

Statistics Canada

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Participation, Graduation and Dropout rates

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Over time

The overall participation rate in postsecondary education among those aged 18 to 20 years in December 1999 increased steadily from 54% in December 1999 to 79% in December 2005. Looking more specifically at participation rates and status by type of institution attended, attendance at university almost doubled over the six years period from 21% in 1999 to 40% in 2005, while attendance at college / CEGEP went up from 26% in 1999 to 42% in 2005 among the YITS respondents. Growth in attendance at postsecondary institutions slowed between 2003 and 2005 as respondents grew out of the prime postsecondary education age range.



Chart 1

Postsecondary participation rates of young adults in December 1999, 2001, 2003 and 2005 by type of institution attended

As shown in Chart 1 as students aged, the proportion of those in postsecondary education who attended more than one type of institution increased. In December 1999, the sum of the attendance at the three types of institutions was 58% compared to the participation rate in postsecondary education of 54%. That meant that some of the students attended more than one type of institution. In December 1999, 7% of the students had done so. By December 2005, that percentage had gone up to 37%.

This is a reflection of the non-linear pathways taken by youth. By December 2005, almost two thirds of postsecondary students had participated in multiple programs. Some of the program switches occurred within the same type of institution, from college to university and also from university to college. It is important to keep in mind however, that in the case of Quebec, graduation from a CEGEP program is generally required to access a university program, meaning that most university students attended at least two types of institutions and tried at least two programs. Similarly, in other provinces, in the case of transfer programs, some of the credits are taken at college and some of the credits are taken at university.

Provincial analysis

As shown in Table 1, in most provinces, the participation rate in university programs was higher than the participation rate in either college / CEGEP or programs in other types of institutions. Newfoundland and Labrador and Nova Scotia had the highest university participation rates while Alberta had the lowest. Not surprisingly, Quebec had the highest participation rate in college / CEGEP programs and the highest proportion of students attending two types of institutions. This is in line with the structure of the Quebec education system as described earlier. Also, along with Alberta and British Columbia, Quebec had one of the lowest university participation rate. Ontario had the second highest participation rate in college, equal to the participation rate in university.



Table 1

Postsecondary participation rates of young adults aged 24 to 26 by December 2005, by province and type of institution attended

Graduation rates varied widely by province and by institution type (Table 2). Prince Edward Island had the highest graduation rate for both university and college while Alberta had the highest dropout rate for both university and college. Since programs in college / CEGEP and other postsecondary institutions are generally more technical and labour market oriented or since they lead to university, it is not very common to graduate from a college / CEGEP or another type of non-university institution and to pursue another program in the same type of institution. In university however, it is fairly common to graduate from a first degree and to pursue another university program, either at the bachelor level or at the graduate level. This was the case for almost a fifth of the university students in Nova Scotia, Quebec and Saskatchewan.

 **Table 2**
Postsecondary status of young adults aged 24 to 26 by December 2005, by province and type of institution attended

Quebec had the lowest university dropout rate in all the provinces and one of the highest graduation rates from college / CEGEP. Since graduating from CEGEP is generally required to access a university program in Quebec, it is quite possible that opting out occurs at the beginning of the process, most often following CEGEP. In other provinces, the mismatch process could be on-going, with students dropping out of university and going to college and vice versa.

Demographics

Participation rates in university programs were lower for Canadian born students than for the non Canadian born (Table 3). In contrast there were no significant differences in graduation and dropping out rates. At college, however, the non Canadian born group had a significant higher rate of dropping out than the Canadian born group.

 **Table 3**
Postsecondary participation rates of young adults aged 24 to 26 by December 2005, by demographic characteristics and type of institution attended

The postsecondary education participation rate of the Aboriginal population¹ was significantly lower than for the non-Aboriginals. The participation rate for university was less than half the rate of the non-Aboriginal group (17% for Aboriginals versus 41% for non-Aboriginals). Conversely, differences between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal population participation rates were non significant for college and for other types of institution (Table 3).

The overall participation rate in postsecondary education was 11 percentage points higher for women than men. Women seemed to have better results in both university and college as graduation rates were higher and dropout rates were lower compared to men. In contrast men had more success in other types of institutions for which they had lower dropout rates.

 **Table 4**
Postsecondary status of young adults aged 24 to 26 by December 2005, by demographic characteristics and type of institution attended

There were also differences in participation rates between youth in rural and urban communities, with all postsecondary participation rates being lower for youth from rural communities. The participation rates of urban students were the same for university and college. However for the rural group, the participation rate in college was 11 percentage points higher than the participation rate in university. The choice of the institution can be related to cost, with colleges selected by rural young adults because they are likely to be closer (Frenette 2007) (Table 4). There were no significant differences between the graduation rates and dropout rates of both groups.

Family background

Previous studies have pointed out that family characteristics can have an impact on postsecondary education participation rates. Differences noted in participation rates for different family characteristics were far more important for university than for college / CEGEP or for other postsecondary institutions. Students who lived with both parents when they were in high school had higher participation rates in university than students living in a single parent family or in another type of family structure (Table 5). The participation rates for college / CEGEP and other types of postsecondary institution were comparable for students living with both parents or coming from a single parent family structure. This might be associated with the cost of going to university compared to going to college / CEGEP. Single parents are more likely to be in the lower income quartile. According to Frenette (2007), family income may pose different barriers for university attendance. The additional cost of studying away from home may reduce enrolment among students from lower-income families who must move away to attend. college / CEGEP may be a more affordable option (Table 5).

Previous studies have also found that parental education has an impact on participation in postsecondary education has also been mentioned in previous studies. The participation rate in university programs of students with parents who had a postsecondary diploma was almost three times as high as the rate of students with parents who had less than high school education. Parents' attitude towards the importance of pursuing education after high school was also a factor for participation in both university and college / CEGEP. The participation rate in university was almost four times as high when the parents considered higher education important. The same ratio for college / CEGEP was almost two to one.

 **Table 5**
Postsecondary participation rates of young adults aged 24 to 26 by December 2005, by family characteristics and type of institution attended

Differences in graduation rates and dropout rates were also observable in relation to some of these family characteristics, especially family structure (Table 6). Students who lived with a single parent or in another family structure when they were in high school had lower graduation rates from both university and college / CEGEP than students who lived with both parents. The university dropout rate was higher for students who lived in another family structure. The dropout rates were higher at college / CEGEP for students who lived with a single parent.

 **Table 6**
Postsecondary status of young adults aged 24 to 26 by December 2005, by family characteristics and type of institution attended

High school experiences

Pursuing postsecondary education is mostly preceded by high school graduation. High school is a place where many learning habits are potentially developed. Therefore, positive experiences, results and behaviors while in secondary education can affect outcomes at the postsecondary level (Lambert, 2004).

The participation rates in postsecondary education were highly related with behaviour and performance in high school (Table 7). The time spent studying while in high school, the grade average and the presence of a dropout spell in high school were all reflected in participation rates in postsecondary education, and especially in university. The participation rate in university was twice as high for students who spent more than three hours a week studying while in high school. It was almost eight times higher for students who never dropped out of high school and it increased as the grade averages rose, which was not surprising given the entrance requirements for university.

 **Table 7**
Postsecondary participation rates of young adults aged 24 to 26 by December 2005, by high school characteristics and type of institution attended

Self-reported high school marks were reflected in outcomes in all types of postsecondary education. In the A and above grade category (80% to 100%), a vast majority of students graduated from university, college and other institutions (Table 8). As grades declined, so did the graduation rates, for example in universities, decreasing from 84% in the highest grade range to less than a third of those in the 60% to 69% grade category. The reverse was observed in terms of dropping out of postsecondary education. For example, well over one third of those in the 60% to 69% grade range in high school dropped out of college.

 **Table 8**
Postsecondary status of young adults aged 24 to 26 by December 2005, by self-reported high school grades and type of institution attended

Only in universities did marks in high school show any pattern in terms of still continuing education without graduation (continuers). Less than a tenth of those in the highest grade range were still continuing in universities, while this proportion increased to over a third for those in the 60% to 69% grade category. Also, the proportion of students with higher marks in high school (90% to 100%) who were graduates continuers (at the university level, the majority of these were probably master and doctoral students) was three times as high as the proportion of students with average marks (70% to 79%).

Positive experience in high school can be important for future levels of engagement in postsecondary education. Positive high school engagement was important in terms of positive outcomes at the postsecondary level. In all types of postsecondary education, those reporting higher level of high school engagement were more likely to have graduated by age 24 to 26 (Table 9). On the other hand, and again true for all types of postsecondary education, those reporting lower levels of high school engagement were much more likely to have dropped out before completion.

Learning habits are developed early and often persist with progressive levels of education. Those reporting higher learning intensities in terms of time spent on homework had better postsecondary education outcomes than those with shorter studying time. Almost three-quarters of those who spent more than three hours per week on homework while in high school had graduated from university by age 24 to 26. This compared to 56% of those with shorter homework times. Similar patterns were observed for college (Table 9).

 **Table 9**
Postsecondary status of young adults aged 24 to 26 by December 2005, by some high school characteristics and type of institution attended

As positive early learning patterns in terms of homework time were associated with positive outcomes at the postsecondary education level, the opposite was also true in terms of dropping out. At both the university and college levels, less intensive

learning habits in high school were associated with increased chances of dropping out of postsecondary education. However, there was no difference in dropout rates along the learning intensity scale for students in other types of institution.

A dropout episode in high school is strongly associated with outcomes in postsecondary education. Graduation rates were much higher for students who never dropped out of high school compared to those who had a dropout episode (twice as high for college / CEGEP for example). Those who ever dropped out of high school seemed to be struggling more than their counterparts as a higher proportion of them were still trying to finish a first diploma or degree by age 24 to 26.

Student loans

The uptake of student loans to pursue postsecondary education is an investment for one's future. Student loans in this report could come from any source (government, family, personal loans), had to be used to finance education and had to be repaid. There were no significant differences in terms of graduation rates between those with and without student loans (Table 10). This was true for all types of postsecondary education. As in the case of graduation rates, there were no significant differences between those with and without student loans in terms of dropping out, again true for all types of postsecondary education.

 **Table 10**
Postsecondary status of young adults aged 24 to 26 by December 2005, by presence of student loans and type of institution attended

Educational outcomes of postsecondary education dropouts

The dropout rates calculated for this report are independent of each other and do not capture prior graduation from, or subsequent returns to other types of postsecondary institution. They simply capture the status, at the end of the fourth cycle (December 2005), in one type of postsecondary institution. A student can therefore hold multiple statuses if he attended more than one type of postsecondary institution².

Table 11 presents the overall postsecondary status of dropouts from university, college and other type of institution. It shows the global educational outcome of dropouts from the three types of institutions. For example: a university dropout who obtained a degree from either college / CEGEP or another type of institution will have an overall graduate status; a college dropout who was studying towards a degree either at university or in another type of institution will have an overall continuer status.

University dropouts were much less likely to have found themselves in the overall dropout category (43%), meaning that a majority of them attended another form of postsecondary education and have either graduated or were still attending it during the last cycle of the survey. Two thirds of college and other institution dropouts were still dropouts at the end of cycle 4, meaning that they did not try another program at a different type of postsecondary education institution, or if they did, they dropped out again.

 **Table 11**
Overall postsecondary status of dropouts aged 24 to 26 by December 2005 by type of institution they dropped out of

Not only were university dropouts more likely to have tried other postsecondary education, they were also more likely to have graduated from a postsecondary institution, with double the graduation rates of other dropouts.

This lower overall dropout rate for university students might be a function of the number of opportunities available to them. University dropouts may have obtained diplomas from college or other institution prior to attempting university (as in the case of CEGEP in Quebec) or after. In all cases they may have had more options compared to college and other type of institution dropouts. This naturally leads to another interesting research question not considered in this report, which is the sequence of dropping out and the direction of the switch between postsecondary education types.

Note :

1. The sample design of the YITS 18-20 cohort was determined by the sample design of the Labour Force Survey (LFS). Specifically excluded from the survey's coverage are residents of the Yukon, Nunavut and Northwest Territories, persons living on Indian Reserves, full-time members of the Canadian Armed Forces and inmates of institutions. The YITS sample is therefore **NOT** representative of the Aboriginal population as a whole, but is only representative of the off-reserve aboriginal population.
2. If a student graduated from a CEGEP or college and went to university and dropped out, he/she would have a graduate status for college, a dropout status for university and an overall postsecondary graduate status.

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