

UNIVERSITY ATTAINMENT

WHAT IS IT?

The proportion of Canadians aged 25 to 64 who have completed a university program, according to Statistics Canada's annual Labour Force Survey. This indicator measures the number of working-age Canadians who have finished a university-level program.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO LEARNING IN CANADA?

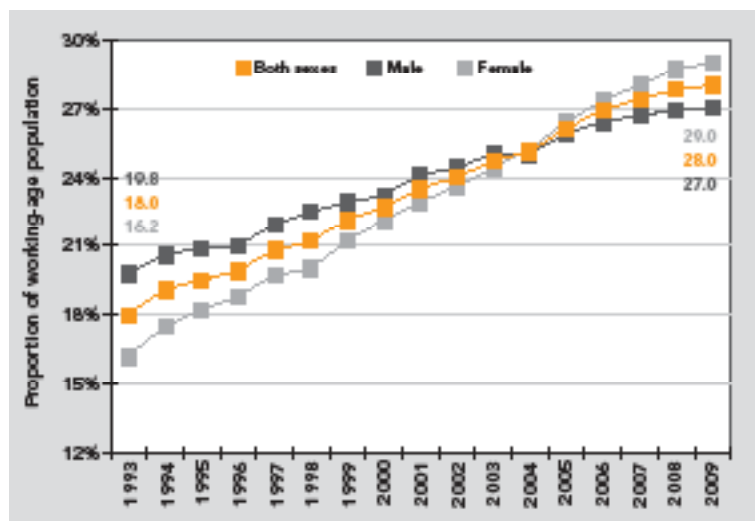
Research clearly shows that higher educational attainment results in a wide range of economic and social benefits for individual Canadians, the communities they live in and the country as a whole. University attainment is a key indicator of "human capital," which refers to the skills and knowledge on hand in the workforce.

UNIVERSITY ATTAINMENT RATES CONTINUE STEADY CLIMB

According to Statistics Canada's Labour Force Survey (LFS), the proportion of working-age Canadians with a university education has steadily increased over the past 15 years. In 1993, 18% of Canadians aged 25 to 64 had received a university certificate, diploma, bachelor's degree or graduate degree; by 2009 that number had jumped by more than half, to 28%.

Over the same period of time, university attainment rates for females rose more than the rate for males. In 1993, only 16% of women in Canada had completed a university education, compared with 20% of men. By 2009, Canadian women had passed men in this regard, with 29% having attained some form of university education—compared to 27% of men (see Chart 1).

CHART 1: University attainment in Canada, by gender, ages 25–64, 1993–2009



Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey

For an in-depth examination of Canada's post-secondary education sector, please see CCL's 2009 report *Post-secondary Education in Canada: Meeting our Needs?*, available at www.ccl-cca.ca/pse. For those interested in further explorations of specific issues related to PSE in Canada, please see *Challenges in Canadian Post-secondary Education*, a monograph series that continues the work of CCL's annual PSE reports on a topic-to-topic basis www.ccl-cca.ca/PSE.

According to a 2008 study by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Canada placed second on an international list of countries comparing overall post-secondary attainment (domestically this includes university, college, CEGEP and trades programs), ahead of such countries as Japan, the United States and Australia. The same study showed that, in terms of the proportion of citizens having completed university, Canada placed seventh overall—behind top-ranked Norway, Israel and the United States (see Table 1).

TABLE 1: Percentage of working-age population with post-secondary attainment, by OECD country, 2006

Country	Academic/ university/ research programs	Country	College or vocational programs	Country	Post-secondary ¹
Norway	31%	Russian Federation ²	33%	Russian Federation ²	54%
United States	30%	Canada	23%	Canada	47%
Israel	30%	Belgium	18%	Israel	46%
Netherlands	28%	Japan	18%	Japan	40%
Denmark	27%	Israel	16%	United States	39%
Iceland	26%	Finland	16%	New Zealand	38%
Canada	24%	New Zealand	15%	Finland	35%
Australia	24%	Estonia	11%	Denmark	35%
Korea	23%	Ireland	11%	Estonia	33%
New Zealand	23%	France	11%	Australia	33%

Source: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Education at a Glance (Paris: 2008).

1 OECD uses attainment of “tertiary” education, which includes academic/university programs and vocational post-secondary programs, such as at colleges.

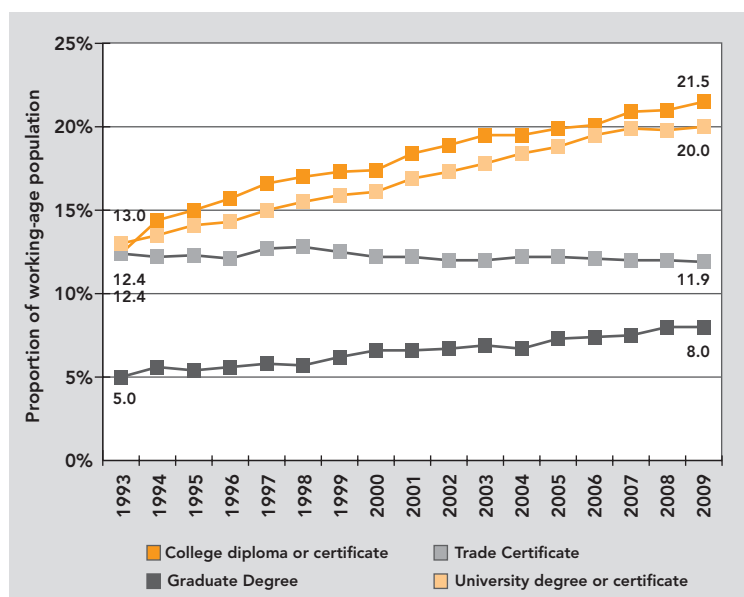
2 Reference year 2002.

Note: Numbers may not match due to rounding.

UNIVERSITY AND COLLEGE ATTAINMENT HAS SURGED SINCE 1993

The proportion of Canadians with any form of post-secondary education has risen steadily since the early 1990s, with the greatest increase among those who completed a community college or CEGEP program (see Chart 2). According to the LFS, in 1993 an equal proportion of Canadians had completed a university degree, college diploma or trades certificate (approximately 13%). A decade-and-a-half later, college and university attainment has increased steadily while the proportion completing a trades certificate has not changed.

CHART 2: Highest level of post-secondary attainment, by type, ages 25–64, Canada, 1993–2008



Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey

Note: The Labour Force Survey ranks university attainment higher than college and CEGEP. If a person completes both a college program and a university program, only the university attainment is counted. Thus, completion of college and CEGEP is not fully represented.