

Pathways to College:

Report of the Adult Student Pathways to College Postsecondary Programs Project

**Submitted by the College Sector Committee
on Adult Upgrading**

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**College Sector Committee
for Adult Upgrading**

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

About 25% of students in postsecondary Ontario college programs have delayed their entrance to college and have never participated in any form of postsecondary education.¹ These delayed entrants take multiple pathways to college that include participating in courses or programs to upgrade their academic skills. This report examines the pathways to college taken by students who do not have an Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD) or equivalent and have delayed entry to college education.

The Adult Student Pathways to College Postsecondary Programs project is one of the five projects on “Improving College Systems Pathways” undertaken by the Coordinating Committee of Vice-Presidents Academic on behalf of Ontario Colleges and funded by the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (Change Fund). The key objective of this project was to gain a better understanding of the multiple pathways adult upgrading students take to enter postsecondary college programs and suggest strategies to improve data collection and tracking of mobility of college academic upgrading students between colleges.

The intended focus of this project was on groups of students in college postsecondary programs who

- did not have an OSSD and participated in a college upgrading program.
- had an OSSD and participated in a college upgrading program to improve their grades, secure prerequisites and improve the currency of their knowledge.
- had obtained an Academic and Career Entrance (ACE) certificate.
- applied to college with a General Education Development (GED) certificate.
- returned to secondary school (including adult day school) to obtain an OSSD or specific credits.
- applied under the current mature student definition without participating in any form of preparatory programming at either college or secondary school.

Information on student pathways and mobility was collected from applicant and registrant data sources, focus groups with students and group discussions with staff. Four colleges representing each of the Ontario regions were selected to participate in the project (Durham - eastern region, Humber - central region, Mohawk - western region, and Northern - northern region). In addition, six colleges (Algonquin, Boréal, Cambrian, Centennial, Conestoga and Sheridan) agreed to be involved in a working group that provided feedback to this project.

¹ *Background Research Paper: A profile of non-direct entrants to Ontario colleges*, Colleges Ontario, November 2007

Collecting and analyzing data on individuals who delayed entry to college was a complex process since there was no single comprehensive source of information for this cohort. The Ontario College Application Service (OCAS), the main source for data on applicants and registrants in Ontario colleges, primarily focuses on collecting information to support the college application process and as such, there were limitations with using this data to inform the work of the Adult Student Pathways to College Postsecondary Programs project. In addition, college applicants at the time of this report were not required to disclose their academic history or present related documentation unless they needed documentation for admission purposes. In many cases, applicants saw no advantage in disclosing their academic history and it was therefore difficult to use OCAS data to collect information on pathways. As a result, various sources of data were referenced, collected and analyzed to present a profile of the target population and pathways taken by this group.

Despite the data limitations, some significant themes emerged from the research. A substantial portion of college applicants and registrants do not take a direct pathway to college. In 2005-06, 61% of applicants did not come directly from secondary school.² 44% of all applicants in Fall 05 (52% in Fall 06) did not report an OSSD and 36% of all registrants in Fall 05 (45% in Fall 06) did not report an OSSD.³

Colleges play an important role in the lives of delayed entry students. Colleges offer students internal pathways to meet program prerequisites or upgrade their academic skills. Student participants and staff in focus groups pointed to the central role that college academic upgrading programs can play in promoting enrolment in postsecondary programs and preparing students for success. All participants emphasized the benefits of accessing college services and supports early on in the college application process to assist in the transition to postsecondary education. Furthermore, this project confirmed that delayed entrants are not a homogeneous group and that they are often unaware of the variety of pathways and services available to support them in their transition to postsecondary education.

In particular, the findings pointed to the importance of

- understanding the complexity of prospective delayed entrants since they are not a homogeneous group.
- leveraging available data to analyze the profile and pathways of delayed entrants.
- understanding the impact of external factors such as Employment Insurance, Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB) and Ontario Works on employment pathway planning and decisions to return to education.
- providing information and support early on in the college application process to clarify

² 2007 *Environmental Scan, An analysis of trends and issues affecting Ontario*, Colleges Ontario.

www.collegesontario.org, page 8

³ Ontario College Application Services, application and registration data.

This data did not indicate whether applicants and registrants may have obtained an OSSD equivalent such as ACE, GED or an out-of-province or international secondary school credential.

- college admission requirements, cycles and processes.
- the application process and the OCAS application forms (paper and online).
- available pathways for delayed entrants who may lack the necessary admission requirements for college programs, or for those entrants who may have the necessary prerequisites but feel they lack the academic confidence or preparedness to succeed in postsecondary college education.
- the value of upgrading programs and courses offered by colleges.
- the relationship between program selection and career planning.
- the financial costs of applying and then attending college and the types of loans, supports and bursaries available.
- developing innovative outreach strategies and promoting the pathways available within colleges such as college academic upgrading.
- preparing specific material and information for delayed entrants in a variety of formats including print, online and in person.
- building in flexible options for delayed entrants who have families and households to support.

The barriers to delayed entrants identified through the work of the Adult Student Pathways to College Postsecondary Programs project were strikingly similar to those identified in other college sector initiatives.

One of the key objectives of this project was to access and provide comprehensive reports on delayed entrants and the mobility of academic upgrading students from college to college. However, at this time there is no effective way to capture the movement of upgrading students in postsecondary programs who may have attended an upgrading program at another college. As a result, the project was unable to meet this key objective.

The report suggests a number of ways to address these tracking issues. Firstly, terms relating to college academic upgrading should be clearly defined for the applicant on the OCAS forms. Secondly, asking college applicants to fully disclose their previous educational background on the OCAS application form would allow for a more comprehensive reporting of all the pathways taken by delayed entrants. This disclosure should include details on the type of college academic upgrading credential (ACE and/or other) and where it was obtained. These recommendations have been tabled with the Committee of Registrars, Admissions and Liaison Officers (CRALO). By working together with other college initiatives on strategic enrolment, improving pathways and researching student mobility, colleges can enhance their capacity to collect comprehensive data on delayed entrants to college postsecondary education.

Colleges have an opportunity to build on existing practices and strengthen the role that college academic upgrading programs can play in providing internal pathways, promoting postsecondary programs and preparing students for their future studies at college. The findings of this report are significant and support the findings of other system-wide initiatives on improving student pathways, assisting delayed entrants and developing effective enrolment management strategies.

2. INTRODUCTION

The majority of applicants and registrants to Ontario colleges do not enter a postsecondary⁴ college education directly from secondary school. For the past ten years, the proportion of non secondary school applicants to college has remained at approximately 60%.⁵ Of the total student population enrolled in Ontario colleges in 2005-06, 38% of students came directly from secondary school, 35% participated in some form of postsecondary education prior to entering their current college program and 25% of students had delayed entry to college after secondary school.⁶ Delayed entry students who did not participate in any form of postsecondary education took a variety of pathways to gain admission into postsecondary college programs. A number of these delayed entrants took pathways within college to upgrade their skills prior to entering postsecondary programs. The intent of the Adult Student Pathways to College Postsecondary Programs project is to enhance an understanding of this group of delayed entrants, the multiple pathways they take to college and the barriers they might encounter on the way.

In 2006, the Coordinating Committee of Vice-Presidents Academic on behalf of Ontario Colleges was funded by the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (Change Fund) to undertake a project on “Improving College Systems Pathways.” The goals of this initiative were to

- significantly increase educational pathways within and between colleges by developing a clearer understanding of student mobility within the system.
- identify the scope of the issues related to mobility and the barriers which may exist.
- design system-wide strategies.
- encourage colleges to address issues related to student mobility through funding of pathways projects.

The Improving College Systems Pathways initiative had five sub-projects that were intended to enhance an understanding of college system pathways in Ontario colleges and suggest strategies to improve student mobility:

- College to College Transfer
- Adult Student Pathways to College Postsecondary Education
- Pathways from Ontario College Diploma to College Degree Programs
- Apprenticeship Bridge to Technician Programs
- Access and Transferability of Postsecondary Credit for Ontario Learn.

⁴ Postsecondary education is defined as apprenticeship, college, and university programs in *Ontario a Leader in Learning: Report and Recommendations* by the Honourable Bob Rae (February 2005).

⁵ 2007 Environmental Scan, page 8

⁶ *Background Research Paper: A profile of non-direct entrants to Ontario colleges*, Colleges Ontario, November 2007

The College Sector Committee for Adult Upgrading (CSC)⁷ was asked to oversee the sub-project on Adult Student Pathways to College Postsecondary Programs. This report examines the pathways to college taken by students who do not have an OSSD or equivalent and have delayed entry to college education and suggests strategies to improve the tracking of this group of students.

This project was closely connected to Ontario college strategic enrolment initiatives examining non-direct entrants to college programs. In particular, this project worked parallel with the two projects approved by the Committee of Presidents in 2006: *A Profile of Non-Direct Entrants to College*, and the *Review of College Recruitment and Admissions Processes Impacting Non-Secondary Entrants*. In addition, this project referred to two studies undertaken by the CSC: *Innovative Approaches and Promising Directions*⁸ that examined the practices and structures currently in place in college academic upgrading programs and the *Prepared for Success (2006-2007)*⁹ that tracked college academic upgrading students in first-semester postsecondary programs.

The results of this project support the findings of other related college initiatives that have described the characteristics of delayed entrants to college postsecondary education and examined the barriers facing these students. This project has concluded that collecting data on delayed entrants and tracking their mobility is a complex process, but nevertheless important in gaining a fuller understanding of this cohort and supporting them in their transition to college.

2. OBJECTIVES

The key objectives of the Adult Student Pathways to College Postsecondary Programs project were to

- gain a better understanding of the multiple pathways adult upgrading students take to enter postsecondary college programs.
- provide input into the overall Improving College System Pathways project on strategies to clarify pathways.
- suggest strategies to improve data collection and tracking of mobility of college academic upgrading students between colleges (see [Appendix A](#) for a background on academic upgrading programs in colleges).

⁷ The College Sector Committee for Adult Upgrading is a provincial committee established to assist the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities in leading Ontario colleges in the development of provincial resources, procedures and standards related to the development and delivery of upgrading and preparatory programs and services for adult learners.

⁸ *Innovative Approaches and Promising Directions*, Meeting the Needs of Underrepresented Populations in College Academic Upgrading Programs, College Sector Committee on Adult Upgrading, April 2006.

⁹ *Prepared For Success (2006-2007)*, A Study of the Success of Adult Upgrading Graduates in the First Semester of Postsecondary Programs, College Sector Committee for Adult Upgrading, December 2007.

This project specifically focussed on applicants and students in college postsecondary programs who

- did not have an OSSD and participated in a college upgrading program.
- had an OSSD and participated in a college upgrading program to improve their grades, secure prerequisites and improve the currency of their knowledge.
- had obtained an ACE certificate.
- applied to college with a GED certificate.
- returned to secondary school (including adult day school) to obtain an OSSD or specific credits.
- applied under the current mature student definition without participating in any form of upgrading programming at either college or secondary school.

The findings outlined in this report are intended to contribute to a better understanding of the profile of non-direct entrants to college programs, barriers to college entrance and ways to increase participation rates and improve support for this cohort of students.

3. METHODOLOGY

The CSC designed this project through a consultative process with colleges. Information on student pathways and mobility was collected from applicant and registrant data sources, focus groups with students and group discussions with staff.

A strategy was developed to gather quantitative and qualitative information on

- the profile of the target population who have delayed entry to college full-time postsecondary diploma programs.
- internal and external pathways taken to reach college.
- the mobility of college academic upgrading students.
- the barriers adult upgrading students encounter researching and entering postsecondary diploma programs.
- strategies to improve tracking and to clarify pathways.

A formal request for college participation on this project was issued via the Vice-Presidents Academic at each college and the CRALO. Participating colleges were selected using the following criteria:

- the proportion of non secondary school registrants to secondary registrants or a significant number of non secondary school registrants
- geographic distribution
- mix of student information system platforms (e.g., DAG, homegrown, Banner, and Peoplesoft)
- the ability to send and receive transcripts through the Electronic Data Interface (EDI)

- the capacity to collect and analyze data and assign internal expertise.

Four colleges representing each of the Ontario regions were selected to participate in the project (Durham - eastern region, Humber - central region, Mohawk - western region, and Northern - northern region). These four participating colleges were asked to supplement OCAS data with information from their college student record systems, provide insight on admission processes and organize focus groups with college personnel and delayed entry students in postsecondary programs. Six additional colleges (Algonquin, Boréal, Cambrian, Centennial, Conestoga and Sheridan) agreed to be involved in a working group that provided feedback to this project.

The Adult Student Pathways to College Postsecondary Programs project focussed on a narrow sub-group of delayed entrants. At the time of preparing this report, there was no single data source that provided comprehensive information on this target population. As a result, various sources of data were referenced, collected and analyzed to present a profile of the target population and pathways taken by this group.

Baseline data on applicants and registrants was collected from 2005-06 OCAS sources. This information was supplemented with data from college student record systems at the participating colleges. In addition, this project referred to the data used in the *Background Research Paper: A profile of non-direct entrants to Ontario colleges*. This particular research paper was relevant to this project because it profiled non-direct entrants to Ontario colleges in 2005-06 and segmented the data by various entry pathways.

The use of focus groups with students and discussion groups with college personnel at the participating colleges was central to describing the characteristics of the delayed entrant cohort, the types of pathways taken and the barriers faced by this group. Focus groups were conducted with student volunteers at the four participating colleges. The student focus groups examined pathways taken, the application and admission experience and the types of barriers, gaps and opportunities identified by students. Each participating college was asked to recruit students for the focus group who

- were in their first year of a full-time postsecondary diploma program.
- had not been enrolled in a postsecondary program for credit purposes prior to their first year at the participating college; exceptions to this were students who attended a postsecondary college preparatory program first such as Pre-Health or General Arts and Science.
- were 19 years of age or older prior to the start of classes.
- did not graduate from secondary school in the year prior to attending college or did not earn an OSSD.
- may have completed some form of upgrading prior to first year college (e.g., Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS), ACE, targeted secondary school credits, etc.)
- were Canadian citizens or permanent residents of Canada.

All student focus groups took place between June and October 2007. A total of 53 students from the participating colleges attended the focus groups that lasted about one and a half hours. Before participating in the focus group, students signed a consent form and completed a questionnaire on their profile to provide the focus group facilitators with background information. Participation in the focus groups was voluntary and a guarantee of anonymity was provided to the students.

A cross-section of administration, recruitment, assessment, advising and college upgrading staff were also asked to participate in the staff discussions at each of the participating colleges. The staff discussions focussed on college recruitment, admission and registration processes, support services, mobility issues, data, gaps and opportunities. Staff discussion groups were held between June and October 2007. Thirty-five staff at the participating colleges attended the discussion groups that lasted approximately two hours.

The ten colleges participating in the project working group met on several occasions and were consulted on survey tools, methodology and college-level data. The working group provided valuable feedback on the project design and findings.

The CSC also worked closely with the other projects under the “Improving College Systems Pathways Project” and other related college sector initiatives. As referenced above, this project worked in parallel with the two system-wide initiatives approved by the Committee of Presidents that addressed the long-term enrolment issues facing the colleges:

- *A Profile of Non-Direct Entrants to College* which examined the characteristics of non-direct college students and those who did not go to college immediately after secondary school. By using existing data sources such as the College Applicant Survey and OCAS data, this study developed a profile of the academic background and demographics of students who registered in college programs after they had been out of secondary school for more than a year and who may or may not have previously pursued other postsecondary education.
- *The Review of College Recruitment and Admissions Processes Impacting Non-Secondary Entrants* which examined college systems to ensure that college processes were aligned with the needs of non-direct from secondary school students and applicants. This project developed a template to support colleges in their own review of institutional policies and processes, with a focus on the alignment of these processes with the needs of the non-direct applicants and students. Based on the input of Ontario colleges and research in this field, this project identified the top ten barriers faced by non-direct applicants and students and further actions that could be undertaken to support local colleges in recruiting, admitting and serving non-direct applicants and students.

4. RESULTS

A. DATA

i. Data Collection Process

Collecting and analyzing data on individuals who delayed entry to college for this project was a complex process since there was no single comprehensive source of information for this cohort. OCAS, the main source for data on applicants and registrants in Ontario colleges, primarily focuses on collecting information to support the college application process and as such, there were limitations with using this data to inform the work of the Adult Student Pathways to College Postsecondary Programs project. There were a number of research sources that derived data from surveys to examine the characteristics of delayed entrants in Ontario colleges.¹⁰ Although the project referenced these studies, they all relied on different working definitions of delayed entrants or the non-direct student so making comparisons and drawing conclusions was challenging.

In Fall 2007, subsequent to data analysis undertaken for this project, the *Background Research Paper: A profile of non-direct entrants to Ontario Colleges* was released by Colleges Ontario. This research study used a number of sources¹¹ and matched data with 2006 OCAS enrolment data. The significance of this research study was that in combining survey results with applicant and enrolment data, it provided high level information profiling the distinct segments of the non-direct pool. This study was instrumental in enhancing an understanding of the target population of the Adult Student Pathways to College Postsecondary Programs project.

ii. Terminology

The terminology used to label and describe students who delayed their entry to postsecondary college education varies within research studies and survey material.¹² The term non-direct was commonly used to describe the pathways taken by students who do not access postsecondary education directly from secondary school. OCAS uses the categories of secondary and non-secondary to describe applicants who have

¹⁰ Sources included the College Applicant Survey (CAS), the Canadian College Student Survey (CCSS) 2007, the *Environmental Scan 2007*, a study of direct and non-direct entrants of college applicants taken from the National Graduate Survey (NGS), Statistics Canada, Extracting data for Ontario Colleges and the Student Engagement Survey (SES)

¹¹ Sources included the 2005-06 Student Satisfaction Survey and the 2006 College Applicant Survey. Data from the National Graduate Survey administered to college and university graduates was also referenced in this research.

¹² The *Background Research Paper: A profile of non-direct entrants to Ontario colleges* used two sources of data that described delayed entrants:

- Delayed entry to postsecondary education - 21 years of age and over, secondary school and/or college upgrading only (Student Satisfaction Survey).
- Delayed entrants - those who did not attend school in the past 12 months and whose highest education attained was grade 13 or less (includes those without a secondary school diploma) (College Application Survey).

applied directly from secondary school and those who have not. Other terms such as delayed entrants, delayers, mature students and adult students were also referenced in research material.¹³ Not only was the terminology used to describe this cohort different, but there was also variation in the way in which specific terminology was defined in the data sources.

In an attempt to provide clarity, the Adult Student Pathways to College Postsecondary Programs project worked with other related college projects¹⁴ to consistently identify and subdivide the non-direct applicant and student population:

- delayed entry into postsecondary education, sub-segmented as a result of having
 - obtained an OSSD
 - not obtained an OSSD
- attended postsecondary education, sub-segmented as a result of having
 - partially completed
 - graduated
- new Canadians who have not attended secondary school or postsecondary education in Canada.

Delayed entrants are therefore a sub-group of the non-direct student population and adult upgrading students are a segment of the delayed entrant cohort. The Adult Student Pathways to College Postsecondary Programs project attempted to focus on data on delayed entrants to college education (with or without an OSSD or equivalent) and adult upgrading students.

iii. Applicant and Registrant Data Issues

Using OCAS data to analyze the characteristics of delayed entrants had its limitations since

- delayed entry students appeared in the OCAS secondary student data when they completed a course at the secondary school level in the 12 months prior to applying.
- most OCAS data elements were based on self-reported information.
- applicants were not required to disclose previous academic history.
- the data did not have flags that demarcate the different segments of the non secondary applicant pool.

The Adult Student Pathways to College Postsecondary Programs project also had to be cautious in using OCAS data to analyze academic upgrading students since

¹³ Sources included the *Background Research Paper: A profile of non-direct entrants to Ontario colleges, and Education, Skills and Learning – Research Papers: Who goes to post-secondary education and when: pathways chosen by 20 year-olds*. 2003, Statistics Canada

¹⁴ A Profile of Non-Direct Entrants to College project and The Review of College Recruitment and Admissions Processes Impacting Non-Secondary Entrants project

- college academic upgrading was not defined on the OCAS application form and applicants may have interpreted the term differently.
- details of college academic upgrading credentials were not maintained by OCAS.
- there was no provision to track the mobility of college upgrading students who elected to pursue a postsecondary program at a different Ontario college.

In addition to these challenges, individual colleges have varying capabilities to leverage their student information systems to segment and analyze relevant applicant and enrolment data. All the participating colleges recognized the potential of using segmented data for strategic enrolment planning purposes and understanding the pathways taken by delayed entrants. However, they also acknowledged that their ability to collect and analyze this data was limited by their internal data collection systems and processes.

Notwithstanding the issues outlined above, the Adult Student Pathways to College Postsecondary Programs project did refer to OCAS data and other research studies to compile information on the characteristics of delayed entrants to Ontario Colleges.

iv. Findings

Non-direct and delayed entrants

A significant portion of college applicants and registrants did not take a direct pathway to college. The *2007 Environmental Scan: An analysis of trends and issues affecting Ontario* reported that in 2005-06, 61% of applicants did not come directly from secondary school.¹⁵ More specifically, 44% of all applicants in Fall 05 (52% in Fall 06) did not report an OSSD and 36% of all registrants in Fall 05 (45% in Fall 06) did not report an OSSD.¹⁶ This data did not indicate whether applicants and registrants may have obtained an OSSD equivalent such as ACE, GED or an out-of-province or international secondary school credential.

The *Background Research Paper: a Profile of Non-Direct Entrants to Ontario Colleges* provided insight into the different segments of non-direct entrants (with adult upgrading students considered part of the non-direct segment that were defined as delayed entrants). The research paper highlighted that:

- delayed entrants represented 25% of college enrolments.
- 19% of delayed entrants applied for one year programs.
- males were more likely to have delayed entry to postsecondary college education (28% of males versus 22% of females).

¹⁵ *2007 Environmental Scan*

¹⁶ Ontario College Application Services, Application and Registration Data (2005 and 2006)

- 23% of delayed entrants self-reported a grade average over 80% and 30% of delayed entrants had grade averages under 70% (compared to 29% of direct entrants who self-reported a grade average over 80% and 20% of direct entrants who self-reported a grade average under 70%).
- 29% of delayed entrants had no grade 12 math (compared to 50% of non-direct entrants with postsecondary education who had advanced grade 12 math).
- 88% of delayed entrants were under 25 years of age.

College entrants and academic upgrading

Table I shows the number of college academic upgrading students who went on to postsecondary college programs over the past ten years.¹⁷ The increase in numbers of postsecondary students who participated in college academic upgrading programs is in large part due to the improved capacity of colleges to track and report on this activity.

TABLE 1
Number of College Academic Upgrading Students who Pursue Postsecondary Studies

Years 1995	-	2000-	2001-	2002-	2003-	2004-	2005-	2006-
	2000	01	02	03	04	05	06	07
Number of students	1058	599	1029	1091	986	1498	1786	2227

The Adult Student Pathways to College Postsecondary Programs project attempted to use OCAS applicant and registrant data (Fall 05, Winter 06 and Fall 06) to gain a better understanding of the pathways taken by adult upgrading students applying and entering college diploma programs.

The data showed that only a small proportion of the college academic upgrading students who went on to enrol in college programs actually submitted academic upgrading documents. College applicants have not been required to disclose their academic history or present related documentation unless they needed documentation for admission purposes. In many cases, applicants saw no advantage in disclosing this information or forwarding documentation. Out of the reported 1786 students in 2005-06 who had participated in college academic upgrading and enrolled in postsecondary college diploma programs, only 421 applicants actually submitted college academic upgrading documents¹⁸ to OCAS. Given the small size of the group of applicants and registrants who submitted academic upgrading documents this OCAS data could only be used in a limited way.

¹⁷ Source: *Prepared for Success, 2006-2007*. This data is likely an under-representation of the true number of students pursuing postsecondary studies. The college system does not have a mechanism for tracking students moving from a college upgrading program to a postsecondary program at a different college. There is also no mechanism to track individuals who pursue postsecondary studies on a part time basis through continuing education or distance education.

¹⁸ College upgrading documents included programs such as ACE and LBS. This did not include the GED Certificate.

Program selection of academic upgrading applicants

Academic upgrading students tend to enrol in certain postsecondary programs. The *Prepared for Success 2006-2007* study highlighted health sciences, technology and business programs as the most likely choice for enrolment by academic upgrading students.

The OCAS data on applicants to diploma programs presenting college academic upgrading documents also supported these findings. OCAS data (Fall 2005 and Fall 2006) showed that the top program areas for registrants who presented academic upgrading documents were technology, human services, health sciences and business.

The *Background Research Paper: A profile of non-direct entrants to Ontario colleges* reviewed data for entrants to all programs and the findings also indicated that delayed entrants were likely to enrol in programs in health sciences, human services and business.

B. FOCUS GROUPS

i. Overview

As part of the research on adult student pathways, the Adult Student Pathways to College Postsecondary Programs project conducted focus groups with volunteer adult students and led discussion groups with college personnel at the four participating colleges. Given the limitations of the data on delayed entrants, the qualitative information collected through the focus groups furthered an understanding of pathways and delayed entrants.

The focus and discussion groups explored the following areas:

- routes or pathways that led to college
- reasons for returning to education and attending college
- student mobility (including data-related issues)
- the application and admission experience, including supports and services prior to registration
- gaps and obstacles encountered along the way to college
- advice, opportunities and suggestions.

Through these discussions, a number of themes regarding the motivations, aspirations, pathways and needs of adult students emerged. Despite regional differences in the variety and number of postsecondary opportunities, students presented similar reasons for returning to college and shared many of the same needs and concerns.

The emerging themes of the focus and discussion groups corroborated many of the findings highlighted in the *Background Research Paper: A profile of non-direct entrants to Ontario colleges*, the *Prepared for Success* report, and the *Review of College*

Recruitment and Admissions Processes Impacting Non-Secondary Entrants. In particular, the latter report identified the top ten barriers faced by non-direct applicants, which included financial concerns as well as the need for transition support, clear and accessible college and career information, and timely information on appropriate academic preparation. These same issues arose frequently during the focus group discussions with students and staff.

ii. Profile of Participants in the Student Focus Groups

Prior to the student focus group discussions, participants were asked to complete an anonymous questionnaire. Information was collected on academic background, prior activities, program of study, dependants, age and other demographic information, as well as methods used to finance their college education. The purpose of administering the questionnaire was to provide the facilitators with a general profile of participants and to assist them in understanding focus group feedback and discussion. The information gathered on the questionnaire showed that the focus group participants were not a homogeneous group. Of note, in comparing the characteristics of focus group members to those of the overall delayed entry pool (referenced earlier in the report), this project's focus group participants were older than the delayed-entry students in general. Within this context, highlights of the information provided in the questionnaire are as follows:¹⁹

- Every focus group participant had elected not to register in his/her current college program directly after secondary school.
- Over 40% were in Semester 1.
- 65% of focus group participants were over the age of 30.
- 50% had dependants.
- Participants supported themselves through college by drawing upon a variety of sources that included loans or grants from the Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP), earnings through part-time work during the school year as well as full-time work during the summer, personal savings, and sponsorships through agencies such as the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB), Service Canada, or Ontario Works.
- Over 70% of participants had a secondary school diploma, while under 20% had only partially completed high school.
- 60% of participants indicated that they were enrolled in specific college preparation programs or in some form of upgrading in the year prior to enrolling in their current program. Of this group, over 25% were in college academic upgrading courses or college-based preparatory programs.
- Under 40% of participants had previously enrolled in a college program either at their current college or at another college, while just under 25% had previously enrolled in some form of university study in Canada or abroad.

¹⁹ Multiple answers were allowed in many of the questions to allow a more comprehensive volunteer profile to emerge.

- Over 45% of participants had worked full-time prior to beginning their current program, while under 15% stated that they were unemployed.
- Over 25% of participants were the first in their families to attend college or university.

Despite the parameters outlined for focus group participants (Section 3, Methodology) the students who volunteered represented a broader segment of delayed entrants than was originally targeted for this project. For example, some students who had previously attended a postsecondary program were invited to attend the focus group. In this case, it was difficult for colleges to parse data using their student information systems particularly because students were not required to disclose prior postsecondary education as part of the application for admission process.

The range of experiences of the focus group participants was taken into consideration by the facilitators when reporting the focus group feedback.

iii. Findings

a. Reasons for Returning to College

Participants provided a range of reasons that triggered and affected the timing of why and when they decided to return to college. Most participants reported that they had made a conscious, deliberate choice to return to college, some after a lengthy absence from formal education. In many cases, participants had to overcome barriers and make significant personal sacrifices to fulfil these goals of returning to education.

Participants shared their reasons for having initially delayed entry to their current college program after leaving secondary school:

- lack of academic interest to pursue further education in general
- insufficient academic preparation to pursue college (e.g., grades below requirements, lack of prerequisites, secondary school diploma not completed)
- attended university or another college program first
- ready employment or good salary prospects at the time of leaving secondary school
- lack of financial resources to support a postsecondary education
- child-care responsibilities.

Some participants described themselves as not being mature or focussed enough to have benefited from further education at the time of leaving secondary school. As participants gained life or employment experience they reported that they eventually turned to college as a viable option. This decision was often made as a result of career research or because of encouragement, advice or direction from key influencers such as family members, employment counsellors or college academic upgrading staff.

The motivation to return to school related in large part to personal or career fulfilment goals. However, some students were led to college because of involuntary changes in life circumstances despite previously not having planned to attend college. Nonetheless, most of the participants now viewed college as an important stepping stone to better or different employment opportunities and lifelong learning.

With respect to specifically choosing college now over and above other educational options, participants offered the following reasons:

Employment or Career

- limited career mobility and employment options, sometimes due to a lack of prior education and training or because of downturns in the economy or industry
- reaching a salary ceiling because of a lack of postsecondary or even secondary school credentials
- workplace injuries that necessitated retraining in a different field and retraining options were offered at the college level
- college programming that offered the best or most direct route to the fulfillment of new career goals
- newcomers to Canada who wanted to earn a Canadian credential or to improve their English skills in order to increase their chances of acquiring employment in Canada commensurate with their skills and prior training

Personal Fulfilment

- returning to school and college as a fulfilment of a lifelong dream now made possible because of changed circumstances such as a shift in family responsibilities
- wanting to set a good example for their children by participating in postsecondary education

Fresh Academic Starts

- entering another college program first and either not persisting in the original program or not finding relevant employment
- entering and failing university, or entering university first and discovering that it was not a good fit, with college now cited as a better educational match
- college as a more direct or practical pathway to employment than university

Additional Reasons for Choosing College

- accessibility of the college in terms of transportation and location
- in some regions, college was the only viable and practical option, since leaving the community was not an option
- referrals through external agencies - some participants were referred or directed to college for retraining purposes by community vocational organizations, WSIB, Service Canada (Employment Insurance), or Ontario Works
- college as less expensive and intimidating, and more accessible and practical than university.

b. Pathways to College

Delayed entrants to college postsecondary programs take a number of pathways to return to college. Staff discussed how pathways could be affected by policy changes, labour market shifts and the level or type of programs in the local community. Factors such as financing and program availability also influenced an adult student's choice of pathway.

Participants in the focus groups with or without an OSSD reported that they enrolled in the following courses or programs before entering their current college program:

- college upgrading programs (i.e., LBS and/or ACE)
- prerequisite upgrading through adult secondary schools, or through colleges offering secondary school courses to adult students in partnership with local secondary schools
- Ontario secondary school credit courses for the purpose of earning an OSSD
- continuing Education courses at college
- GED certificate
- English and other courses offered through community agencies
- other college postsecondary program(s) - partially or fully completed diploma or certificate programs
- university program(s) - partially or fully completed degree programs.

c. Preparing to Return to College

Participants highlighted the factors that facilitated their return to school and the concrete arrangements that had to be in place first. The three main areas identified were financial, academic, and family obligations:

Financial arrangements

- availability of OSAP was a key factor
- funding through Employment Insurance (EI), WSIB or other forms of sponsorship
- household income adjustments: for example, some students who were not eligible for OSAP made some significant financial sacrifices in order to return to school

Academic preparedness

- some student participants were required to take subject-specific prerequisite courses to qualify for admission and they did so through secondary school courses, ACE, or college continuing education courses
- others prepared for enrolment in full-time college programs by voluntarily taking part-time college courses through Continuing Education, completing requirements for an OSSD, earning a GED certificate, or enrolling in college

upgrading programs (LBS or ACE); as well, some students retook previously earned secondary school credits as an academic refresher

Child care:

- some participants waited to begin college until their children were older and more self-sufficient.

d. Applying and Being Admitted to College

The project explored the application and admissions processes with both student and staff participants. Given the diverse nature of focus group participants feedback on the application and admission process was varied. The colleges participating in this project employed a range of protocols and methods to qualify an adult student for admission and this was reflected in the responses to the focus group discussion. The highlights of the discussions on the application and admission process are summarized below:

Applying for Admission

Students expressed a range of perspectives on and varying degrees of ease with the online and paper version of the OCAS application process. The level of comfort with these processes and technology in general decreased for students who had been away from formal studies for a length of time. This factor may have accounted for the varied and sometimes contradictory perspectives:

- According to students, there are too many assumptions about an adult applicant's access to, knowledge of and comfort with computers and technological processes such as the online OCAS and OSAP applications.
- The common online application for admission was generally viewed as efficient; however, the students who had only applied to one college would have preferred the option of applying directly to their college of choice.
- There was a lack of clarity about the documentation required for application for admission.
- Application deadlines were viewed as too early by some.
- Terminology and acronyms were confusing and open to interpretation (e.g., OCAS, OSAP, bursary, scholarship).
- Students expressed confusion over terms such as "mature student" when used as an admission criteria. Some students assumed that by virtue of their age they were automatically classified as mature students which conferred them preferential treatment for the purpose of admission. Others felt that a mature student was not considered equal to a recent secondary school graduate since their academic knowledge base was not current.

Qualifying for Admission

Colleges have a variety of methods, policies, and approaches to qualify adult students for admission. These range from an admissions test, a mature student category, acceptable upgrading deemed equivalent to senior level high school prerequisite

courses, as well as different protocols depending on the credential presented. Within this context, the following points were raised in the focus groups:

- Some students reported that they were required to formally upgrade their credentials in order to meet program requirements; other students with the necessary academic background or who had qualified for admission under the mature student category chose to acclimatize to college education by taking some form of upgrading first. This seemed to be especially the case if participants had been absent from formal education for some years. Upgrading was generally undertaken through high school or college academic upgrading programs such as LBS/ACE.
- College staff indicated that prospective students would be better served if they connected with admissions staff early in the process for guidance. Not all pathways to admission necessarily have equal weight in the decision process. For example, some colleges ranked the type of prerequisites earned; i.e., prerequisites taken through college upgrading courses or secondary school were sometimes ranked higher than some other types of pathways depending on the program.
- ACE was well recognized by admissions staff at the participating colleges for all programs. Some colleges offered conditional admission to postsecondary programs (including to high demand programs) pending the successful completion of college upgrading courses or ACE.
- College staff indicated that students who take a college academic upgrading program at one college and then apply to another college should not have difficulty in having this credential recognized.
- Some of the students who had the choice of taking an admissions test reported this to be an efficient method of demonstrating eligibility for admission. However, a number of students who had been out of school for a period of time and were required to take an admissions test described the process as intimidating.

e. Accessing College Services

Student participants and staff both highlighted the important role that colleges can play in helping prospective students navigate the variety of pathways available and determining the most effective way to reach academic and career goals.

According to college staff, the heterogeneous nature of delayed entry students and the multiplicity of pathways to college have made it challenging for colleges to provide targeted services to this cohort of students whose needs are deemed more complex than those students entering college directly from secondary school. Staff also noted that delayed entry students often appeared confused and disoriented and welcomed face-to-face interaction.

Staff also indicated that the process of applying for admission to college could prove overwhelming for some adult students, but that students who connected with staff could expect clarification, support, and assistance on all aspects of the application process. This support ranged from navigating the OCAS and OSAP application forms to clarifying necessary documentation, as well as receiving guidance on pathways to improve the

chances for admission. Indeed, student participants who had consulted with college staff in the various areas during the application process reported a greater ease in navigating college processes and as having benefited from these interactions and interventions.

It was also clear through discussions that some students were unaware of the supports and services offered and the variety of admissions pathways available -- some students appeared to learn about these options for the first time from other focus group participants, especially in the case of college academic upgrading opportunities.

Participating colleges took a variety of approaches and relied on different organizational models to serve delayed entry students in making the transition to college. Highlighted below are some of the general findings on the use of college services from both the student and staff perspective:

Financing College Education

- Availability of and eligibility for financial support - This was central to the decision to return to college. Staff indicated that some students/prospective students made assumptions about their eligibility for financial assistance and therefore self-selected out of the process without first speaking to a student financial services office.
- Researching financial aid opportunities - Student participants found the process of researching financial aid sources, applying for OSAP and other bursaries daunting. Although they acknowledged that much information was readily available online, participants found it difficult to navigate their way through the information. The participants who connected with college financial aid offices early in the process reported the most success in negotiating the process.
- College costs - Participants valued knowing all costs associated with their courses, as well as course timetables, well ahead of time so that they could arrange work, manage their budgets and plan caregiver schedules.

Finding and Communicating Information

- Student participants reported that they did not necessarily know what and when to ask, and to whom to direct their questions. Participants also acknowledged that services and resources were available, but they were not always aware of how to access them.
- Participants gleaned information from a variety of sources: college and other web sites, print publications, in person and telephone consultations with college staff. There was no consistency in the preferred method of receiving information.
- All participants indicated a desire for coherent, clear, and simple information on college processes both in print and online.
- Face-to-face interactions were valued.

- Participants expressed impatience over perceived “bureaucracy” or “the run-around”.

Toward Enhanced Services

- Segmentation of students by pathway: Staff noted that it was difficult to segment and identify different categories of delayed entry applicants or registrants for the purposes of recruitment, marketing, communications, and service delivery. Such segmentation could be useful for the development of targeted and differentiated services for this cohort of students.
- One-stop service: Student participants discussed the merits of a one-stop service that catered to adult students and provided information on financial aid, admission requirements, time management, all costs associated with attending college, tips on how to fit college studies into one’s life, and academic upgrading.
- Career guidance: Staff indicated that prospective students who are undecided about career options would benefit from colleges offering early career development supports and programs.
- Organizational models: Staff at participating colleges reported that they have experimented with different models of service provision to ensure that students had a clear point of initial contact. For example, some colleges made their admissions staff the point people while others assigned advisors or counsellors to this role.

f. Academic Upgrading

Sixty percent of student participants in the focus groups had taken some form of upgrading in the year prior to starting their college program, either voluntarily or as required by their college admissions office. These included Grade 12 courses, other high school courses, GED, ACE and LBS. Participants found that taking these preparatory courses or programs was of benefit both academically and personally. In particular, participants who had taken college academic upgrading programs reported increased levels of self-confidence and improved academic and technological skills. In addition, students valued the information and advising received from college upgrading staff.

This feedback was echoed by staff involved in college upgrading. Since college upgrading staff are engaged in activities such as outreach, marketing, advising, data gathering and tracking, based on the focus group discussions it appeared that college upgrading staff are an effective resource and link for delayed entrants and other college staff.

For other issues raised in the focus group see [Appendix B](#).

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

Moving Forward

About 25% of students in postsecondary Ontario college programs have delayed their entrance to college and have never participated in any form of postsecondary education. These delayed entrants have taken multiple pathways to college including taking courses or programs to upgrade their academic skills. Even those applicants with secondary school credentials may have found that they did not have the specific prerequisites for college entry or that they were not prepared for postsecondary education. Some of these students chose to upgrade their skills or gain academic confidence through the variety of upgrading courses or programs at Ontario colleges prior to entering postsecondary programs.

Through data review and analysis, as well as through discussion with focus groups, the Adult Student Pathways to College Postsecondary Programs project has provided a fuller understanding of the characteristics of these delayed entrants, the barriers encountered and the multiple pathways taken. The results of this project support the findings of other college initiatives on strategic enrolment and pathways. In particular, the challenges identified by other college initiatives with respect to marketing and recruitment to delayed entrants, academic preparedness, financial issues, and understanding and navigating the admission process were all corroborated by the findings of this project.

This project has confirmed that delayed entrants are not a homogeneous group and that they are often unaware of the variety of options available to help them gain admission to college programs. Colleges play an important role in the lives of delayed entry students. Colleges offer students internal pathways to meet program prerequisites or upgrade their academic skills. Participants and staff in this project pointed to the central role that college academic upgrading programs can play in promoting enrolment in postsecondary programs and preparing students for success. All participants emphasized the benefits of accessing college services and supports early on in the college application process to assist in the transition to postsecondary education.

Colleges have an opportunity to build on existing practices and strengthen the role that college academic upgrading programs can play in providing internal pathways, promoting postsecondary programs and preparing students for their future studies at college.

Tracking mobility

A key objective of this project was to suggest strategies to improve data collection and techniques to track the mobility of college academic upgrading students between colleges. The Adult Student Pathways to College Postsecondary Programs project was unable to provide and access comprehensive reports on delayed entrants and the

mobility of academic upgrading students from college to college since there were no consistent sources of information on this cohort of students and the pathways they take.

As this project has demonstrated, the definitions of delayed entrants students used in surveys and research reports varied significantly. The primary source of quantitative information for this project was from OCAS, which is first and foremost an application service. As such, the OCAS data was limited in what it could show this project about the pathways taken by delayed entrants. It was not possible for this project to segment out the specific characteristics of delayed entrants and track mobility through this data source. Disclosure of previous education on the OCAS application form is voluntary and only a small proportion of students who completed academic upgrading disclosed information and forwarded the necessary documents to OCAS.

Data on pathways and the mobility of college academic upgrading students was collected by some colleges, but since it was housed at the individual college level, it was not easily accessible for system-wide analysis. Colleges are not able to track the full extent of the mobility of academic upgrading students to postsecondary programs. Currently there is no way to capture the movement of upgrading students in postsecondary programs who may have attended an upgrading program at another college.

There are a number of ways in which these tracking issues could be addressed. Firstly, the term “college academic upgrading” should be clearly defined on the OCAS Help function. Following this, asking college applicants to fully disclose their previous educational background on the OCAS application form would allow for a more comprehensive reporting of all the pathways taken by delayed entrants. This disclosure should include details on the type of college academic upgrading credential (ACE and/or other) and where it was obtained. Other options to improve the tracking capability could include the administration of a survey to college academic upgrading students in postsecondary programs and the matching of this information to application and registration data.

CRALO (through the Sub-committee on Admissions) should consider the viability and implications of full disclosure of previous academic history. At the same time, the CSC should examine the feasibility and cost of other options such as matching academic upgrading student survey data with OCAS data as a means to track the mobility of college upgrading students.

The college sector also has an opportunity to strengthen the connection between the various initiatives on strategic enrolment, improving pathways and researching student mobility by building the capacity to collect comprehensive data on delayed entrants to college postsecondary education.

Building on Focus Group Feedback

Focus groups with students and the staff at the four participating colleges and the project's working group provided valuable insights on the pathways taken by delayed entrants, the barriers faced and opportunities to overcome gaps and challenges. The barriers identified through the work of the Adult Student Pathways to College Postsecondary Programs project are strikingly similar to those identified in other college sector initiatives.

The issues raised in the focus groups may be helpful in developing strategies to support delayed entrants make the transition to postsecondary education:

- the complexity and heterogeneity of prospective delayed entrants
- the current limitations of data on the profile of delayed entrants and the pathways taken
- the impact of external factors such as EI, WSIB and Ontario Works on employment pathway planning and decisions to return to education
- timely information and support in the college application process (even pre-application) to clarify
 - college admission requirements, cycles and processes
 - the application process and the OCAS application forms (paper and online)
 - available pathways for delayed entrants who may lack the necessary admission requirements for college programs or those who may have the necessary prerequisites, but feel they lack the academic confidence or preparedness to succeed in postsecondary college education
 - the value of upgrading programs and courses offered by colleges and the way in which these programs could assist students in applying to college and prepare them for postsecondary studies
 - the relationship between program selection and career planning
 - the financial costs of applying and then attending college and the types of loans, supports and bursaries available
- innovative outreach strategies to promote the pathways available within colleges (such as college upgrading programs, continuing education and distance education)
- availability of materials and information for delayed entrants in a variety of formats including print, online and in person
- flexible options for delayed entrants who have families and households to support.

The findings of this report should be used to support other system-wide initiatives on improving student pathways, assisting delayed entrants and developing effective enrolment management strategies for this cohort.

Clarifying the Application Process for Delayed Entrants

During the focus groups with students and staff and subsequent discussions with the project's working group, a number of specific suggestions were made to improve the clarity and ease of completing the OCAS application process for delayed entrants:

- Provide applicants with specific definitions of college upgrading programs (ACE and LBS).
- Instruct applicants on how to bypass the Ontario Education Number (OEN), if they do not have one.
- Provide clearer instructions on submitting transcripts.
- Clarify that the Help function key on the OCAS online application provides instructions on how to complete the application.
- Provide guidelines to students on how to get clarification on mature student status.

The OCAS application forms should be reviewed from the perspective of the delayed entrant who may be unfamiliar with terminology, processes and online services. The findings of such a review should be submitted for consideration to CRALO (Sub-committee on Admissions).

6. APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Since their inception in the 1960s, Ontario Colleges have delivered adult upgrading and college postsecondary preparation programs. These programs prepare learners for further training or employment.

Literacy and Basic Skills

Colleges currently operate under the Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) guidelines introduced in 1996 and updated in 2000. LBS is aligned with the provincial government's focus on moving people from social assistance into employment or improving employment opportunities. LBS is offered free of charge to a literacy level approximating International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) level 3 (the accepted level at or below which adults are considered to face serious barriers to employment). MTCU manages the LBS Program and provides more than \$60 million in annual funding to third-party deliverers such as colleges, school boards, and community agencies. The LBS program is delivered to over 45,000 adult learners at more than 300 sites across Ontario. The overriding mandate of LBS is workforce preparation. Colleges, however, focus primarily on the more advanced academic levels of LBS. Unlike their delivery partners in other sectors, they are the sole deliverers of the college entry level preparation (Academic Upgrading) funded by provincial government.

Academic Upgrading

Academic Upgrading is a non-postsecondary program delivered by all 24 colleges at main campus and satellite locations. The purpose of this program is to prepare people to succeed in postsecondary and Pre/Apprenticeship programs as well as to improve employment opportunities. Delivered continuously by colleges since 1964, it was originally called Basic Training for Skills Development (BTSD). The first three levels are still called BTSD 1 (Grades 1 – 6), BTSD 2 (Grades 7 – 8) and BTSD 3 (Grades 9 – 10).

BTSD 4 (Grades 11 – 12) was officially renamed the Academic and Career Entrance Program (ACE) in 2004. ACE is a program approved by the Colleges Branch, Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities. Qualifying students receive an Academic and Career Entrance (ACE) certificate recognized as equivalent to an OSSD for purposes of admission to postsecondary and Pre/Apprenticeship programming. The ACE certificate is also recognized for hiring purposes by an increasing number of employers. Based on their goal, students select from the following courses: Communications (English, Français, and Anglais Langue Seconde), Mathematics (Core, Business, Apprenticeship and Technology), Science (Biology, Chemistry and Physics), Computer Studies, and Self Management/Self Direction. To qualify for an ACE certificate, students must successfully complete all the outcomes of four courses: ACE communications, one mathematics course and any two other courses. Most students participate in Academic Upgrading to acquire the specific ACE courses required to qualify for admission to the next step of training.

APPENDIX B

During the focus group discussions, a number of issues were raised which were technically outside of the scope of this report. The following is a summary of these issues:

- Some colleges and students reported that some employers are still requiring the completion of an OSSD as a condition of hiring, even if a student has a grade 12 equivalency such as an ACE certificate.
- Adult students appreciate extracurricular activities organized by colleges that cater to the more “mature” student and that include the opportunity to involve their families.
- Students identified simple solutions that would have made a significant difference in their level of comfort in the early stages of their college experience such as having pocket-sized maps of campus and classroom locations.
- Accelerated programming (i.e., offered year-round or condensed) is considered a desirable option for some students.
- Some students are limited in their choice of postsecondary programs if they are reliant on funding from sources such as Human Resources and Social Development Canada (HRSDC) or the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB), where limitations often have been imposed.
- Related to the point above, some staff discussed the opportunity colleges have to develop a greater number and variety of one year programs.
- Students who wish to study in postsecondary programs on a part-time basis have a financial disincentive for doing so because tuition fees are not tied to individual courses, but to blocks of courses within a semester.

7. ACRONYMS

ACE	Academic and Career Entrance
CRALO	Committee of Registrars, Admissions and Liaison Officers
CSC	College Sector Committee for Adult Upgrading
EDI	Electronic Data Interface
EI	Employment Insurance
GED	General Education Development
LBS	Literacy and Basic Skills
OCAS	Ontario College Application Services
OEN	Ontario Education Number
OSAP	Ontario Student Assistance Program
OSSD	Ontario Secondary School Diploma
OW	Ontario Works
WSIB	Workplace Safety and Insurance Board

8. GLOSSARY

Direct Entry Student

A direct entry student is someone entering postsecondary education directly from secondary school.

Indirect Entry Student

An indirect entry student is someone who has delayed his/her entry to postsecondary education.

Mature Student

The province defines a mature student as someone over the age of 19 years without an Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD).

Secondary Applicant

A secondary applicant is someone taking one or more secondary school level courses through day school, secondary school, summer school, adult education, continuing education or correspondence in the twelve months prior to applying to college.

Non-secondary Applicant

A non-secondary applicant is someone who has not taken secondary school level courses in the twelve months prior to applying to college.

Transfer Student

A transfer student is someone who transfers from one postsecondary institution to another.

General Education Development (GED) Certificate

The General Educational Development test is an international secondary school equivalency examination program for adults. The GED tests cover what secondary school graduates are expected to know in mathematics, writing, science, literature, and the arts. Candidates who successfully complete the tests can earn the Ontario High School Equivalency Certificate.²⁰

Ontario Secondary School Diploma

The Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD) is the qualification in Ontario signifying graduation, and its receipt indicates a student has met all diploma requirements. In order to earn an OSSD, a student having entered Grade 9 in 1999 or subsequent years must earn 18 compulsory credits, 12 optional credits and complete 40 hours of community involvement activities and successfully complete the provincial secondary school literacy test.

²⁰ Ministry of Education's website: <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/students/faq-students.html>

Ontario Education Number (OEN)

The OEN is a student identification number assigned by the Ministry of Education to elementary and secondary students across the province. The number, which is unique to every student, is used as the key identifier on a student's school records, and follows the student through his or her elementary and secondary education. The OEN is nine digits long, randomly assigned, and tied to stable information about the student (name, gender, date of birth).²¹

²¹ Ministry of Education's website <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/brochure/oen/index.html>