

# Parents hire consultants for university admissions

BY WADE HEMSWORTH

The annual avalanche of applications that buries Ontario university administrators every January has rolled in, deeper than any year since the double cohort passed through.

The number of students hoping to start university in September has jumped nearly 5 per cent across Ontario, and demand is expected to continue climbing.

"We kept expecting it to be the last year and for a levelling-off to happen, but it just isn't happening," said Paul Genest, president of the Council of Ontario Universities.

Genest said economic change is driving a greater proportion of Ontarians to university.

"We're shifting to a knowledge-based economy, and that's why I think that students and their parents are realizing that a university education is their best bet for the future," he said.

The competition for spaces and the challenge of making the right choices has reached a point where families are hiring private consultants.

Those consultants are recommending students start planning their strategies for getting into university or college by Grade 11 at the latest.

McMaster University received 30,800 applications by Monday's extended deadline, up 2.5 per cent over last year — including spikes in nursing (13 per cent), science (10 per cent) and engineering (9 per cent), said registrar Louis Ariano.

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# 'University is not a factory'

## Administrators fear high numbers affecting quality of education

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McMaster wants to roll back first-year admissions to 4,965 from 5,100 for the coming school year. That could pose a tricky challenge as the university also struggles to meet the province's priority of broadening access to university.

McMaster set the target because current resources are strained to the point that the quality of education is at risk.

First-year enrolment there has increased by 22 per cent since 2004, the year after the double cohort.

"The university is not a factory. It's supposed to be an intensive learning experience," Genest said. "You can't just warehouse students, and that's why individual universities are taking that point of view."

Neighbours living near McMaster are also pushing back against increased numbers of students living in off-campus rental homes.

Across the province, 83,000 students are now looking for first-year placements in Ontario's universities, up 4.8 per cent over last year, and 39 per cent from 2001.

Finding a way to meet the growing demand means Ontario's 19 universities will need to work intensely with the province over the coming months, Genest said.

The process of matching students to



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**About 83,000 students will be vying for first-year placements in Ontario's universities this year, up 39 per cent from 2001.**

the best universities and colleges for their needs can be overwhelming, say Joseph Knap and Jacqueline Barclay, who opened the area's first education consultancy in Burlington in September.

Though the choice can affect their entire education and even their future careers, they say too many students leave it until the last minute.

"That's not the way you should be looking at it," said Barclay, a former high-school placement officer.

Knap, a former high-school teacher, said guidance counsellors simply don't have time to do thorough one-on-one planning with their students.

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## Post-secondary planning saves time, money: experts

**BY WADE HEMSWORTH**

The demand for expert help navigating the complicated passage from high school to university or college has created a new career for two educators.

Jacqueline Barclay and Joseph Knap opened their storefront educational consultancy, Barclay & Knap, in Burlington in September.

There, they help students and parents target schools and programs best suited to their skills and goals.

The most common mistake that university and college applicants make, they say, is not starting soon enough.

Most students don't start planning for college and university until Grade 12, they say, which is at least a year too late.

By then, most school guidance counsellors simply don't have enough time to give all students all the help they need.

"You're planning the next four years of your life, and by extension, your career," Knap said.

He and Barclay do interest-based testing to focus students' goals, counsel them on what high-school courses to take, guide them through student loans, grants and scholarships and fill out their post-secondary applications with them.

Spending a few hundred dollars on their services can save students and parents from making mistakes that could cost thousands, they say.

"People are hesitant to plan a one-day wedding without bringing in an expert," Knap said.

"In comparison to that one-day event, if you're planning four years of education, why would you undertake that yourself without accessing an expert?"

Many students simply don't know the full range of options open to them in terms of universities and colleges, and often tend to apply to the most popular schools because they know them best.

Instead, the consultants recommend a targeted, rational approach that gives students and their parents the greatest control over the outcome with the least amount of stress.

"You should start early," Barclay said.

"It's a very stressful process. When you think that these students are researching the universities, trying to decide what they want to study next year, working on their Grade 12 subjects and at a part-time job, it's a stressful situation."

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