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WHAT THE 2024 UNIVERSITY/ COLLEGE APPLICANT STUDY TELLS US ABOUT TRANSFER

SEPTEMBER 2025

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Published by

Ontario Council on Articulation and Transfer (ONCAT) |
Conseil Ontarien pour l'articulation et le transfert (CATON)
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Suggested Citation

Napierala, J. (2025). What the 2024 University/College Applicant Study Tells Us About Transfer. Ontario Council on Articulation and Transfer. https://oncat.ca/assets/oncat/ONCAT_Whatthe2024UniversityCollegeApplicantStudyTellsUsAboutTransfer_2025.pdf

Funding to support this report was provided by ONCAT (Ontario Council on Articulation and Transfer). The opinions, findings, conclusions, and recommendations expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of ONCAT or the Government of Ontario.

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Introduction

The University/College Applicant Study (UCAS) is an annual survey conducted by the Academica Group that gathers insights about applicants to postsecondary institutions across Canada. Since the mid-2000s, the UCAS has collected and shared valuable information about the motivations and factors that influence students' decisions related to postsecondary education. In 2023, ONCAT partnered with Academica to expand the survey's consideration of student mobility and transfer experiences in Ontario. This partnership introduced new questions focused on students' educational backgrounds, reasons for transferring, and overall expectations. In addition, it enabled Ontario institutions to participate in the survey at no cost.

The UCAS offers a broad view of how students make decisions about their postsecondary education. This report specifically focuses on the questions that were added by ONCAT — which explore student mobility and transfer experiences. For additional transfer-related analyses using UCAS data, please refer to publications on ONCAT.ca (e.g., Pizarro Milian et al., 2022) and the Academica Forum (e.g., Napierala & Hanson, 2025).

Methodology

This report draws on data from the 2024 UCAS survey in Ontario, which was conducted online between January and June 2024. The survey captured responses from 41,351 applicants to Ontario postsecondary institutions.[1] A total of 21 Ontario postsecondary schools participated in the 2024 UCAS, including 13 colleges and polytechnics,[2] and nine universities. For context, among these institutions:

- 32% are in the Greater Toronto Area and 23% are in Northern Ontario.
- 36% are smaller institutions with fewer than 10,000 students and 41% are larger institutions with more than 20,000 students.

Results

The tables in this report highlight selected findings from the 2024 UCAS, grouped into four key areas: Mobility Pathways, Transfer Credits, Transfer Decision-Making, and Information Gathering. For the Mobility Pathways section, we also include demographic and educational background data to provide additional context.

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1 For all tables below, the weighted n's are displayed, which have been adjusted to match the gender population profile at each institution. The number of observations (n) for individual tables below may vary due to item non-response.

2 For this analysis, polytechnic institutions are grouped together with colleges.

Mobility Pathways

The tables in this section use a custom variable called mobility pathways, which was created by combining responses to several survey questions. Mobility pathways describe the type of postsecondary institution a student previously attended (the "sending" institution)[3] and the type they are applying to (the "receiving" institution). For example, a "college-to-college" mobility pathway implies that a student previously attended a college or had a college credential and then applied to a college in 2024.

This variable separates students without previous postsecondary experience into two groups:

- Direct Entry (DE): Students who began postsecondary education within one year of finishing high school.
- Non-Direct Entry (Non-DE): Students who waited more than one year after high school to begin postsecondary education.

For non-DE students, we only know the type of institution they applied to; as such, they are not associated with any sending institutions.

Finally, students whose responses did not clearly indicate a previous institution type, or who applied to multiple types of institutions, are grouped under "Pathway Unclear."

TABLE 1
Mobility Pathways

Pathways	*n*	%
College-to-college	7,638	18.47
University-to-college	1,395	3.37
College-to-university	7,016	16.97
University-to-university	941	2.28
Direct entry-to-college	6,259	15.14
Direct entry-to-university	8,837	21.37
Non-direct entry-to-college	3,113	7.53
Non-direct entry-to-university	528	1.28
Pathway unclear	5,624	13.60

Note. *n* = 41,351.

[3] Three variables were combined: two survey questions inquired about the type of their most recent postsecondary institution and an additional question asked about the type of credentials they completed.

TABLE 2
Demographic Characteristics by Mobility Pathways

Characteristics	*n*	C-to-C	U-to-C	C-to-U	U-to-U	DE-to-C	DE-to-U	Non-DE-to-C	Non-DE-to-U	Pathway unclear
		%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Gender[a]										
Woman	21,501	18.91	4.22	16.30	2.24	14.31	21.43	7.27	1.37	13.95
Man	19,118	18.08	2.46	17.89	2.33	15.90	21.33	7.64	1.17	13.20
Non-binary	539	16.79	2.63	13.14	2.19	17.66	19.91	11.89	1.58	14.28
Other	188	12.94	1.74	9.93	1.11	24.57	23.29	13.68	0.82	11.86
Age group[b]										
17–19	18,788	3.12	0.54	0.78	0.91	27.85	46.08	5.54	1.73	13.44
20–24	8,770	29.33	5.38	21.21	4.18	8.07	1.46	15.06	1.85	13.45
25–29	5,680	34.92	4.80	35.20	2.85	1.99	0.20	6.06	0.33	13.65
30–39	5,514	30.76	6.16	38.09	2.80	1.95	0.06	5.03	0.28	14.86
40–49	2,054	31.04	8.09	37.30	3.01	2.34	0.00	5.12	0.07	13.05
50 and older	443	36.14	9.50	31.35	5.55	2.00	0.00	4.58	0.19	10.63
Student status										
Domestic	26,256	13.52	4.82	8.17	2.50	17.61	31.05	8.48	1.51	12.34
International	15,095	27.08	0.87	32.26	1.88	10.84	4.53	5.88	0.87	15.80
Disability[c]										
Have a disability	6,113	17.27	5.02	8.42	2.52	20.32	20.23	12.06	1.72	12.44
No disability	33,236	18.94	3.07	19.01	2.24	13.94	21.28	6.62	1.16	13.75
Prefer not to answer	2,002	14.40	3.37	9.23	2.18	19.16	26.31	8.80	1.89	14.66
Parental education[d]										
Don't know/NA	1,584	20.27	2.17	14.74	2.44	22.69	14.58	10.20	0.64	12.25
High school or less	8,194	25.89	4.46	19.76	1.93	14.74	9.98	9.91	1.09	12.23
Incomplete PSE	3,418	21.74	3.84	17.94	2.49	16.94	14.04	8.31	1.39	13.30
Completed college or trades/vocation	9,665	21.27	4.34	13.03	1.92	19.51	17.02	8.98	1.03	12.91
Completed university	18,491	12.96	2.41	17.80	2.56	12.05	30.62	5.34	1.52	14.74

[a] *n* (Gender) = 41,346.
[b] *n* (Age group) = 41,249.
[c] *n* (Student status) & n (Disability) = 41,351.
[d] *n* (Parent education) = 41,352.

TABLE 3
Household Characteristics and Employment, by Mobility Pathways

Characteristics	*n*	C-to-C	U-to-C	C-to-U	U-to-U	DE-to-C	DE-to-U	Non-DE-to-C	Non-DE-to-U	Pathway unclear
		%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Marital status										
Single, never married	31,394	16.67	2.76	14.46	2.16	16.64	23.93	8.19	1.54	13.66
Married/common-law	7,025	26.80	5.50	30.17	2.96	6.48	9.94	4.52	0.33	13.29
Separated/divorced/widowed	1,102	21.02	9.18	14.02	2.26	15.32	17.36	6.83	0.47	13.53
Prefer not to answer	1,830	15.94	2.27	11.02	1.57	22.56	23.68	8.18	0.89	13.89
Dependent children under age 15										
Have dependents	4,968	28.89	7.52	32.35	2.95	4.81	3.06	6.31	0.19	13.92
No dependents	35,383	16.98	2.80	14.93	2.18	16.39	23.99	7.73	1.45	13.53
Prefer not to answer	1,000	19.46	2.95	12.47	2.13	22.09	19.50	6.44	0.48	14.49
Employment status										
Full-time (32+ hrs per week)	10,950	24.62	6.74	30.84	3.04	6.35	4.01	8.88	1.44	14.08
Part-time (<32 hrs per week)	12,351	14.74	2.97	9.65	1.83	19.33	30.54	6.16	1.27	13.52
Serving in the military	110	14.50	3.08	19.54	2.07	16.34	16.79	12.03	0.00	15.64
Unemployed/looking for work	9,210	17.88	1.66	11.28	2.14	18.15	27.50	7.12	1.11	13.16
Not working outside the home and not looking for work	4,386	12.27	1.30	10.75	2.13	16.47	34.31	7.42	1.39	13.96
Prefer not to answer	4,344	21.20	1.79	21.09	2.04	17.60	13.12	8.86	1.17	13.13
Household income last year (2023)										
$30,000 or less	7,265	26.84	3.28	20.37	2.21	12.74	10.46	8.66	1.28	14.15
$30,001–$60,000	6,612	21.76	4.67	20.08	2.45	12.29	15.82	8.47	1.33	13.14
$60,001–$90,000	4,556	16.50	5.86	15.92	2.20	14.48	24.41	6.98	1.21	12.43
$90,001–$120,000	3,631	11.86	4.05	14.19	2.43	14.39	32.50	6.04	1.24	13.31
$120,001–$150,000	2,000	10.65	4.31	13.37	2.19	12.35	35.55	4.59	1.59	15.39
$150,001+	2,619	7.76	3.22	10.63	3.15	13.68	42.40	4.18	1.53	13.47
Don’t know	8,610	14.53	1.54	12.43	1.85	21.88	24.22	8.65	1.28	13.60
Prefer not to answer	6,058	23.10	2.17	22.31	2.38	14.03	13.73	7.26	1.07	13.96

Note. *n* = 41,351 for all characteristics.

TABLE 4
Education Experience by Mobility Pathways

Characteristics	*n*	C-to-C	U-to-C	C-to-U	U-to-U	DE-to-C	DE-to-U	Non-DE-to-C	Non-DE-to-U	Pathway unclear
		%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Highest PSE credential by Aug 2024[a]										
High school diploma or less	21,331	1.88	0.13	0.65	0.41	26.74	40.90	14.59	2.47	12.22
Incomplete college/university/ polytechnic	3,049	32.77	3.42	23.29	12.06	7.86	2.22	0.00	0.00	18.37
Completed trades/vocational/ technical school	404	32.78	1.61	7.45	1.12	15.91	1.44	0.00	0.00	39.65
College certificate/diploma/degree	6,299	60.17	18.09	8.37	1.21	2.84	0.17	0.00	0.00	9.15
University undergraduate degree or above	10,269	22.55	1.14	54.64	3.94	0.70	0.27	0.00	0.00	16.76
Location of most recent PSE[b]										
Quebec	218	27.87	21.46	22.31	13.40	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	14.77
Ontario	10,696	48.91	11.44	23.18	4.74	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	11.72
British Columbia	116	29.84	6.28	33.69	4.91	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	25.31
Atlantic provinces	161	25.13	6.04	39.32	9.49	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	20.15
Prairies	154	24.63	7.92	27.98	18.14	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	21.38
Northern Territories	9	55.34	9.27	10.58	9.27	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	11.61
Outside of Canada	7,773	22.95	0.81	53.62	3.43	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	19.19

[a] *n* (Highest PSE cred by Aug 2024) = 41,352.
[b] *n* (Location of most recent PSE) = 19,127.

Transfer Credits

TABLE 5

Previous Postsecondary Experience by Seeking Transfer Credits

PSE experience and transfer	*n*	%
No PSE experience	21,331	51.58
Some PSE experience	14,177	34.28
Some PSE experience & seeking transfer credits	5,843	14.13

Note. *n* = 41,351.

TABLE 6

Expected Quantity of Transfer Credit to Be Received

Quantity of transfer credit	*n*	%
More than two years (e.g., more than 20 courses)	780	7.07
Two years (around 20 courses)	1,438	13.03
One to two years (around 11 to 19 courses)	822	7.45
One year (around 10 courses)	1,064	9.64
About half a year (around 5 courses)	516	4.68
Less than half a year (less than 5 courses)	1059	9.60
None	807	7.31
Don’t know	4,551	41.23

Note. *n* = 11,037. This variable is in reference to applicants’ first-choice PSE institution.

Transfer Decision-Making

TABLE 7
Reason for Transfer

Reason for transfer	*n*	%
Want to obtain a higher-level credential	8,199	40.95
Want to increase chances of getting a job	6,618	33.06
Want to attend a better/different school	5,079	25.37
Want to change careers	5,464	27.30
The school's location (e.g., to be close to family/friends, reduce commuting time)	3,277	16.37
Have moved/am considering moving	1,706	8.52
Lost interest in current/previous program	1,246	6.22
Want to study online/remotely	1,423	7.11
My current/last program was too academically challenging	535	2.67
Other	3,256	16.26

Note. *n* = 20,020.

TABLE 8
When Did You Decide to Transfer?

When did you decide to transfer?	*n*	%
Before entering my last postsecondary (PSE) program	2,902	14.50
While enrolled in my last PSE program	4121	20.59
After completing or leaving my last PSE program	12,997	64.92

Note. *n* = 20,020.

TABLE 9

Is There an Articulation/Transfer Agreement Between Your Previous Program and the One You Applied to?

Presence of articulation agreement	*n*	%
Yes	2,340	11.69
No	10,333	51.61
Don't know	7,347	36.70

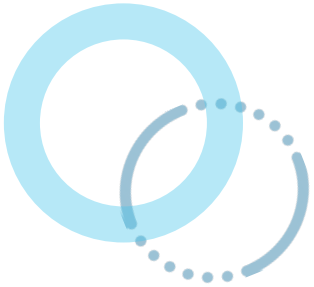
Note. *n* = 20,020.

TABLE 10

Did You Consult With a Transfer Advisor?

Consultation with a transfer advisor	*n*	%
Yes, at my current/last institution	1,040	5.19
Yes, at [my first-choice institution]	1,648	8.23
Yes, at both	512	2.56
No, I did not	16,821	84.02

Note. *n* = 20,020. The first-choice institution refers to the postsecondary institution most preferred by the student.



Information Gathering

TABLE 11
How Much Difficulty, if Any, Have You Had in Getting the Transfer-Related Information You Need?

Level of difficulty	*n*	%
A great deal of difficulty	1,105	5.52
Quite a bit of difficulty	2,225	11.11
A little difficulty	4,115	20.56
No difficulty	12,575	62.81

Note. *n* = 20,020.

TABLE 12
Web Portals as a Source of PSE Information

Web portals	*n*	%
canadian-universities.net	3,327	8.25
cicic.ca	788	1.95
educanada.ca	3,435	8.51
ontariocolleges.ca	20,900	51.81
ontariouniversitiesinfo.ca	8,991	22.29
ratemyprofessors.com	2,516	6.24
scholarshipscanada.com	5,600	13.88
schoolfinder.com	2,473	6.13
studentawards.com	1,639	4.06
studycanada.ca	4,916	12.19
universitystudy.ca	2,837	7.03
ALIS.ca	255	0.63
ouac.ca	15,310	37.95
myblueprint.ca	10,406	25.80
ontransfer.ca	1,451	3.60
bctransferguide.ca	254	0.63
transferalberta.ca	310	0.77
Other, please specify:	732	1.81

Note. *n* = 40,341. Respondents could select more than one web portal source; thus, the total percentage exceeds 100%.

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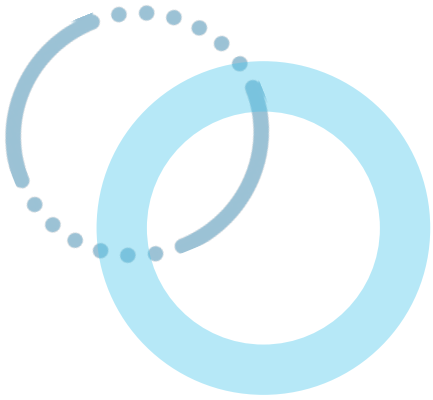

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