

SPECIAL FEATURES/CONTRIBUTIONS SPÉCIALES

The Admission of Non-Matriculated Adults to University Credit Courses*

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Every university in Canada has provision for admitting non-matriculated adult students and yet little information has been compiled about admission policies, how many students are admitted in this way, or how they perform. Admission policies are variable and this is reflected in the variety of terms used to define this group, which include "mature", "non-qualified", "special", and "non-matriculated adult" students.

Following World War II many universities admitted returning veterans who did not meet normal admission requirements. While a few universities like Queen's and McMaster introduced in the late 1950s the policies from which current practice derives, most registrars in response to a recent survey reported that non-matriculated adult admission policies were introduced in the 1960's, a period in which there was a general move to broader accessibility. Two types of changes have been made since then: there has been a tendency to reduce the minimum age and some institutions which administered tests have ceased the practice. As examples of the former, Toronto started in 1967 with a minimum age of 30, which was subsequently reduced to 25 and then 21, and Calgary moved from 25 to 23 in the 1970s and 21 in the 1980s. Contrary examples do exist, however; St. Mary's raised the minimum age from 21 to 25, and Bishop's raised the age from 21 to 23 in 1978, since many students attend CEGEPs until age 21.

Little information exists about how many students are admitted, since centralized systems like Statistics Canada's Student Information System and the Ontario Universities' Application Centre do not collect data about the "basis of admission". Statistical data on educational background, where they exist, normally refer to last educational institution attended. The responses from registrars suggest that fewer than 5 per cent of full-time students are admitted in this way, but that more are admitted to part-time study. A few institutions reported proportions in excess of 10 per cent and in some cases explanations are readily apparent. These institutions include Memorial (at which such students may take

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foundation year courses), Mount St. Vincent (where the introduction of the practice in 1974 was designed to facilitate the return of older females to formal education), St. Mary's, Regina (which has developed a distinctive approach described later), Winnipeg (which offers arts and science courses downtown in a major metropolitan area and has developed special features in its programming of course offerings), and Calgary.

Application and Selection Procedures

Chronological age alone does not define the non-matriculated adult applicant; an adult who meets prescribed admission requirements will be admitted on that basis. Of 44 institutions responding to a survey, 23 defined a minimum age of 21, 4 a younger age, 7 an older age, and 10 did not prescribe a specific age. All four institutions using a minimum age younger than 21 are located in Western Canada and no institution there specified an age older than 21. All Ontario universities which specify a minimum age use 21. In Quebec the minimum age varies from 21 to 23, the higher age requirement being explained by one respondent by the need to complete the prerequisite courses offered by the CEGEPs. In the Atlantic provinces, the combination of minimum ages and/or length of work experience ranging up to five years effectively serve to define generally higher minimum ages of 23 to 25. A lower age (21) is used by Memorial, where students may take the foundation year, and Acadia, which appears to be the only university in Canada where non-matriculated adults must commence their studies on a part-time basis.

Thirty-three institutions reported using the same procedures for entry to full-time and to part-time study, 7 employ different procedures, and 4 gave no response. Where procedures differ, the part-time applicant may be asked to supply less information, or may be exempt from a test and interview as at Saskatchewan or from a test as at McMaster, or may be excluded from full-time study because of low grades on Grade 13 or pre-university courses as at Toronto.

The information to be supplied by the applicant and the selection procedures used are summarized in Table 1.

The requirements given in the table and the discussion below relate mainly to B.A. programmes; additional requirements may exist for other programmes and academic prerequisites normally must be met, particularly in the scientifically-based disciplines. The non-matriculated adult status is generally restricted to residents of Canada, but not necessarily to the province in which the university is located.

Virtually all institutions require transcripts of previous academic work, and almost 80 per cent require either a letter or a curriculum vitae or both to evaluate an applicant's life experience and reasons for wishing to pursue university study. Few institutions require letters of reference, but of the 14 which require or may request letters 6 are in the Atlantic provinces, 3 in Quebec, and 4 in Ontario. Interviews are required by only eight institutions, but may be required or requested in selected cases by 28 of the 44; Winnipeg uses the interview not for selection but for

TABLE 1
 INFORMATION REQUIRED AND SELECTION PROCEDURES

	Yes	In Some Cases	No	No Response
Letter required	22	5	15	2
Curriculum vitae required	23	5	12	4
Secondary school transcript	39	-	3	2
Post-secondary transcript	41	-	1	2
References (normally two)	10	4	27	3
Interview	8	20	15	1
Test	6	5	32	1
Canadian/Landed Immigrant Status	32	-	10	2
Resident of Province	7	-	25	12

counselling of admitted students. The responses suggest that the interviews are not normally structured nor is formal scoring used.

Only eight universities require non-matriculated adults to write a test; at one, part-time applicants are exempt and at another, applicants to its General Studies programme are. Three other institutions may require a test of some applicants. At least three institutions which used to require a test have discontinued the practice. Different tests are used but generally they are aptitude or intelligence tests.

The general picture described in the responses and supplementary comments is of procedures which are rarely formal and in which applications are considered on a case-by-case basis. Formal assessments of the effectiveness of current policies and procedures have rarely been done, although a number of respondents were able to comment on the achievements of students admitted in this way.

Forms of Admission

From a review of calendars, six forms of admission of non-matriculated adult students were identified and registrars and admission officers were asked to define their institutions' practices in terms of these six. Some use more than one of the forms and the difference may be related to:

1. the qualifications of the applicant such that some are granted clear admission and some admitted on probation,

2. the Faculty to which admission is sought, and
3. whether the applicant seeks entry to full-time or part-time study.

The most common form of admission in all parts of the country (21 of 44 respondents) is that where candidates are selected and admitted to degree programmes without probation. All seven Quebec respondents reported using this form; it was noted that the prerequisite courses in CEGEPs must be completed and these provide grounds for assessing academic performance. At Laval, applicants who are not admitted may enter non-degree work. In addition to the 21 there are four institutions which follow this form in combination with another; in two cases weaker applicants are admitted on probation and in another to a non-degree General Studies programme. At the fourth institution those admitted to part-time study are on probation.

The second most common form (10 of 44 respondents) is similar to the first; candidates are selected and admitted to degree credit courses but on probation. An additional four institutions use this form in combination with another. The standards for clearing probation vary, but most consistency appears in Ontario where a 60 per cent or C-average on at least two full courses is common. Some institutions require passing grades, e.g. Prince Edward Island on 9 semester hours and Mount St. Vincent on 12 semester hours. New Brunswick specifies attainment of the average required for continuation in that programme. This raises the question of whether requiring a higher average to clear probation places the non-matriculated adult in double jeopardy: he or she does not possess the normal qualifications but is required to perform at a higher level.

Three universities admit non-matriculated applicants to (degree) credit courses and their performance in these courses is used to determine whether they can enter degree programmes. One university, Memorial, may place applicants in foundation year courses, which are equivalent to senior matriculation courses, and another, Acadia, admits all such applicants on a part-time basis. The fourth form is similar to the last except that such students are admitted to credit courses on probation, and is found at Brandon and at McMaster for entry to part-time study.

Open admission, the fifth form, in which all applicants older than a specified age are admitted to a degree programme without probation, was reported in use at Athabasca, the Open Learning Institute, and Windsor. The first two began their operating lives as open institutions, and Athabasca's mandate is described in its calendar thus;

"...to provide a University education to adults who are unable or unwilling to attend a conventional university. By combining an open admission policy and year-round registration with distance learning methods, Athabasca makes university education available to any adult who wants it..." (p. 1)

Windsor may use its preliminary year courses to ensure that students admitted are prepared for its degree courses, and may, therefore, be classified as using the next form of admission.

The sixth and final form is admission to degree programmes on the basis of performance in non-degree courses, which all applicants may take. This approach

is used at Regina where applicants register in 90-level courses to gain admission to degree programmes, and at Guelph where those not admitted to a degree programme may register initially in a General Studies programme. At Toronto, applicants may take pre-university courses at Woodsworth College or Grade 13 courses to qualify for entry to degree programmes.

Regional Variations in Admission Practices

Admission policies and practices vary across the country, but similarities appear within regions. In the Atlantic Provinces, the minimum ages specified and/or the work experience required serve to ensure that non-matriculated adult students are older than in other regions, and not surprisingly it appears that they comprise a smaller proportion of full-time students (perhaps 2 to 3 per cent). Memorial, probably because of its Foundation Year, appears to be an exception with a minimum age of 21 and a higher proportion of students falling in this category.

All universities in Quebec use similar procedures, and this appears to be related to the requirement that the prerequisite courses offered in CEGEPs be completed. Ontario universities display consistency in prescribing a minimum age of 21 and two years absence from formal education, and in the information which must be supplied.

In the Western provinces, the prescribed minimum age never exceeds 21 and it is only in those provinces where the generally prescribed age falls below 21. The greatest variation appears in these provinces, but these variations may be mere reflections of inter-provincial differences in the organization of education. The two Western-most provinces each have an open institution and well-established college systems which cater to the needs, while the universities in Saskatchewan and Manitoba have developed distinctive approaches to the admission of non-matriculated adults.

Performance of Non-Matriculated Adult Students

A number of registrars and admissions officers were able to report their impressions about the academic performance of non-matriculated adults or identify informal in-house reports. None identified formal studies not previously identified by this author, and some failed to identify known studies. Experience in the United States is that studies of academic performance for this group produce highly variable results, which is to be expected in the view of the variability in admission practice.

Two early studies on the performance of mature students at universities in Alberta reflected favourably on the performance of this group (Perkins, 1971; Batt, 1972). A later study at an Ontario university reported that full-time mature students did not perform as well as students admitted directly from Grade 13 and in one Faculty not as well as those in the bottom quartile on the Grade 13 admission average (Darling, 1976); an informal examination of student records at that

university subsequently suggested that this pattern did not prevail among those who studied on a part-time basis. The most extensive study in Canada was that of Maslany and Weston (1978) at the University of Regina, who conducted an analysis of 2,156 mature applicants since 1966. They reported that the best predictor of university performance was performance in previous university-level courses, and recommended that performance in university courses be used to determine admission to degree programmes. In 1980, the University of Regina changed its admission policy along these lines. A later study (Ayers, 1980) examined the relationship of first-year university grades with Tests of General Educational Development for a group who did not graduate from high school. There was a slight tendency for higher university grades to be associated with higher test scores and a marked trend for failures to increase with lower test scores. The author suggested one might consider open admission for this group particularly for those who plan to study on a part-time basis.

Concluding Comments

Policies and procedures for the admission of non-matriculated adults were developed by most Canadian universities in the 1960s as part of a move to broaden accessibility. They were designed to cater to those who had dropped out of formal education, the late-bloomers, and the disadvantaged. In 1972, the Commission on Postsecondary Education in Ontario commented that;

“...high school graduates who, after job experience, wish to enter the postsecondary stream, and other learners and adults wanting a second chance in education are often overlooked in discussions of postsecondary education...” (p. 42)

In many ways this remains true for the non-matriculated adult who in the recent report of the Commission on the Future Development of the Universities of Ontario received passing mention (p. 9). There is no reliable information about how many are admitted, little has been written about their academic performance or the special problems they may face on entering universities, and, while changes in admission policies have occurred, there is little evidence of formal evaluations of the policies.

What little has been gleaned in this review may be summarized briefly. Fewer than 5 per cent of full-time undergraduates are admitted in this way, although the proportion is probably greater among part-time students. Approaches to admission vary from open admission in a few institutions, through a position where such applicants are given an opportunity to demonstrate their ability by taking either credit or non-credit courses, to the practice of most institutions which is to select on the basis of various criteria of generally unknown effectiveness. Practices vary among universities and regions reflecting the provincial organization of education and institutional characteristics. Current policies and practices may well be appropriate, but one would be hard pressed on current evidence to argue for the status quo, or broader access, or more restricted access.

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