

Will I get in?



*Access and Capacity
in British Columbia's
University System*

“Today's youth have heard the message from parents and potential employers about the importance of education. They are demanding access to university in greater numbers and there is every indication that this trend is likely to continue.”

Trends in Higher Education, The Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, October 2002.

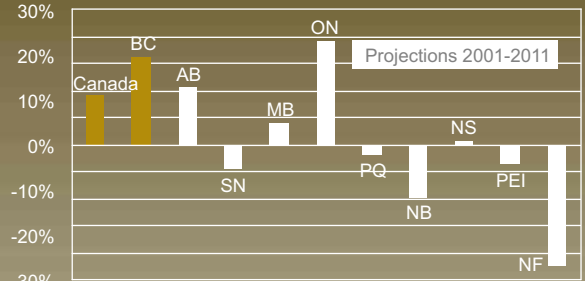
Getting Ready for the Wave!

There is no question that enrolment pressures at BC universities will continue to grow significantly over the course of the next decade. The only real question is just how large that demand will be.

All available evidence strongly suggests that the pressure will be dramatic and there is growing reason for concern about the capacity of BC's universities to adequately respond to anticipated demand. The most recent Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC) Stats Canada analysis suggests that in the period between now and 2010, Canada will be faced with an additional 125,000 to 200,000 students seeking opportunities for university education. As noted in figure one, British Columbia will have the second highest growth rate.

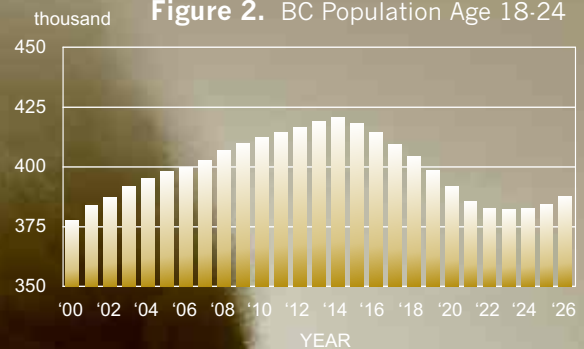
In British Columbia, BC Stats predicts that between 2000 and 2014, the 18-24 age cohort alone will grow by 43,000, many of whom will want to go on to university (figure two). That trend, however, is not the only pressure on university enrolments.

Figure 1. Youth Population Growth



Source: AUCC, Stats Canada

Figure 2. BC Population Age 18-24



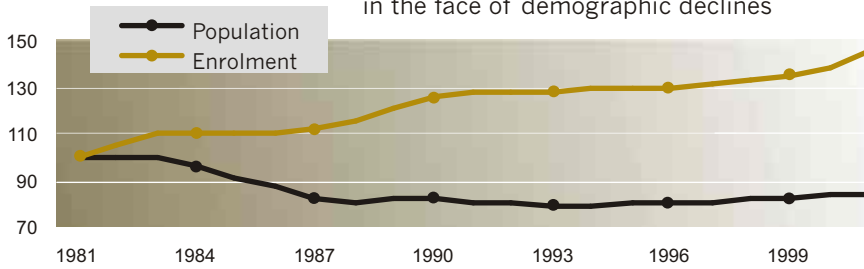
Source: BC Stats

“BC - like many other jurisdictions - has an aging population where new entrants into the workforce will be outnumbered by those entering retirement by 2009.”

Source: Learning to Win - BC Progress Board, Learning to Win - “Ready, Set, Go”, December 12, 2002

There is every reason to believe that participation levels are increasing significantly within the 18-24 age cohort as young people come to understand that a rapidly evolving labour market will require higher levels of education from prospective employees. Improvements in K-12 graduation rates will also put pressure on participation rates. History also tells us that enrolment pressures will increase even when the post-secondary population cohort decreases as shown in figure three.

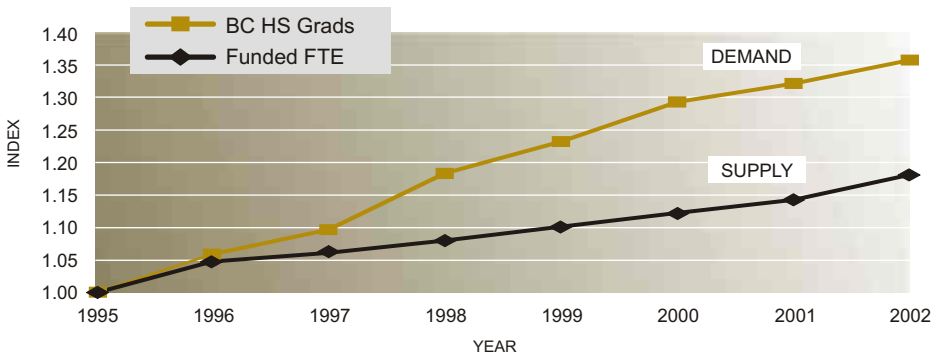
Figure 3. Strong enrolment is possible even in the face of demographic declines



Source: Stats Canada data and AUCC estimates

Historically, BC has had a smaller university system than in other parts of Canada. It is also true that the number of funded university student spaces has not kept pace with the number of high school graduates the province produces each year or with the number of adults returning to university to pursue mid-career learning opportunities. As a result, in an environment where demand is increasing, the minimum entry grade point levels have climbed to unprecedented levels. Universities across the province are already turning away too many qualified students.

Figure 4. Growing gap between supply and demand for university education – BC secondary school graduates applying for admission to BC universities



Source: BC Government and TUPC

In September of this year the minimum GPA for admission to Science at the University of British Columbia was 87%, Arts required 82% and Commerce required 90%. Grade point average requirements are approaching similar levels at Simon Fraser University and the University of Victoria anticipates entry requirements of 85% in both Arts and Sciences for the next academic year. BC universities have done their part to lessen the impact of what could have been even higher GPA levels by receiving additional unfunded students in 2002/03 and 2003/04 but this short-term measure is not sustainable.

If this situation persists BC's universities will be pushed to restrict access through ever increasing minimum entry grade point levels. This is not the direction we should be heading in. On the contrary, we need to open the doors of our universities to BC's students now – ensuring that we have the educated population and skilled workforce that will help to drive economic development and innovation.

It is also important to note that we have seen the emergence of a significant new pressure at the second and third year transfer level. One of the great strengths of BC's post-secondary system has been the ability of students to make the transition to university after successfully completing the first one or two years at one of the province's excellent community colleges. Limitations on the numbers of available seats at the university level has challenged the ability of universities to continue to receive the same numbers of qualified students from the college system.

While the current situation results from many factors, and while it is right to say that government has inherited a difficult situation, it is also clear that universities, other education partners and government must work together to provide opportunity to a much greater number of highly qualified students. Too many of these students are spending too much time asking – *Will I Get In?*

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Quality Counts

It is essential for our universities to be well positioned to take a lead role in the growth and change occurring in our society. Our universities have great strengths in the excellence of their faculty, their research achievements, in the quality of the students, and in the dedication of the staff at each of our institutions. We can also be proud that our universities consistently rank at, or near the top of MacLeans magazine's annual national survey of

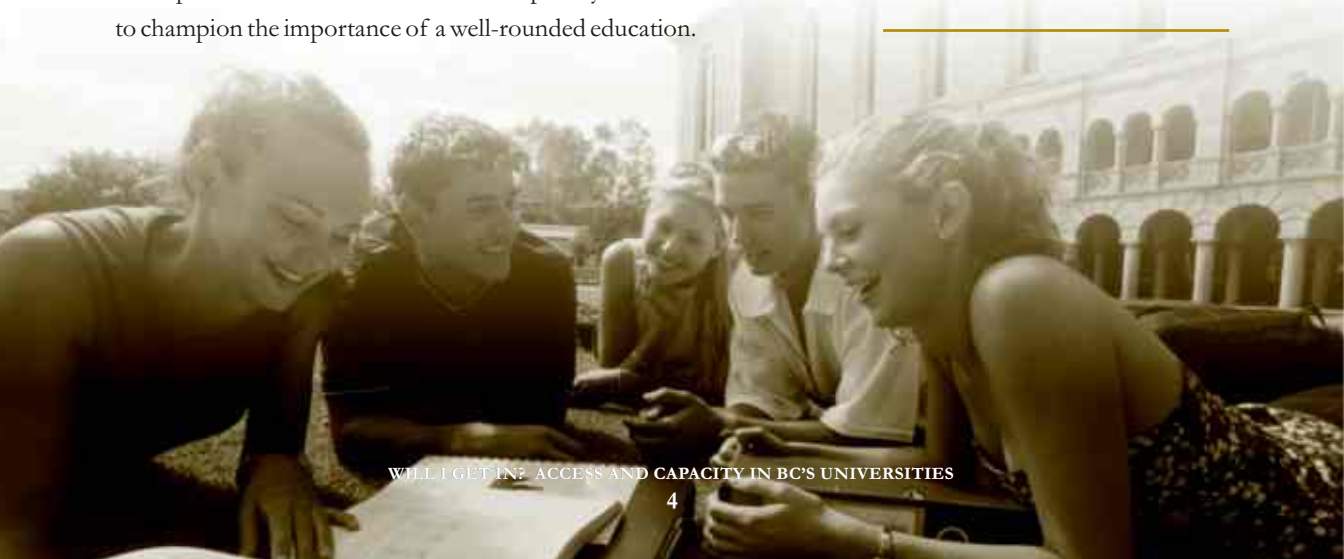


universities; our universities have been the home to Nobel Prize winners; our universities produce outstanding graduates; our universities offer world class education; and our graduates stay (88%) in BC to help develop and grow this province.

We also must recognize and commend the action that has been taken by the Provincial Government over the last two years to increase student spaces in critical areas of economic and social need, in difficult fiscal circumstances. The government has taken action to help our universities double the annual number of graduates in computer science, electrical engineering and computer engineering over the next five years. As well, the number of medical school graduates will be doubled through a collaborative effort between the government and three of BC's universities – UNBC, UBC and UVic. This is clearly a step in the right direction. Still, additional student spaces are needed in the areas of science and

technology as well as liberal arts – the field that ensures our students have the ability to think conceptually through exposure to philosophy, literature, language and other disciplines. Throughout history conceptual advances have been interdisciplinary and we must continue to champion the importance of a well-rounded education.

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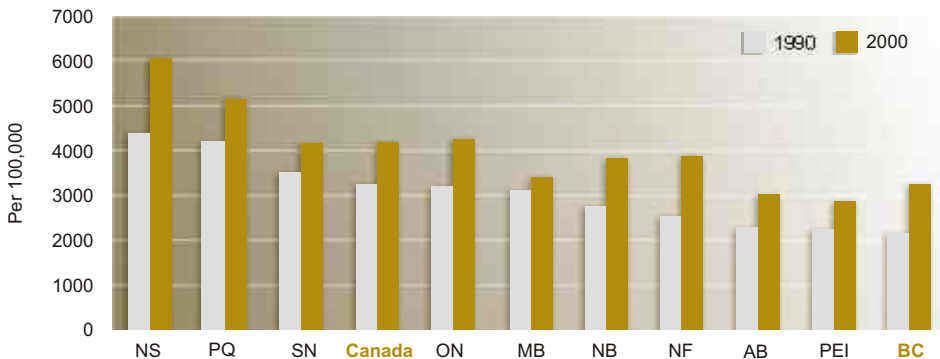
The Provincial Government should also be applauded for introducing rolling three-year budgets. As a result, the ability to plan in the universities has improved significantly. However, it also alerts us to coming pressures, most significantly noted in the current plan in fiscal year 2004/05, where funding to the universities is projected to decline significantly. This trend must be reversed if universities are to maintain quality and respond effectively to the needs of the students.

While it must be recognized that the size of the post secondary system in British Columbia has increased, this has been done, at least at the university level, by squeezing students into existing capital space. Universities have been as creative and as efficient as possible in responding to these pressures, but have not been able to build the classrooms and faculty space necessary to meet even current needs. Action is urgently required to meet anticipated increases in participation levels and this must also be done in a manner that preserves and enhances the quality of university education.

Our Future Natural Resource is Knowledge

The future holds much promise but also poses many challenges. Historically, economically, socially and intellectually, British Columbia has always focused on our abundant natural resources. For years British Columbia has been a province of considerable wealth; its natural resource industries ensuring substantial revenue to support the province's health care and education systems. Our wealth in this area has been beneficial for the entire province. At the same time, British Columbia has, for many years, been able to attract talented and skilled people from other parts of Canada and from the rest of the world to help us support and manage our economy. As

Figure 5. Total University Degrees as a Proportion of the 20–29 Population



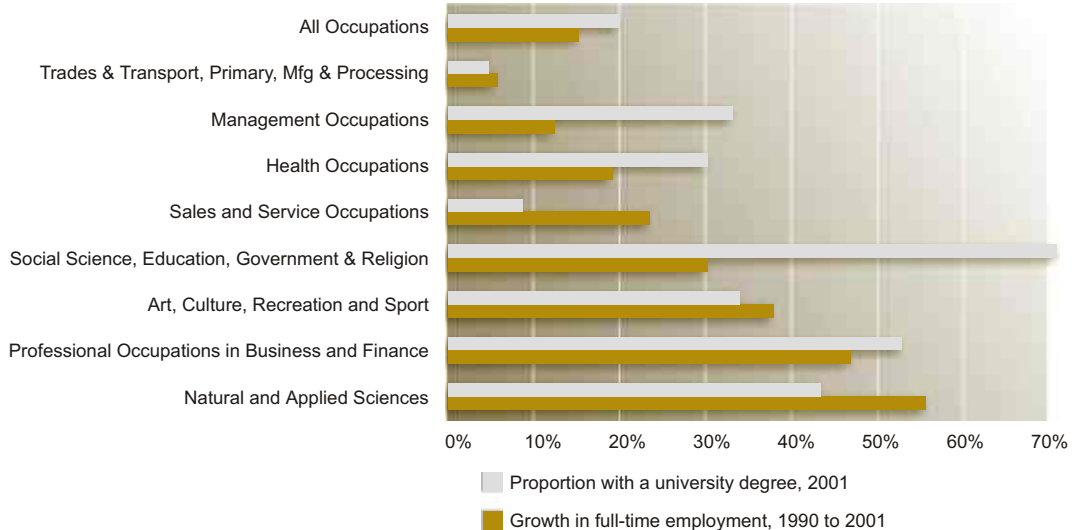
Source: Stats Canada

a result of this, and the abundance of low skilled, high paying jobs, the Province for years has not made as substantial an investment in post-secondary education as other jurisdictions and this has resulted in under investment in our universities, lower system capacity and per capita degree production levels lower than almost all other provinces. With the huge restructuring of the British Columbia economy, this must change.

We are living in a knowledge-based world where our ability to unleash the creative thought that leads to innovation will determine whether we succeed as a society and as an economy. If we are to achieve the level of excellence necessary for us to prosper in a global marketplace, we must educate those who will become the skilled workers, and the talented researchers in our new economy. This will require a solid funding base for our post-secondary system, the resources necessary to increase student spaces, further support for the direct and indirect costs of research and an increase in the number of graduate students we educate.

British Columbian's are increasingly aware of the rapidly changing labour market and the shift to a knowledge based economy. Statistics Canada is reporting that today's fastest growing occupations will require the most education.

Figure 6. Proportion with a university degree, 2001



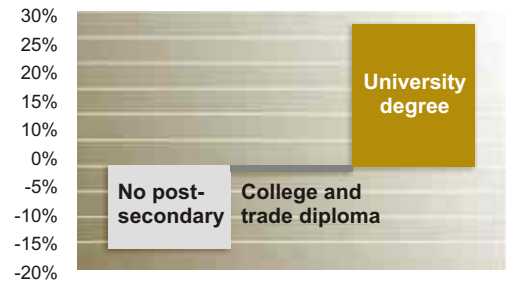
Source: AUCC, Stats Canada, Labour Force Survey 1991

British Columbia's students certainly understand this and they are turning to universities and other post-secondary institutions in even greater numbers in order to access the opportunities that are before them.

Students know that university graduates in British Columbia:

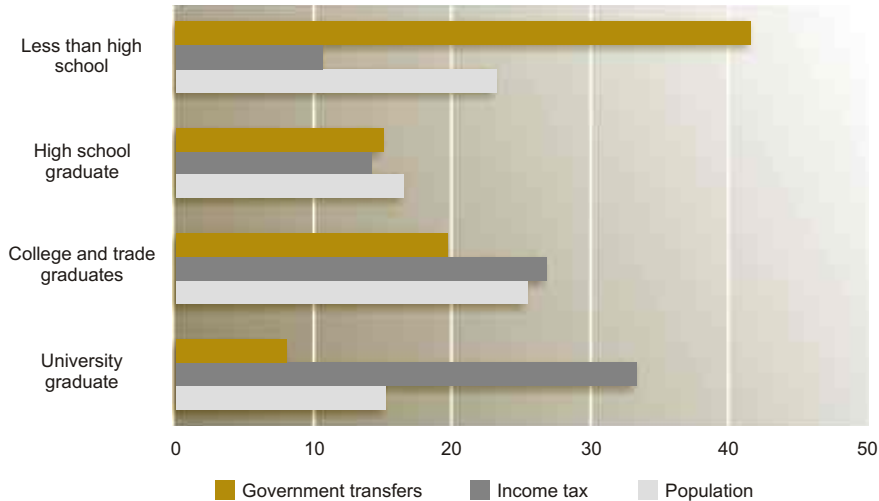
- Are more gainfully employed;
- Earn above average salaries;
- Use proportionately fewer government resources;
- Are more socially engaged;
- Have more economic opportunities; and
- Provide greater income tax revenues to government.

Figure 7. University graduates continue to earn much higher salaries



Source: AUCC

Figure 8. Investing in universities provides strong returns to graduates and governments



Source: Statistics Canada, Survey of labour and income dynamics, 1997

Opening Doors To British Columbians

The reasons are clear why students are seeking access, the opportunities and the resources necessary to provide them with high quality education essential to support success in a more complex world. However, achieving success usually requires a team effort and a commitment by all to embrace the challenge before us. British Columbia's universities stand ready to continue to do their part.

Together, with Government, we must ensure that British Columbia's university system is high quality and has sufficient capacity to meet the demands of students today and into the future.



Opening doors to British Columbians will require action on the following key elements.

1. Support for Quality

- Restoration of projected funding reductions in fiscal year 2004/05 will be essential to maintaining the quality of BC's universities.

2. Building Education Capacity

- Development of a comprehensive plan to increase the capacity of BC's universities to substantially improve access opportunities for BC students.
- Resources to support system growth that will maintain high levels of quality and put in place the capital space and the technological infrastructure necessary to sustain the teaching and research mandates of BC universities.
- A commitment to guarantee that all qualified students will be able to find an opportunity to continue their studies at a BC university whether they enter directly from the province's K-12 system or transfer from any of BC's excellent colleges or university-colleges.

We know if the challenge is met and the goal reached, the answer to the question, "*Will I Get In?*" will be "*Yes!*"



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