

THE
CANADIAN NATIONAL
SURVEY OF
POST-SECONDARY
INSTITUTIONS
ON
ENTRANCE
REQUIREMENTS
FOR
HOME-EDUCATED
STUDENTS

by
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The survey, conducted between October 2000 and February 2001, accomplished its goal of measuring the collective attitudes of Canadian post-secondary institutions towards home-educated students. The relatively high rate of participation was primarily from private and western institutions, but a significant sampling was received from public and eastern ones as well.

Most institutions had either accepted or were interested in accepting home-educated students, although few were actively recruiting them. Most institutions did not have a written home education policy. As indicated by the nearly unanimous desire to see the results of the survey, most institutions are now facing the challenge of finding ways of accepting the increasing numbers of home-educated students.

Requirements for admission varied widely. Given a choice of nine instruments that could be used to determine the admissibility of students, none was clearly favored. Likewise no standardized test was clearly preferred over others. Half the participating institutions still required a provincially accredited diploma in spite of the knowledge that most home-educated students would not have one. Most institutions indicated an uncertainty regarding what is included in a student portfolio.

Not to negate the findings, the margin of error that is inherent in any broad-based analysis is discussed. Although the findings are accurate, some aspects must be taken into consideration in order to get an accurate perspective of the results.

It is recommended that future surveys be directed towards discovering, and making public, the attitudes and requirements of each institution, and so provide a greater benefit to parents and students. It is, therefore, more conceivable that such a survey will be conducted on a provincial basis in order to take into account the different educational policies of each province.

Finally, when taking into consideration that few institutions had a written home-education policy and that nearly all participating institutions indicated a desire to see the results of the survey, it can be reasonably assumed that policy suggestions would be welcomed. Five recommendations are provided to help accommodate home-educated students, including: less emphasis on an accredited provincial diploma; more emphasis on a student portfolio; use of Canadian skills-based standardized test; inclusion of a career investigation report in admission requirements; and acceptance of parental letters when determining a home-educated student's readiness for post-secondary studies.

SURVEY PARTICIPATION

In total, 187 questionnaires were distributed and 67 were returned completed. As can be expected in a survey of this nature, not all institutions of higher learning were sent the survey and not all who were contacted chose to participate. However, a 36% rate of participation (**Fig. 1**), is well above the 20% rate experienced in the equivalent American survey of 1996.(3)

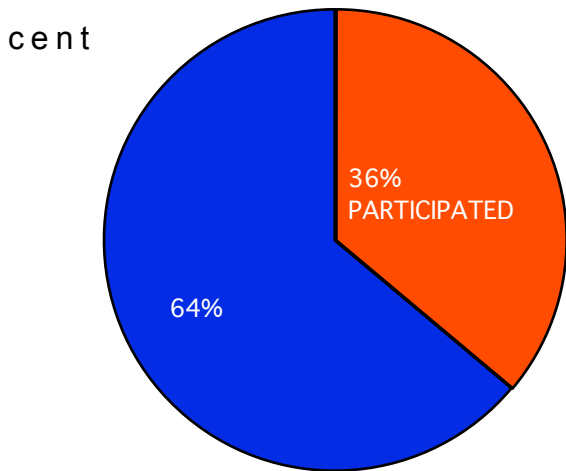


Fig. 1 Rate of Participation In The Survey

participation by province (**Fig. 2**) is not an accurate representation of willingness on the part of all provincial institutions to participate since some provinces received a limited number of surveys. New Brunswick, for example, received five surveys but none were returned. Prince Edward Island, on the other hand, received only two surveys,

one of which was returned, giving the questionable impression that half of all the institutions in Prince Edward Island participated. Institutional participation in the survey for each province is summarized in **Fig. 3**. The information on this chart suggests that the western institutions were more inclined to respond to the survey than the eastern ones. The four western provinces averaged 52% participation while the eastern six averaged only 23%. This may reflect the fact that home education is more common in western Canada resulting in a greater interest on the part of western institutions.

Private institutions generally responded to the survey more frequently than the public ones.

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Fig. 3 Number Of Survey Participants Per Province Compared With Surveys Sent Out

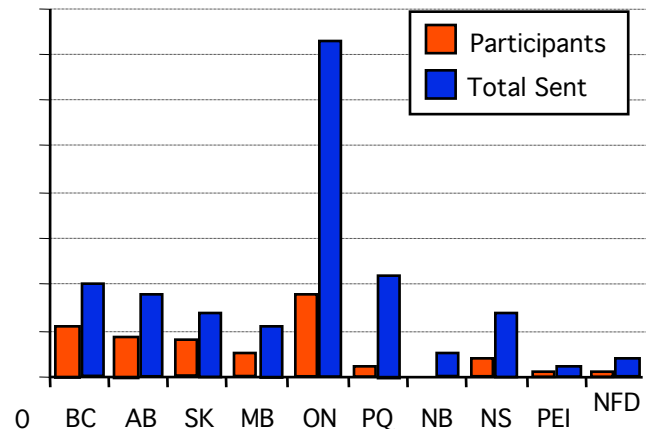
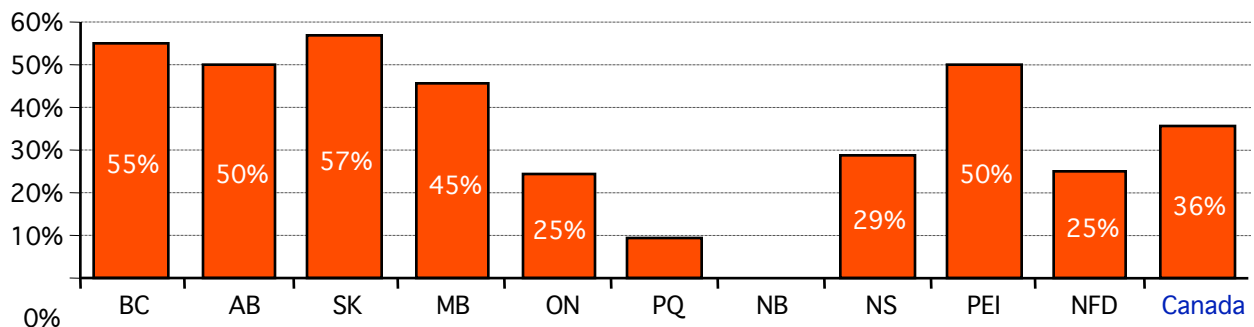


Fig. 2 Percent Participation By Province



HOME EDUCATION POLICIES

As expected, the results indicated a wide range of experience, understanding and methods of acceptance regarding home-educated students. Over 70% of participants indicated that they had accepted home-educated students (**Fig. 4**). This was encouraging yet substantially lower than in the United States where 96% of participants indi-

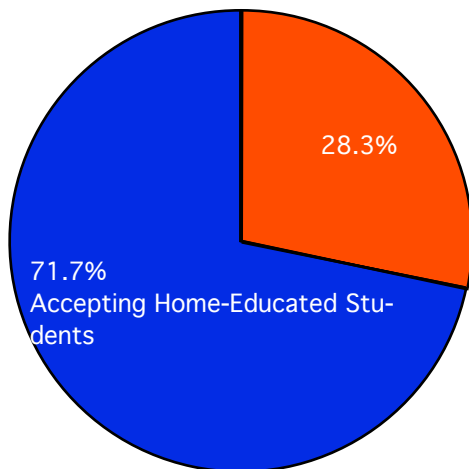


Fig. 4 Percent Of Institutions Accepting Home-Educated Students

could justifiably question how a post-secondary institution could possibly acquire such information short of hiring a full-time private investigator!

Most institutions indicated that home-educated students either interacted well with their peers or were outstanding in their willingness to get involved in extra-curricular activities. Overall the assessment of home-educated students was very positive, which

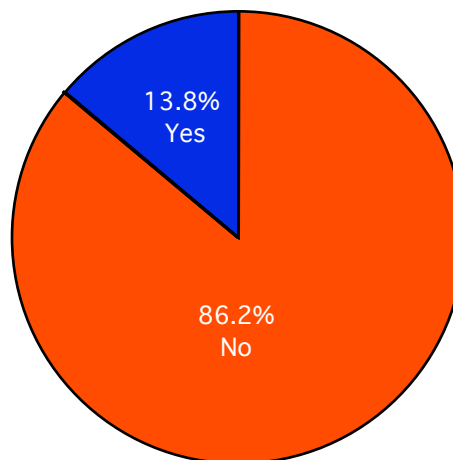


Fig. 5 Percent Of Institutions Recruiting Home-Educated Students

cated acceptance of home-educated students.(3)

It should be noted, however, that institutions that have enrolled home-educated students would be more likely to respond to a survey on home-educated students and so the results of both studies may be somewhat slanted in favor of home-educated students. Like the American findings, some institutions had only a few home-educated students and some had significant and increasing numbers enrolled over the last few years.

It was clear from survey responses that home-educated students which did attend post-secondary institutions were successful and many excelled. One institution indicated a well known, long-standing prejudice towards home-educated students by making reference to their alleged lack of social skills. (9) One

leads one to question why most institutions do not actively recruit home-educated students (**Fig. 5**). A reasonable assumption for this could be that there is not a great deal of opportunity to do so. Home school conventions would be the most likely place to recruit. However, there are not a great many of these and most of them in Canada have been smaller and rather disorganized. While larger conventions could be fertile ground for recruitment, some organizations such as the Alberta Home Education Association (AHEA) has traditionally not invited post-secondary institutions to participate in the exhibit hall. When AHEA did make a few tables available in 2001, there was considerable interest, especially from private institutions. In the past, home-educated students were not numerous and even though the numbers are increasing they still make up a very small part of the total

pool of potential candidates for any institution. As student numbers increase and their success becomes evident, more institutions will likely take note and, as has been shown in the United States, more institutions will make a greater effort to recruit home-educated students.(5)

Like their American counterparts, few Canadian institutions reported having a home education policy in place at the time of the survey (Fig. 6). Some institutions later sought counsel and/or approval for newly minted versions and many of those who did have a written

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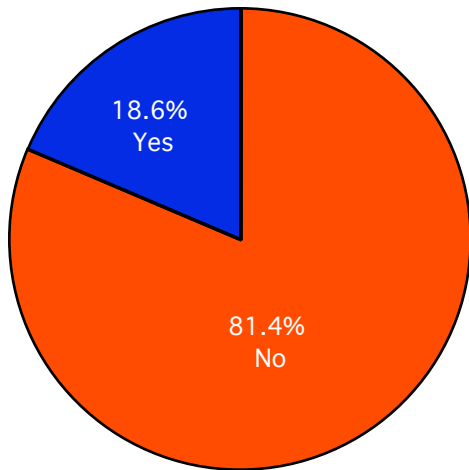


Fig. 6 Percent of Institutions With A Home Education Policy

turned copies of them with the completed questionnaire.

Analysis of the existing policies indicated a range of approaches and avenues used to screen students for admissions and most had alternatives to the diploma. This information is summarized later in this report.

The survey did identify a general need for policy regarding home-educated students in institutes of higher learning. It was also noted that the more an institution had accepted home-educated students the more likely they were to have a written policy in place. When asked in the questionnaire whether the institutions were interested in the results, nearly all answered affirmatively, indicating, perhaps, a recognition of the need for a written policy regarding home-educated students.

REQUIREMENTS FOR ADMISSION

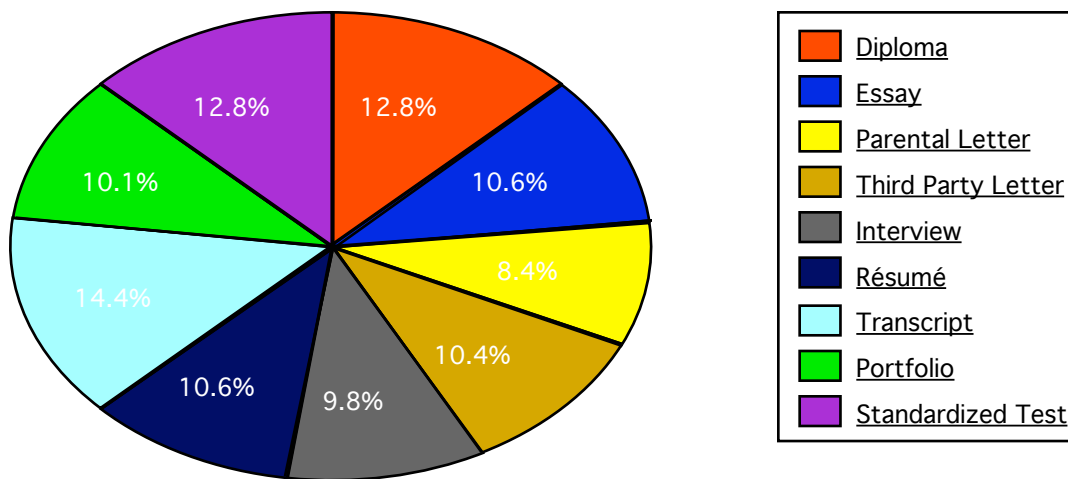
The cover letter accompanying the questionnaire stated that the majority of home-educated students completing their high school level programming at home would do so without earning the provincially accredited diploma and that some of these students would be seeking entrance into post-secondary institutions. One of the objectives of the questionnaire was to ascertain what post-secondary institutions were doing to accommodate non-diploma home-educated graduates. It was therefore somewhat surprising when half the institutions indicated that they would accept home-educated students, but only if they had a diploma. These findings indicate the degree of flexibility (or inflexibility) of post-secondary institutions when it comes to defining standards. The bigger the institutions, the more likely they were to demand that students meet their methods of measurement rather than to employ alternative measures of ascertaining the academic competence of applicants. This observation would lead one to question why institutions would assume that home-educated students would indeed have a provincial diploma. Granted, it is possible to earn a provincially accredited diploma at home, more so if one is home-schooling as opposed to home-educating, but

this often proves to be very challenging. Provincial diplomas are awarded to students who have completed the specified program following standards dictated by the provincial educational bureaucracies. In short, it is a diploma designed by the public education system for attendees of the public education system. While no institution would consider granting a diploma, degree, or certificate to students attending a different institution, some feel that getting a provincial diploma at home is a reasonable expectation, in spite of the fact that these students have not been educated within the provincial public education system.

It may be important at this juncture to differentiate between a home-school program

standards. These home-based students are the ones who are more likely to earn the provincial diploma. Bringing a school program home is not the same as providing a home-education. A home-education, on the other hand, is a program offered to a student by a parent outside the structured learning environment of a school. Parents in this case, decide the individualized goals, standards, and expectations for each student, which, while generally meeting the goals and expectations of the provincial ministry of education, may not necessarily follow the scope, sequencing, and curricular standards set by it. These are the students who are most likely not to have a provincial diploma. It is not that these students have not attained a level of competence equivalent to or better than those

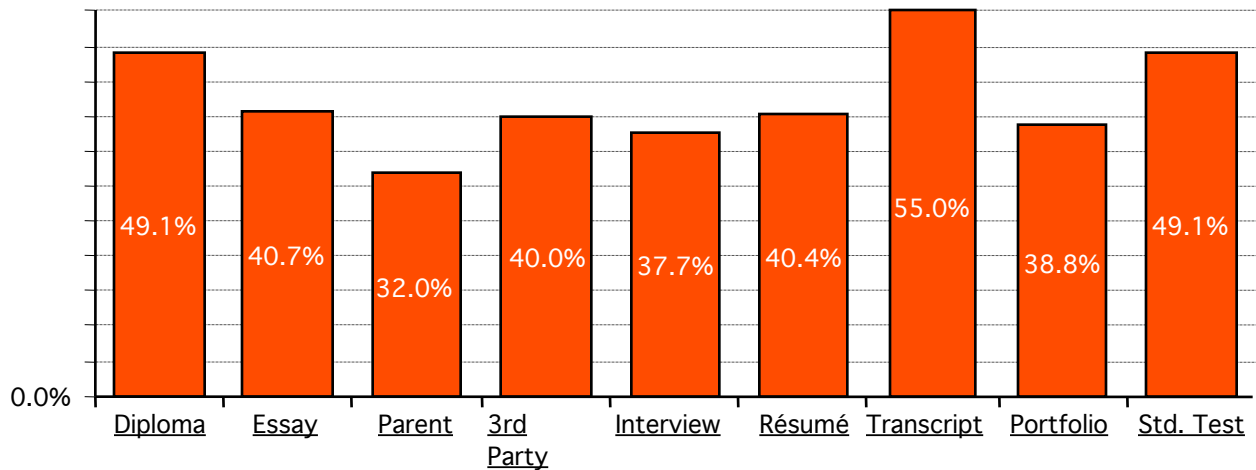
Fig. 7 Elements Used To Assess Admission To post-secondary Institutions



and a home-education program. While there are some who would argue that the difference is one of semantics, it may be instructive to distinguish the two for the sake of highlighting the differences of opinion and perceptions of the key players. A home school program can best be defined as bringing the school home. Parents are less involved and an educational institution such as a local school, a willing non-resident school, or an online school, is in control of the programming, standards and evaluation that generally adhere to provincial

of their publicly educated counterparts (see reference 7), it is simply that they completed their education using a different method and so have arrived at the door of post-secondary institutions using an alternative pathway and educational pedagogy. The question then becomes: is it fair to exclude potential student candidates because they lack a provincial diploma? Most institutions indicate that they are not in the business of denying students access, but that there is a concern regarding the need for ascertaining the level of compe-

Fig. 8 Percentage of Institutions Using Each Element To Assess Admission



tence needed to be successful in the chosen program.

The questionnaire provided a choice of nine options that could be used as a measure of whether or not a student should be accepted to the institution. As can be seen in **Fig. 7**, all appeared to be of equal value. However, each institution tended to favor one or more method over the others. The percent usage for each option (**Fig. 8**) shows an apparent conflicting message regarding diplomas and transcripts. Even though less than half of the institutions indicated that they would require a diploma, over half indicated that they would require a transcript which usually accompanies a diploma. In fairness, institutions may simply have been indicating a desire to see which courses had been completed by the student and what marks were achieved in them outside of a diploma.

When it comes to accompanying letters, there appears to be a perception of parental bias as more institutions prefer to have a letter from a third party than from parents. This may be indicative of a lack of familiarity with home-education. A parent who is with a child all day, every day, over many years should be more qualified to report on the character, strengths, accomplishments, and maturity of their children (students), than an individual who may see the student no more than a few

hours per year. One would therefore expect a higher degree of accountability from parents who know the child than from a third party who, while making claim to objectivity, is most likely to report using information gathered from the parents.

The portfolio is the instrument of choice for most non-diploma students, yet it was one of the least accepted items. The reason, as has been determined through numerous interviews, is that most institutions do not know what a portfolio is or what it includes. A portfolio is best defined as a collection of information that describes the academic achievements of the student as well as his/her personal accomplishments and character. Portfolios are discussed in more

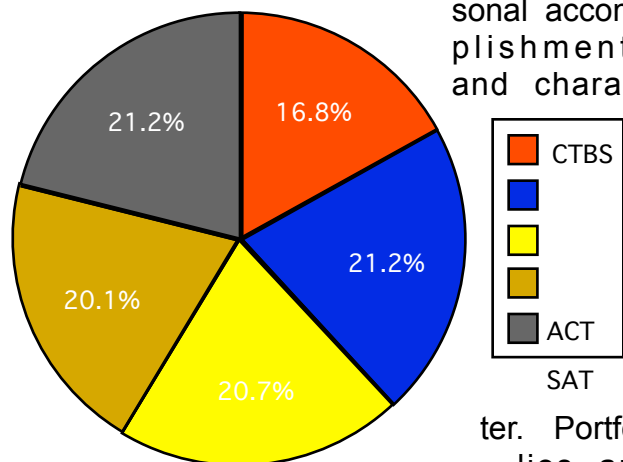


Fig. 9 Standardized Tests Used To Assess Admission

detail later in this report.

Standardized testing was chosen as often as a diploma for entry requirements. When given a choice of five instruments, (Fig. 9) none was clearly favored over the other. The obvious conclusion here is that any test that will give some indication of the level of proficiency is acceptable to most institutions, although most indicated a preference here as well. Once again, it can be assumed that not every instrument was familiar to all the participants.

CONCLUDING ANALYSIS

As can be assumed in any survey, there is a degree of error that must be taken into account. There is, for instance, as mentioned in the report, an assumption of objectivity which may not be entirely justified. It can be argued that the institutions that participated were more likely to either be presently accepting home-educated students or interested in doing so. The nearly 72% of institutions that indicated they had accepted home-educated students may therefore not be indicative of the rate of acceptance for institutions in general. It should also be noted that the highest rate of participation was from private institutions, including Bible colleges and university colleges which are more likely to accept home-educated students because they are smaller, more personal and are usually founded on a faith shared by the students and their families.

Another factor that must be considered is who within the institution answered the questionnaire. Since over 80% of institutions that responded had no policy for home-educated students, how accurate were the answers? Since our initial sampling was rather demanding in its time constraints, a second sampling was conducted using the original mailing list which inadvertently resulted in some institutions answering the same survey twice. On a few occasions, those that answered twice had different responses. Experience has shown that different students applying to the same institution have found the response to be quite

different. Until an institution has a written policy in place, either the registrar will demonstrate confusion in dealing with home-educated students or with experience, will develop a consistent pattern of his/her own which is subject to change.

Language is always a problem when conducting any survey. Great care was taken to be as concise as possible without sacrificing meaning in the questionnaire, yet confusion did occur. What, for instance, did the participant understand to be the meaning of a transcript, parental letter or portfolio compared to the understanding of those who conducted the survey?

Although some questionable information may have been collected, the sampling was large enough to give a reasonably accurate picture of the state of home-education at a post-secondary level, and that picture is indeed an encouraging one. We can imagine that, not that many years ago, most institutions would have had very little experience with home-educated students. If we can use the United States as an example, more and more institutions are accepting home-educated students. Some, such as Harvard and Stanford Universities, actively recruit them (4). Home-educated students have most often proven to be outstanding students and post-secondary institutions that accept them, often like to have these students, as their success is also a positive reflection of the institution that has trained them.(6)

PROPOSAL FOR A FUTURE SURVEY

The (2000/2001) Questionnaire On Entrance Requirements For Home-Educated Students was conducted to get a measurement of the general attitude of post-secondary institutions towards students who had chosen to complete their secondary training at home. The results were instructive and yet not comprehensive enough to be able to give individual students confident guidance regarding a specific institution. In the next phase of this study, individual institutional requirements will

be gathered and published so home-education students and families can readily ascertain which institutions are “home-education friendly” and what is required of students for admission. Phase two will be conducted on a province-by-province basis to accommodate differences in provincial education policies as well as to provide a more thorough procedure to include all post-secondary institutions in each province.

HOME-EDUCATION POLICY SUGGESTIONS

The (2000/2001) Questionnaire On Entrance Requirements For Home-Educated Students was designed as an instrument to measure the existence of policy in post-secondary institutions in regards to home-educated students. As mentioned in the report, over 80% of the participating institutions did not have a written home school policy, while 72% had accepted home-educated students. Whether these students were in possession of an accredited diploma was not determined, but one can assume that some, if not most students, were accepted without a diploma when one considers the nature of home-education. With so many institutions not having a written policy, one can also assume that the overwhelming majority that indicated interest in the results were actually interested in what other post-secondary institutions were doing with home-educated students. It is with this in mind that this segment is included in the report.

To begin, it is imperative that parents, students and institutions have a common objective: that of the educational success of the student. The most common philosophy held by post-secondary institutions is that they are not in the business of denying any student access; however, there is a need to ascertain the level of competence necessary for success in the program of choice. Neither parents nor students would likely disagree with this. Problems arise when the method of ascertaining this competence becomes unpredictable, confusing, difficult, excessive, or

even demeaning. Institutions that have a written home-education policy make it easier by the very fact that expectations are clearly spelled out. On the other hand, having a written policy does not necessarily equate to an institution being “home-education friendly”. Most institutions say that admission of home-educated students is determined on an individual basis, which is, perhaps, a polite way of saying that no written policy exists. Personal communication with admissions officers of institutions that had accepted home-educated students indicated that the most common method used to gain entrance was persistence on the part of the student. Persistence does indicate a sincere desire to get what one wants and so can indeed provide a reasonable assurance of success in the program. However, it is still a “hit and miss” method of gaining entrance into an institution.

Traditionally, for most of the past century, it was generally accepted that persons who wanted to attend a post-secondary institution had attended a public or private school that adhered to the provincially mandated, standardized curriculum and evaluation. The accredited diploma was used as a standard of measurement and the marks on the transcript were evaluated to ascertain that the proper prerequisites had been fulfilled and that the level of competency therein was equivalent to what was needed for admission into the desired program. This method, for the most part, remains the standard of measurement today. Although relatively successful, this process is not without its shortcomings. A diploma from one province does not necessarily mean the same as one from another province in terms of curricular content. Institutions, therefore, need to have an alternative method of evaluation for out-of-province applicants just as they would for non-diploma home-educated students. A second problem is that this method of evaluation does not consider the character and work ethic of the student, nor is it possible to ascertain whether or not the chosen field is appropriate to the strengths and interests of the applicant. Ad-

mitting a student into a program using this method has become more tenuous as the standards and work ethic of publicly-educated students are changing, perhaps even eroding.(8) The increasing adoption of home-education combined with the uncertainty of diplomas should challenge post-secondary institutions to reevaluate entrance requirements to ensure that adequate consideration is given both to students educated in public/private schools and to students educated at home.

The survey results and ongoing discussions with personnel from all manner of institutions over the past few years has provided much insight into what can be used to measure competency when a diploma is not available. Communications with admissions officers have shown that essentially two major skills must be demonstrated: communication and mathematics. Since most provincial tests are content-based rather than skills-based, a student can indeed score very high on a test yet not be very capable in the subject tested.(2) It is suggested, therefore, that skills-based testing such as the Canadian Test of Basic Skills (CTBS) or the Canadian Achievement Test (CAT) be done to ascertain proficiency of skills. Some institutions have asked for a handwritten essay to establish writing skills and some admit students simply on the strength of their English proficiency. SAT and ACT testing may be less indicative of subject competency and more of test writing skills.(2) However, some institutions have used this instrument in the past, perhaps because they were unaware of the availability of Canadian tests.

Some post-secondary institutions have wisely mandated a career investigation component to their entry requirements, in the hope of eliminating the placement of students in inappropriate programs. This is especially important for institutions that have defined specialized programming. A career investigation report has students indicate that they have good reason to believe that they are sure of their interest in the sought after pro-

gram by the fact that they have some kind of experience, directly or vicariously, in that discipline. This can be in the form of research, mentorship, volunteering, and/or interviewing people in the field. It is highly recommended that institutions incorporate this tool, as it is sure to reduce second and third year attrition.

Students who have completed their secondary education at home have most often done so without obtaining the provincial diploma. Non-provincial diplomas earned from different jurisdictions and curriculum suppliers or awarded by parents are essentially no different than out of province ones, in that they are meaningless unless accompanied by a transcript of programming and marks. Yet even this presents difficulties since the content of different programs is mostly unknown. An excellent solution to this problem, and generally also of the other problems already discussed, is found in student portfolios. A personal / career portfolio is essentially a résumé in a binder that includes collections and examples of achievements as well as an in-depth record or "diary" of personal experiences and accomplishments. Portfolios are personalized, offering a more accurate synopsis of the actual content of the programming taken as well as a measure of the student's skills, strengths, interests and work ethic, providing a good indication of the character of the student. A career investigation report should be included to indicate the appropriateness of the chosen field of post-secondary study. Some schools realized the value of portfolios, attempting to mandate them within their institutions. The reason for their lack of success in the schools is that a portfolio requires a great deal of dedication, time, and work. A home-educated student that does not have a diploma is more likely to understand the importance of a well-constructed portfolio than a student who is encouraged to apply for admission on the strength of their diploma. The only negative aspect to the portfolio is that it does take a little longer to review than simple marks within standardized programming and so is perhaps a bit more cumbersome, espe-

cially for large institutions. However, the time invested will be rewarded with the knowledge that reliable information has been used to make a decision regarding admission.

In summary, the following suggestions are intended to facilitate the formation of a home-education policy that addresses both the post-secondary institutional need for ascertaining prerequisites and proficiency as well as the home-educated students' need to be treated fairly when being reviewed for admission.

- Do not mandate a provincial diploma since this effectively discriminates against students who have not attended the public/separate/private system.
- Ascertain competency in mathematics and communication using a Canadian skills based standardized test such as the CTBS or CAT, or by reference to the student's portfolio.
- Demand a career investigation report that indicates that the student is sure of his/her career choice.
- Ask to see a personal / career portfolio to establish the academic and personal accomplishments, as well as the character of the student.
- Finally, do not negate parental input as parents are indeed the ones most qualified to make the best assessment of their childrens' (students') accomplishments and strengths.

Although this does not exhaust the possibilities of methods used by institutions when establishing entrance requirements, it does simplify the process for both parties. It is with the objective of making the transition from a home-education to a post-secondary education as easy as possible for both students and institutions that this segment of the report was included.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge the great contribution of Elizabeth Davis of the **Home School Legal Defense Association of Canada**. Without her, the questionnaires would not have gone out. Dallas Miller, also of the **Home School Legal Defense Association of Canada**, was instrumental in encouraging me to stretch beyond the provincial arena to a national one for the preliminary stage of the survey. Thanks to Dr. Michael Wagner and to Dr. Lloyd Dosdall for their support and valuable suggestions. Thanks to Adèle Hoflin for proof reading and for being particular of proper grammar. Most appreciatively, I would like to thank the many registrars, admission officers, presidents, and others who so graciously answered the questionnaire, offered advice and generously shared the information included in this report. I look forward to continued collaboration. Finally, I must acknowledge the tireless contribution of my wife Faye, who not only encouraged me, but also painstakingly entered all the data that was received.

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