



Admissions Models:

*A Review of Admissions Models
at BC Public Post-Secondary Institutions*

*Prepared for BCCAT by Gurpreet Sahmbi and Ruth Childs
July 2026*

BCCAT

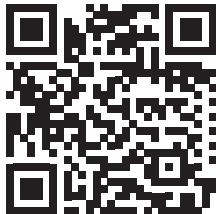
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The admissions models at British Columbia's 25 public post-secondary institutions were investigated through (1) a review of the information available on Education-PlannerBC and institutional websites for applicants to undergraduate programs (mainly diploma and bachelor's degree) and (2) interviews with 20 admissions professionals from 14 of the institutions. Specifically, we considered *what* materials applicants submit, *how* those materials are evaluated, and *who* (e.g., admissions professionals in the Registrar's Office or Enrolment Services, faculty in specific programs) is involved in the evaluation.

Examples were drawn from BC institutions to illustrate what materials applicants are required to submit and how those materials are evaluated. Although most materials are evaluated for evidence of an applicant's *capacity to perform* in a post-secondary program, some provide evidence of an applicant's *capacity to benefit* from a post-secondary education and/or their *potential to contribute* to the post-secondary institution and to society.



A comprehensive model was developed to illustrate the relationship between eligibility-based models, in which the focus is on evaluating the materials submitted by applicants against the requirements for entry to a program, and selection-based models, which are needed when there are not enough spaces for all eligible applicants.

A comprehensive model was developed to illustrate the relationship between *eligibility-based* models, in which the focus is on evaluating the materials submitted by applicants against the requirements for entry to a program, and *selection-based* models, which are needed when there are not enough spaces for all eligible applicants. Both eligibility-based and selection-based admissions models usually begin by checking an applicant's eligibility; this means that, operationally, eligibility-based models involve a subset of the processes and decisions in selection-based admissions models. Within selection-based models, it is important to distinguish two types: (1) selection based on when materials were received (either when applicants apply or when they meet all eligibility requirements) and (2) selection based on further evaluation of materials.

While the admissions models that select applicants based on when materials were received are easy to administer and to explain, some of the interviewed admissions professionals worried that these models advantaged applicants with access to fast and reliable internet, access to computers, help from family members, and support from educators. Selection based on the further evaluation of materials typically involves ranking applicants by grade point average (GPA), by ratings of supplemental materials, or by a weighted composite of GPA and ratings. Some of these materials may already have been evaluated in determining eligibility, but may be used in different ways for selection.

Admissions materials are typically evaluated by admissions professionals in Registrar's Offices or Enrolment Services, and/or by faculty members or experts associated with a program. Most commonly, academic records are evaluated

by the Registrar's Office or Enrolment Services. This is usually done by admissions officers (or equivalent). The Registrar and Associate Registrar are often involved with policy, strategic decision-making, and deciding on exceptional cases, as well as overseeing the work of the staff members who directly review application materials and process admissions decisions. For programs that use an eligibility-based model or selection based on when materials were received, admissions professionals in the Registrar's Office or Enrolment Services may evaluate materials and send offers of admission without ongoing involvement by program faculty members.

Different institutions use the term "holistic admissions" in different ways. Typically, it refers to admissions models in which the *what* includes more than test scores or academic transcripts from previous education, the *how* is selection-based, and the *who* may involve either admissions professionals, program faculty, or both.

For programs that use selection based on the further evaluation of materials, after an initial review from the Registrar's Office or Enrolment Services (usually to check eligibility based on an applicant's academic transcript), applications are sent to programs for further evaluation because this type of evaluation typically calls for discipline- or program-level expertise. There does not appear to be a single way of completing these evaluations, and each institution and program develops evaluation tools (e.g., rubrics, checklists) at their own discretion.

Different institutions use the term "holistic admissions" in different ways. Typically, it refers to admission models in which the *what* includes more than test scores or academic transcripts from previous education, the *how* is selection-based, and the *who* may involve either admissions professionals, program faculty, or both.

When asked if and how their institutions use holistic admissions models, the admissions professionals offered a range of perspectives. Some suggested that their admissions models were "comprehensive" or "multi-dimensional" or that they considered "expanded" or "diverse" qualifications or might offer "discretionary admission" if eligibility requirements were not fully met. Most frequently, some programs' uses of supplemental materials that require expert judgment (e.g., auditions, portfolios) were described as closest to a holistic approach to admissions.

All of the participating colleges, institutes, and universities reported having conversations about improving or ensuring access for groups that have been underrepresented in post-secondary education, although the specific groups varied. In particular, every participating institution is considering or currently implementing specific policies, programs, and/or pathways for Indigenous students.

The choice of admission model(s) is often influenced not only by institutional or programmatic values but also by resources and other constraints. The admissions professionals we spoke with emphasized that changes in policy, provincial funding, federal caps on accepted study permits (i.e., international student visas), and limited resources (e.g., classroom/laboratory space; capacity of admissions staff) all affected enrolment targets and, ultimately, admissions models.

Finally, the changing context appeared to be increasing pressure on admissions professionals to send out admissions offers more quickly or to make alternate offers in order to compete for eligible applicants in a shrinking pool but did not appear to be causing the admissions professionals to rethink their admissions models.

INTRODUCTION

This Review

In April of 2025, the British Columbia Council on Admissions & Transfer (BCCAT) requested a review of admissions models at BC public post-secondary institutions. The review was conducted between June of 2025 and March of 2026, with the following objectives:

- To review literature on available admissions models and their efficacy
- To review admissions models at BC public institutions, and if applicable, to assess what models are more common in certain programs/program areas
- To explore the perspectives of post-secondary admissions professionals on the usefulness and efficiency of admissions models
- To identify areas for future research and, if appropriate, the development of promising practices

This report presents the results of the review.

BC Public Post-Secondary Institutions

British Columbia has 25 public post-secondary institutions (11 colleges, three institutes, and 11 universities), which are listed in **Table 1**.¹ These include colleges that work closely with their local communities, colleges and institutes that provide specialist training, and universities with strong national² and international reputations.

All of the institutions were included in the environmental scan, and 14 of the 25 were included in the interviews of admissions professionals³. Those institutions invited for interviews were chosen to be representative of institutional type, region, and size.

¹ For a history of BC's post-secondary institutions, see Shanahan et al. (2014).

² Of BC's 11 universities, four were ranked by Maclean's Magazine in 2025: UNBC was second in Canada in the Undergraduate category, SFU and University of Victoria were first and second in the Comprehensive category, and UBC was third in the Medical Doctoral category.

³ A 15th institution was invited to participate in interviews, but did not respond.

Table 1. BC Public Post-Secondary Institutions

Institution	Type ^a	Region ^b	2014/15 Enrolment (in 1000s) ^c	2023/24 Enrolments (in 100s)	Inter- viewed
British Columbia Institute of Technology	Institute	Greater Vancouver	44.3	44.9	Yes
Camosun College	College	Vancouver Island	18.5	15.5	No
Capilano University	University	Greater Vancouver	12.2	10.9	Yes
Coast Mountain College	College	Cariboo-North	5.1	2.6	No
College of New Caledonia	College	Cariboo-North	8.6	7.8	Yes
College of the Rockies	College	Thompson-Okanagan-Kootenays	10.2	10.1	No
Douglas College	College	Greater Vancouver	23.9	25.8	No
Emily Carr University of Art and Design	University	Greater Vancouver	3.8	3.9	Yes
Justice Institute of British Columbia	Institute	Greater Vancouver	26.4	46.3	No
Kwantlen Polytechnic University	University	Greater Vancouver	19.5	21.0	Yes
Langara College	College	Greater Vancouver	20.4	19.2	Yes
Nicola Valley Institute of Technology	Institute	Thompson-Okanagan-Kootenays	1.5	1.3	Yes
North Island College	College	Vancouver Island	8.5	6.9	No
Northern Lights College	College	Cariboo-North	7.5	3.4	No
Okanagan College	College	Thompson-Okanagan-Kootenays	19.2	19.8	Yes
Royal Roads University	University	Vancouver Island	4.0	3.9	No
Selkirk College	College	Thompson-Okanagan-Kootenays	12.1	8.6	No
Simon Fraser University	University	Greater Vancouver	33.5	33.2	Yes
Thompson Rivers University	University	Thompson-Okanagan-Kootenays	29.7	35.7	Yes
University of British Columbia	University	Greater Vancouver & Thompson-Okanagan-Kootenays	62.2	75.4	Yes
University of Northern British Columbia	University	Cariboo-North	3.8	3.8	Yes
University of the Fraser Valley	University	Greater Vancouver	14.4	16.2	Yes
University of Victoria	University	Vancouver Island	23.8	23.7	Yes
Vancouver Community College	College	Greater Vancouver	16.7	15.4	No
Vancouver Island University	University	Vancouver Island	16.1	13.3	No

^a See <https://www.educationplannerbc.ca/go/plan/about-post-secondary> for definitions of the institution types

^b Regions are from <https://www.bctransferguide.ca/bc-transfer-system/institutions>

^c Enrolment numbers include full-time and part-time students and are from Appendix C of Heslop, J. (2025). *Student Transitions Project: Transitions and enrolment trends*. https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/post-secondary-education/data-research/stp/stp_research_results.pdf

ADMISSIONS MODELS

Admissions is a multi-step process by which post-secondary institutions set requirements for entry, request and receive materials from individuals who are applying for entry, evaluate those materials against the requirements, and, if there are not enough spaces for everyone who meets the requirements for entry, select from among those who are eligible. Within an institution, entry requirements—and how and by whom admission decisions are made—are likely to differ by program of study.

In this review, we will consider not only what materials applicants submit and how those materials are evaluated, but also who (e.g., admissions professionals in the Registrar's Office or Enrolment Services, faculty in specific programs) is involved in the evaluation.

Most discussions of admissions models have focused on what materials are requested from applicants, how the applicants' materials are evaluated to determine eligibility for entry and, if there are not enough spaces available to admit all those who are eligible, how applicants are ranked based on further evaluation of the applicants' materials or on when the materials were received. In this review, we will consider not only *what* materials applicants submit and *how* those materials are evaluated, but also *who* (e.g., admissions professionals in the Registrar's Office or Enrolment Services, faculty in specific programs) is involved in the evaluation.

Previous Research on Admissions Models

Much of the previous research on admissions models (e.g., Bastedo & Bowman, 2017; Boliver & Powell, 2023; Brock, 2024; Mabel et al., 2022; Rosinger et al., 2021; Sackett et al., 2021; Zwick, 2018) has focused on post-secondary education in the United States or the United Kingdom and the effects of admissions models on access for groups that have been underrepresented in post-secondary institutions. In the United States, in particular, legal decisions have repeatedly changed the materials, information, and approaches that post-secondary admissions professionals can use, leading to decades of research on admissions models under different sets of constraints (for discussion of the effects of the most recent changes, see, e.g., Gooch et al., 2024; Schmidt, 2024). Drawing on this literature to study admissions models in Canada requires careful consideration of the similarities and differences between the social and legal contexts, data collection practices, and histories and organization of post-secondary institutions in different countries.

In addition to having a different social and legal context than institutions in other countries, Canadian institutions are also unusual in not including test scores in admissions models for undergraduate programs (test scores are used by professional programs, such as medicine and law, at some institutions, however). In Helms' (2008) review of admissions policies in 27 countries, only Canada and Norway did not use test scores; when Freeman (2015) revisited Helms' categories a few years later, Canada was alone in not using test scores for undergraduate admissions. Without such tests, post-secondary institutions in Canada have an unusual amount of autonomy in how they make admissions decisions. This is true even in the Canadian provinces with centralized services that receive materials from applicants and forward those materials to post-secondary institutions (e.g., British Columbia's EducationPlannerBC, the Ontario College Application Service, and the Ontario Universities' Application Centre).

Terminology

One of the challenges in studying admissions models is the variation in terminology. Some terms are used differently by different institutions (e.g., Bastedo et al., 2018, documented variations in the use of the term “holistic admissions”). Just as confusingly, different institutions may have different terms for the same admission models (e.g., Gustafson, 2021, in an environmental scan for Saskatchewan Polytechnic, documented the different labels other institutions were using for admissions models based on the order in which materials were received from applicants). Below, we discuss the terminology we will use in this report to refer to what materials applicants submit, how applicants’ materials are evaluated, and who evaluates these materials in different admissions models.

What Materials Applicants Submit

Different institutions, and sometimes programs within institutions, may require different materials from applicants. These materials can include evidence of academic, professional, or technical performance (i.e., evidence that is based on something created or done by the applicant) or evidence provided by others about an applicant (i.e., evidence that speaks to an applicant’s experience, performance, and/or personal attributes from another person’s perspective, usually in the form of a reference letter). Applicants may also be asked to write about their reasons for applying to a program, such as in a statement of interest.

Why post-secondary institutions might request particular materials was summarized by Perfetto et al. (1999) based on the practices of universities across the United States. While most materials, such as transcripts or portfolios, are considered as evidence of an applicant’s *capacity to perform*, some materials might be considered as evidence of an applicant’s *capacity to benefit* from a post-secondary education or their *potential to contribute* to the post-secondary institution and to society. As **Table 2** shows, reference letters or statements of interest may be used as evidence of either *capacity to benefit* or *potential to contribute*, depending on the specific prompts provided to the letter writer or the applicant.

These dimensions provide a framework to understand the purpose of different admissions materials for institutions and programs and what these materials communicate to individuals making admissions decisions.

Table 2. Materials Applicants Submit and Perfetto et al.’s (1999) Dimensions

Dimension	Materials
<i>Capacity to perform in post-secondary education</i>	Academic transcripts (showing courses taken, grades, and credentials) Test scores Technical or artistic portfolios Auditions
<i>Capacity to benefit from a post-secondary education</i>	Statements of interest Reference letters
<i>Potential to contribute to the post-secondary institution and to society</i>	Statements of interest Reference letters

How Applicants' Materials are Evaluated

We will follow Michel and Pollard (2020) in distinguishing between *eligibility-based* (also called screening) models and *selection-based* admissions models:

- “*Eligibility-based admissions models* are ones in which prospective students are evaluated with respect to some published standard to determine eligibility” (p. 6)
- “*Selection-based admissions models* are those in which prospective students are evaluated with respect to the pool of applicants for entry into the higher education institution and selected from that pool” (p. 6)

Eligibility-based models typically use materials, such as test scores or academic transcripts from previous education (e.g., secondary school, post-secondary institutions) that indicate *capacity to perform*. Selection-based models use these materials, but also sometimes incorporate materials that indicate *capacity to benefit* and/or *potential to contribute*. This allows for less of a focus on what an applicant has already accomplished and more on how much applicants might accomplish in the future if they had access to a post-secondary education, or taking into consideration where contributions are most needed. Perfetto et al. (1999) and Rigol (2003) observed that a single academic program may consider different materials related to different dimensions for different applicants, based on an institution's goals and priorities.

Who Evaluates Applicants' Materials

Depending on the types of materials and the clarity of the evaluation criteria, applicants' materials may be evaluated by admissions professionals, usually located in the institution's Registrar's Office or Enrolment Services, or by faculty who teach in the specific program. Typically, materials such as academic transcripts will be evaluated by admissions professionals, while technical or artistic portfolios, statements of interest, and reference letters may be evaluated by program faculty.

Holistic Admissions

As mentioned above, the term “holistic admissions” has been used in different ways by different institutions. It typically refers to admission models in which the *what* includes more than test scores or academic transcripts from previous education, the *how* is selection-based, and the *who* may involve either admissions professionals, program faculty or both. Based on surveys and focus groups with staff specializing in admissions at selective post-secondary institutions in the US, Bastedo et al. (2018) identified three types of holistic admissions:

- *whole file* considers all parts of an application
- *whole person* considers “the applicant as a unique being in light of individual characteristics and achievements”
- *whole context* considers “the whole person within the context of their family and school environments [including] educational opportunities” (p. 789)

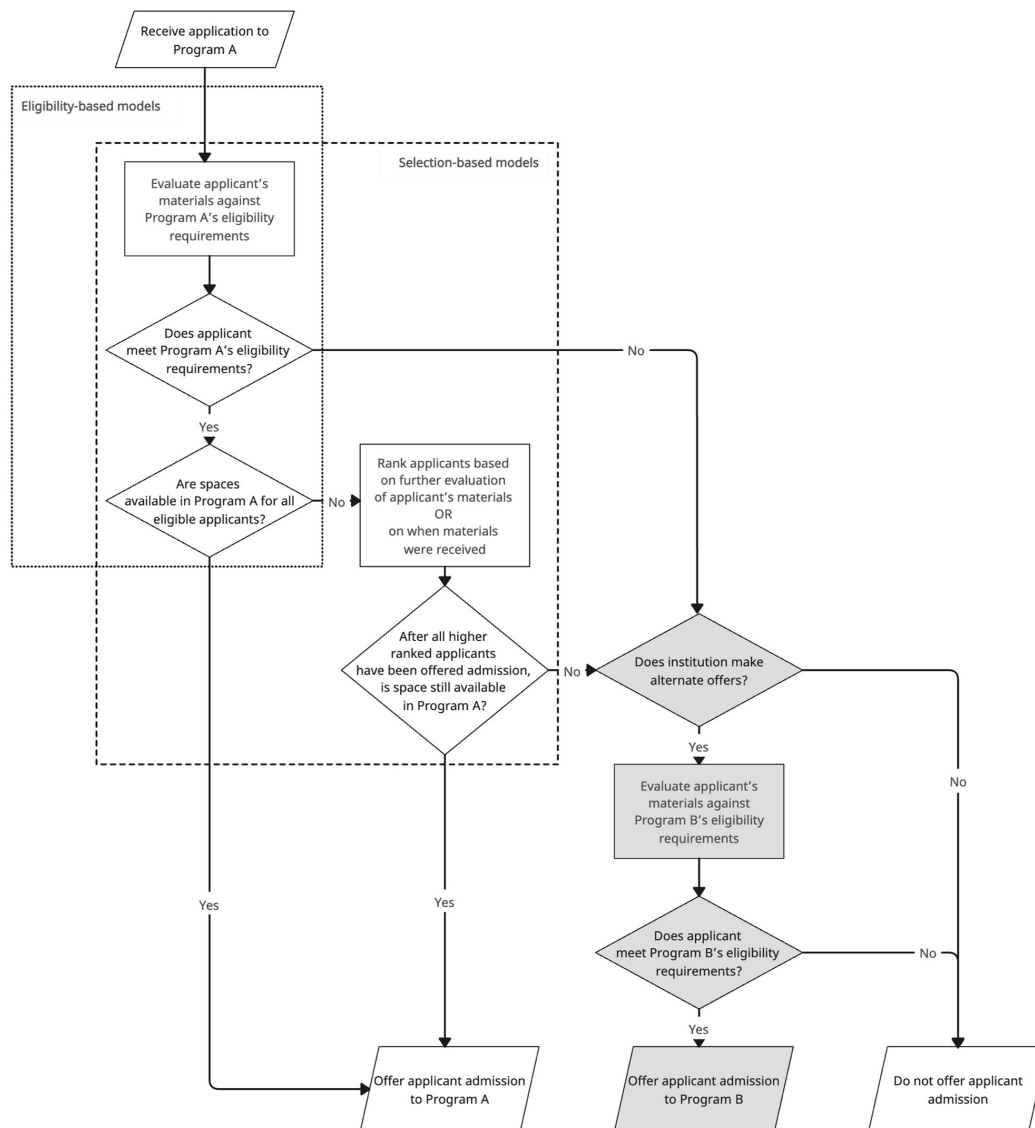
Whole context approaches, especially, may include materials that suggest an applicant's *capacity to benefit* and/or *potential to contribute*, in addition to *capacity to perform*.

A Comprehensive Model

Both eligibility-based and selection-based admissions models usually begin by checking an applicant's eligibility; this means that, operationally, eligibility-based models involve a subset of the processes and decisions in selection-based admissions models. This can be seen in **Figure 1**, an overview of how applications are considered. This comprehensive model, which we developed specifically for this project, served as the basis for the environmental scan and guided the questions asked in the interviews with admissions professionals (interview instrument included in Appendix).

Importantly, the model acknowledges that some institutions may consider applicants not only for admission to the program or programs to which they applied, but also for admission to other programs for which they are eligible and may not have applied to. This is indicated by the shaded cells in the flowchart.

Figure 1. A Comprehensive Model



METHODS

Environmental Scan

Using EducationPlannerBC as a starting place and referring to institutional websites for additional information, we conducted an environmental scan of undergraduate programs (mainly diploma and bachelor's degree) at each of BC's 25 public post-secondary institutions. The aim of this scan was to ascertain broad themes in admissions requirements across these institutions and the implications of this information for admissions model(s) being used.

Interviews with Post-Secondary Admissions Professionals

We conducted hour-long semi-structured interviews with 20 admissions professionals from 14 BC public post-secondary institutions between December 2025 and March 2026 to understand their perspectives on the usefulness and efficiency of the models. The interview protocol is in the Appendix. These professionals primarily worked in central roles (i.e., in the Registrar's Office or Enrolment Services) and their responsibilities included overseeing and managing undergraduate admissions, engaging in policy development and strategy, and/or directly reviewing applicants' materials and processing admissions decisions. The institutions that participated in interviews were indicated in [Table 1](#). While most of the professionals interviewed were, at the time of data collection, in central and higher-level roles, there were always admissions professionals present (including, for example, Registrars) who had experience in conducting admissions evaluations. Indeed, many admissions professionals began their work at post-secondary institutions as admissions officers or equivalent, before moving into roles with wider responsibility. Further, many of the participants oversaw admissions evaluations in their offices, and were involved in evaluating complex cases, and were thus able to speak to the specifics of that work.

FINDINGS

What Materials Applicants Submit

EducationPlannerBC and institutional websites listed prerequisite courses, grades, and supplemental materials (if required) for specific programs. If the information was available, EducationPlannerBC also included a section on "Admission Advice," generally taken from institution websites. All programs at post-secondary institutions required applicants to submit:

- secondary school transcripts

In addition, some programs required applicants to submit:

- other transcripts (e.g., from other post-secondary programs)
- reference letters
- evidence of experience (e.g., résumé)
- proof of experience (e.g., attestation from supervisor)
- portfolio of evidence of technical or artistic proficiency
- essays or statement of interest

A few programs required:

- audition
- interview
- questionnaires or personal profile
- results from a test (e.g., the Casper situational judgment test)

The vast majority of programs across institutions **did not** require supplemental materials, suggesting instead a reliance on academic transcripts indicating the completion and grades in previous courses. Professional programs (e.g., nursing, early childhood education) and fine arts programs (e.g., music performance, acting) typically required supplemental materials such as portfolios, statements of interest, evidence of work/volunteer experience (often through a résumé or curriculum vitae), auditions, questionnaires or personal profiles, and occasionally, test results, such as from the Casper situational judgement test.

Almost all institutions and programs had both general and program-specific English Language Proficiency (ELP) requirements, most commonly met by applicants providing a secondary school transcript that showed they had passed English 12 (or equivalent) with a minimum grade (the minimum varied but often ranged from C- to B-).

The materials required sometimes differed depending on whether applicants were still in secondary school at the time of application or had been out of school for several years.

Some programs required successful applicants to provide additional materials, such as proof of a valid Criminal Record Check (for programs that required working with children or other vulnerable populations), immunization records, or Cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) training (for health sciences and health services programs), after they had received an offer of admission, but before enrolling in the program.

How Applicants' Materials are Evaluated

Evaluation for Eligibility and for Selection

Recall from the comprehensive model that both eligibility- and selection-based models typically begin by evaluating the applicant's materials to determine whether the applicant meets the program's eligibility requirements.

For programs that have enough spaces for all eligible applicants, the admissions process ends there, with offers of admission being sent to all eligible applicants. For programs that do not have enough spaces, selection among the eligible applicants is required. We have found it helpful to distinguish between two types of selection-based models⁴:

- Selection based on when materials were received
- Selection based on further evaluation of materials

⁴ This distinction is similar to Thompson Rivers University's "first qualified" model (based on when materials are received) versus "best qualified" (based on further evaluation of the materials) categories. Purely eligibility-based models are similar to Thompson River University's "all qualified" category.

Selection Based on When Materials Were Received

Some programs that base selection on when materials were received emphasize the order in which applications are received, even if some applications are not complete (e.g., academic transcripts are not yet available); other programs emphasize the order in which applications are complete. In the latter programs, those applicants who meet the eligibility requirements first are offered admission, even if they were not the first to apply (sometimes referred to as “first qualified-first offered”).

The selection based on when materials were received models were a source of discomfort for some of the admissions professionals we interviewed. While this approach might seem easy to defend, they described some programs filling up within a few minutes of becoming available in online application systems, making them worry that applicants with access to faster internet might be advantaged. In addition to fast and reliable internet, access to computers, help from family members, and support from educators are not readily available to all applicants.

Selection Based on Further Evaluation of Materials

Selection based on the further evaluation of materials typically involves ranking applicants by grade point average (GPA), by ratings of supplemental materials, or by a weighted composite of GPA and ratings. Some of these materials may already have been evaluated in determining eligibility, but may be used in different ways for selection. For example, a program may require a minimum secondary school GPA for eligibility, with those applicants who meet the eligibility criterion being subsequently ranked for selection based on a combination of their GPA and other ratings.

Table 3 provides examples of how materials may be evaluated for eligibility and for selection. In relation to Peretto et al.'s (1999) three dimensions of evidence, most of these materials are evaluated for *capacity to perform*, except where we have noted that *capacity to benefit* and/or *potential to contribute* may also be considered.

Table 3. How Materials are Evaluated for Eligibility and for Selection

Materials	Evaluation for Eligibility	Evaluation for Selection	Examples
Secondary school transcripts	• English language proficiency • Minimum GPA (may be for a specific set of courses) • Required courses • Secondary school diploma	• Rank ordering by GPA • Rank ordering by courses taken (if preferred or recommended courses are included)	• Engineering (British Columbia Institute of Technology)
Other transcripts (e.g., from post-secondary programs)	• Completion of certificate for diploma program		• Executive Assistant Diploma (Nicola Valley Institute of Technology)
Reference letters		• Priority for those more suitable for a program based on personal and professional characteristics and experiences (this may include evidence of <i>capacity to benefit</i> and/or <i>potential to contribute</i>)	• Child & Youth Care – BA (Douglas College)

Table 3 (cont'd)

Materials	Evaluation for Eligibility	Evaluation for Selection	Examples
Evidence of experience (e.g., résumé)		• Priority for those with relevant experience	• Graphic Design Diploma (Vancouver Community College)
Proof of experience (e.g., attestation from supervisor)	• Adequate experience	• Priority for those with relevant experience	• Access to Practical Nursing Diploma (Okanagan College)
Portfolio of evidence of technical or artistic proficiency	• Adequate proficiency	• Priority for those with greatest proficiency or <i>potential to contribute</i>	• All programs (Emily Carr University of Art + Design)
Essays or statement of interest		• Priority for those more suitable for a program based on personal and professional characteristics and experiences (this may include evidence of <i>capacity to benefit</i> and/or <i>potential to contribute</i>)	• Video SOI: Fashion & Technology – BDes (Kwantlen Polytechnic University)
Audition	• Adequate proficiency	• Priority for those with greatest proficiency or <i>potential to contribute</i>	• Theatre Arts at Studio 58 (Acting Option) Diploma (Langara College)
Interview		• Priority for those judged more suitable for a program based on personal and professional characteristics and experiences (this may include evidence of <i>capacity to benefit</i> and/or <i>potential to contribute</i>)	• Early Childhood Education and Care Diploma (Vancouver Island University)
Questionnaires or personal profile		• Priority for those judged more suitable for a program based on personal and professional characteristics and experiences (this may include evidence of <i>capacity to benefit</i> and/or <i>potential to contribute</i>)	• Most programs (University of British Columbia)
Results from a test (e.g., the Casper situational judgment test)	• Adequate proficiency	• Priority for those with greatest proficiency or <i>potential to contribute</i>	• Nursing – BScN (Thompson Rivers University)

Although programs sometimes indicated that their admissions processes were competitive, that spaces were limited, or that they operated on a model such as first-qualified, first-offered, most programs did not specifically indicate this in materials on EducationPlannerBC or on their institution's websites. Thus, the type of admissions model used is sometimes implied, rather than explicitly stated.

Who Evaluates Materials

Admissions materials are typically evaluated by admissions professionals in Registrar's Offices or Enrolment Services, and/or by faculty members or experts associated with a program. Most commonly, academic records are evaluated by the Registrar's Office or Enrolment Services. This is usually done by admissions officers (or equivalent). The Registrar and Associate Registrar are often involved with policy, strategic decision-making, and deciding on exceptional cases, as well as overseeing the work of the staff members who directly review application materials and process admissions decisions. For programs that use an eligibility-based model or selection based on when materials were received, admissions professionals in the Registrar's Office or Enrolment Services may evaluate materials and send offers of admission without ongoing involvement by program faculty members.

For programs that use selection based on the further evaluation of materials, after an initial review from the Registrar's Office or Enrolment Services (usually to check eligibility based on an applicant's academic transcript), applications are sent to programs for further evaluation because this type of evaluation typically calls for discipline- or program-level expertise. There does not appear to be a single way of completing these evaluations, and each institution and program develops evaluation tools (e.g., rubrics, checklists) at their own discretion.

In some institutions, the Registrar's Office or Enrolment Services requests supplemental materials from the applicant only after the initial evaluation to ensure eligibility. In other institutions, applicants must submit all materials to the Registrar's Office or Enrolment Services at once. Here, the submitted materials are assessed for eligibility, and then the Registrar's Office or Enrolment Services passes the materials to the program for further evaluation for selection. In some institutions, only materials from applicants who meet eligibility criteria are passed on to a program, while in other institutions, materials from all applicants are sent on, giving the program the opportunity to request that some eligibility requirements be waived for applicants who, for example, have very strong technical or artistic portfolios.

Finally, in some institutions, the Registrar's Office or Enrolment Services does an initial evaluation for eligibility and then passes the contact information for eligible applicants to the program, which is responsible for contacting those applicants and requesting supplemental materials. This process is common for programs requiring auditions and for some programs that ask applicants to submit portfolios. Following faculty or program review, decisions are sent back to the Registrar's Office or Enrolment Services, at which point an offer of admission can be made.

Factors Affecting the Choice of Admissions Model(s)

The choice of admission model(s) is influenced not only by institutional or programmatic values but also by resources and other constraints. The admissions professionals we spoke with emphasized that changes in policy, provincial funding, federal caps on accepted study permits (i.e., international student visas), and limited resources (e.g., classroom/laboratory space; capacity of admissions staff) all affected enrolment targets and, ultimately, admissions models. Enrolment targets also affected how selective programs needed to be. At one institution that offers several programs in the trades, in addition to enrolment targets, safety considerations limit the capacity of specialized classrooms and this, in turn, limits how many eligible students can be offered admission to these programs.

In many instances, more than one admissions model is used to assess applicants. For example, for programs, such as nursing, with specific provincial funding allocations and many interested applicants, admissions becomes more selection-based, rather than exclusively eligibility-based. In contrast, programs such as Associate of Arts degrees typically use an eligibility-based approach, or if spaces are limited by classroom capacity or faculty time, selection is based on when materials are received. Even when there is a demonstrated need for more graduates in areas such as the trades, because the province provides specific funding for a limited number of spots at colleges, institutions need to be selective if the number of eligible applicants to their trades programs exceeds the spaces available.

Holistic Admissions

In the interviews, the admissions professionals offered a range of perspectives when asked if their institution used a holistic approach to admissions. Some suggested that their admissions models were “comprehensive” or “multi-dimensional” or that they considered “expanded” or “diverse” qualifications or might offer “discretionary admission” if eligibility requirements were not fully met. Most frequently, some programs’ uses of supplemental materials that require expert judgment (e.g., auditions, portfolios) were described as closest to a holistic approach to admissions.

The rationales for considering supplemental materials in admissions decisions varied. Sometimes it was related to the discipline of the program (e.g., in fine arts programs, there is a need to assess an applicant’s artistic proficiency). For programs with many more applicants than they can admit, basing decisions exclusively on GPA can lead to only applicants with very high GPAs being admitted; when other characteristics are also related to GPA, this can lead to a class that is more homogeneous than the program intends. In other cases, there may be a desire to admit applicants with particular skills (e.g., leadership) that may suggest a *capacity to benefit* from a post-secondary education but are not clearly apparent in an applicant’s academic records, or there may be a desire to consider applicants’ *potential to contribute* to the post-secondary institution and to society. The latter case was particularly discussed by admissions professionals at institutions with mandates to serve Indigenous and/or rural communities.

At one institution, an admissions professional we spoke with said, “[the] motivation for this holistic approach is to provide fair and equitable access to programs for students who may not have traditional documentation or who have gained relevant skills outside formal education. By considering multiple aspects of an applicant’s background, the institution can better assess potential and preparedness.” The desire to be fair and provide equitable access was repeated by many of the admissions professionals, regardless of whether they considered their approaches to be holistic.

Some admissions professionals described a desire for admissions processes that were more transparent within institutions and for applicants. One described ongoing discussions within their institution to help recruiters provide more accurate and helpful information to prospective applicants. Another, who oversees admissions appeal requests, spoke of a desire to ensure that each step of evaluating applicants’ materials is consistent and defensible, and to be transparent within the institution about how these processes work.

Perspectives on the value of using a holistic approach varied. Some admissions professionals, especially those at colleges, indicated that, while they would like to collect and assess supplemental material, their institutions simply did not have the capacity to do so. Admissions professionals at one large university reported that their use of supplemental materials has declined over time in part because of a lack of capacity to evaluate the materials, but also because of growing pressure from students to receive admissions decisions sooner. At another university, where the use of

supplemental materials was less frequent, admissions professionals were reconsidering the use of holistic admissions approaches for some programs because of how labour-intensive the process of evaluation is, and because they were not convinced that holistic admissions was achieving the intended goals. For example, admissions professionals at a large university mentioned that one program had started using holistic admissions to improve the representation of specific underrepresented groups, but had found it was not having the intended effect; that program was discussing whether to change their approach.

In programs where holistic admissions approaches are being used, however, many participants believed that these approaches are effective, although the meaning of effective varied. In one institution, the admissions professionals asserted that, for the programs using holistic admissions, they believed the approach was “serving the profession.” At another institution, a participant asserted that “[the holistic] approach has been effective in identifying students who are ready to succeed, while also supporting pathways for those who need to build foundational skills before entering their chosen program.” The more specific or immediate effects such as student retention within a program was not discussed.

Even so, at one post-secondary institution where supplemental materials are requested for almost all undergraduate programs, frustrations about perceptions of the value of a holistic approach were voiced. The admissions professionals we spoke with suggested that there is a misperception that including these materials in the admissions process is overly costly and causes significant delays in admissions decisions. The professionals stated that this is not the case, as the value of these materials outweighs any small delays in making admissions decisions.

Finally, some participants worried that holistic admissions and supplemental materials might be used as a way for programs and faculty to “hand-pick” students. Because supplemental materials are typically reviewed by program faculty rather than by admissions professionals in the Registrar’s Office or Enrolment Services, how they are assessed can vary. In this sense, one professional worried about who “holds the power” when making admissions decisions. Many participants suggested that centralized evaluation in the Registrar’s Office or Enrolment Services allows for consistency and efficiency. As materials are sent to programs, decision-making becomes decentralized and it becomes crucial for rubrics, checklists, or other assessment tools used at the program-level to be clearly and consistently applied.

Alternate Pathways and Access Programs

All of the participating colleges, institutes, and universities reported having conversations about improving or ensuring access for groups that have been underrepresented in post-secondary education, although the specific groups varied. Every participating institution is considering or currently implementing specific policies, programs, and/or pathways for Indigenous students. At some institutions, these have been formalized, often in consultation with local Indigenous communities, and with the support of specific Indigenous offices at their institutions. At other institutions, this is pursued informally. For example, at small institutions, materials submitted by Indigenous applicants can be reviewed individually, even when no official policy exists.

Though many participants discussed improving access to post-secondary education for other historically underrepresented groups, none of the admissions professionals we spoke with outlined formal pathways designed for any of these groups. For example, one large institution had created scholarship opportunities for Black-identifying applicants, but specific access pathways had not yet been created.

Approaches to improving access may include reserved or designated seats in programs or giving priority to applicants from particular groups. Some institutions had recruiters with ties to communities and helped potential applicants gather and submit materials. It is notable that every admissions professional we spoke with expressed enthusiasm for working across their institutions to improve access for Indigenous students.

Some participants described “alternate pathways” or “alternate offers” (other terms were also used) where unsuccessful applicants could be offered admission to an alternate program. At most of the smaller or more teaching-focused institutions, some form of academic upgrading is commonly available, particularly for eligibility-based programs. Applicants who do not yet meet the eligibility requirements for a program may be able to enrol in a “bridging program” or “open studies” or may take individual courses in the hope of later being eligible for admission to their desired program. These upgrading opportunities can help to improve access to programs. However, alternate offers may also be used by institutions to compete for students who were not successful in obtaining admission to a selection-based program, but might be willing to attend the institution in a “laddering” program (such as a certificate program that includes a subset of the courses in a degree program) or another program for which they meet the qualifications and that has available spaces.

Changing Contexts

The changes by the Federal government to the number of accepted study permits (i.e., international student visas) have affected many of the institutions included in the study. Although the effect is not consistent, it is evident that, especially for colleges, a significant portion of their applicant pool has changed as a result of this policy change.

Decreasing financial resources, whether from reduced tuition revenues from international students or from Federal or Provincial policies, have also resulted in major concerns. There is worry about the sustainability of small colleges as programs are being suspended or combined. Admissions professionals working at colleges indicated that some programs that used to have substantial waitlists for many programs now have unfilled spaces.

The changing context appeared to be increasing pressure on admissions professionals to send out admissions offers more quickly or to make alternate offers in order to compete for eligible applicants in a shrinking pool. However, it did not appear to be causing the admissions professionals we interviewed to rethink their admissions models. Rather, changes that the admissions professionals had made or were considering, such as reconsidering admissions decision-making processes for some programs using selection based on when materials were received, were more likely to be due to concerns about fairness and transparency.

Changes Participants Would Like to See

At the end of each interview, we asked, “On a provincial and/or institutional level, are there any changes you would like to see regarding admissions processes to higher education?” The perspectives of the admissions professionals in this study were influenced by many years’ experience, often across a variety of institutions, and a deep understanding of admissions at different institutional levels. We summarize their suggestions below.

- Better aggregated data: Several admissions professionals identified the need for better data about application and attendance patterns

- Better individual data: The participants from one institution requested information about individual applicants' multiple attempts at secondary school courses, to make it more apparent when applicants are "shopping around" for better grades.
- Consistency and clarity of English Language Proficiency (ELP) requirements: Participants at some colleges were concerned that higher ELP requirements might affect their ability to recruit applicants.
- Wider transcript exchange: EducationPlannerBC was consistently described as helpful, making the application process easier. However, not all institutions are set up with transcript exchange, resulting in students needing to submit transcripts directly to institutions when applying to programs.
- Updated technology: Participants at some institutions indicated that although they must handle a high volume of applications and requests for waivers or exceptions, they are limited by outdated technology and the need to manually process applications and admissions decisions.
- Better measures: When considering supplemental materials for selection-based programs, the adequacy of available tools and the capacity to use them was also widely discussed. One participant noted that while the Casper situational judgment test has been used by some programs, the limitations of this test are increasingly recognized, and moving to multiple mini interviews (MMIs) would require significant resources. Although it did not come up often, the prevalence of generative artificial intelligence tools was mentioned by some participants, along with concerns about whether applicants might be using them to write statements of interest.

A consistent message from the admissions professionals we interviewed is that Registrar's Offices and Enrolment Services are committed to supporting applicants, ensuring fair and equitable processes, and improving access to their institutions. Some did worry that others within their institutions did not understand the work of admissions professionals, sometimes conflating it with recruitment. They emphasized that recognizing the distinct role of admissions professionals was important.

Recognizing that all of the post-secondary admissions professionals we spoke with worked in Registrar's Offices and Enrolment Services, it is not surprising that many advocated for centralizing admissions processes, where possible. Participants argued that this would allow for more consistency and efficiency, although they acknowledged that decentralization, especially for programs such as those in fine arts or healthcare is sometimes necessary. They emphasized the importance of collaboration and communication with the programs to ensure consistent, transparent, and defensible processes.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

This review describes the admissions models that are currently being used by British Columbia's 25 public post-secondary institutions and the perspectives of the admissions professionals who are responsible for designing and implementing those models. While the participants were keenly aware of the need to improve admissions processes, they were confident in their expertise and efficacy in administering these processes, despite the myriad challenges they face. They had important suggestions for supporting admissions processes in the future, such as through better access to data and updated tools. Some participants also described initiatives to improve consistency and transparency within and across institutions. Through this, they conveyed confidence in their expertise and that of their colleagues to continue to do this important work, even as changing government policies, shrinking applicant pools, and financial pressures are requiring them to find ways to send out offers earlier, make alternate offers, or innovate in other ways. It will be important to follow up with admissions professionals in the coming years to find out whether additional changes have occurred.

Finally, as more data become available from the Student Transitions Project (STP) and EducationPlannerBC, it will become possible to connect applicants' qualifications with their application behaviour and to consider this in relation to institutions' uses of specific admissions models. This could include investigations of whether selection based on when materials are received has differential effects for applicants from different geographic locations or groups.

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APPENDIX: Interview Protocol

Background

1. What is your name and role at your institution?
2. How long have you worked in higher education? At your current institution? How long have you been involved in admissions at your current institution?

Admissions Context

3. How are you involved in admissions?
4. For students applying to undergraduate programs at your institution...
 - a. *If speaking to PROGRAM*: Are you limited in the number of applicants you may accept each year? If yes, who or what sets the limit? What was it in the most recent year?
 - b. *MATERIALS*: What materials are all domestic BC applicants required to provide to apply to your institution/program? Are there optional materials that applicants can provide if they choose to (e.g., describing previous difficulties in their education or describing their connections to or experiences with specific communities)? If yes, what are the optional materials and which students submit these materials?
 - c. *ELIGIBILITY*: Are there minimum requirements that applicants must meet to be eligible for admission at your institution or program? If yes, what are the minimum requirements? Are all applicants' materials assessed to see if they meet these requirements? Who is involved in making this assessment? Where are the minimum requirements listed to help potential applicants decide whether to apply?
 - d. *SELECTION*: Do all applicants who meet the minimum requirements and submit their applications by a deadline receive offers of admission? If not, how does a program decide which applicants will receive offers of admission? Which materials are considered? Who is involved in making these decisions? How is the process for making these decisions described to applicants?
 - e. *ALTERNATE OFFERS*: Does the institution ever make "alternate" offers—that is, offering admission to a program the applicant did not apply to (e.g., a bridging program or a program with lower minimum requirements)? If yes, what kinds of alternate offers are made? Are they made to applicants who did not meet the minimum requirements for their intended program? If a program does not admit all applicants who meet the minimum requirements, are alternate offers made to applicants who are eligible but not admitted?
 - f. *HOLISTIC ADMISSIONS*: The term "holistic" is sometimes used to emphasize that an admission process considers more than just grades or test scores, but the specific materials requested from applicants and the ways those materials are used to make decisions can vary widely. Are any aspects of your institution's admissions described to applicants as holistic? If yes, which aspects? What motivated the decision(s) to use a holistic approach? To what extent do you believe that this approach is working for your institution/program?

- g. **DEMOGRAPHIC SUBGROUPS:** Are there conversations within the institution about whether some groups (e.g., Indigenous, women, or racialized) are underserved overall or in certain programs? Are any groups especially targeted for recruitment such as through access pathways? Do any groups have different application materials (e.g., optional essays) or admission processes? Does the institution count the numbers of applicants or students in any groups? Are there ever any conversations about groups being overserved?
- h. **CHANGES:** Have the application materials or admission processes or, even, who is involved in admissions changed in the past 10 years? If so, how and why? To what extent do you believe these changes have been successful towards achieving your admissions goals? Do you anticipate changes in the next 10 years? Are there particular changes you hope to see in the next 10 years?
- i. **STRENGTHS:** What do you think are the strengths of the admission models your institution/program uses?
- j. **CHALLENGES:** Does the institution face any challenges in carrying out the admission processes? What conversations, if any, have there been about how to improve usefulness and/or efficiency of the admission processes?
- k. **MORE ABOUT THE INSTITUTION:** Are there other things we should know about your institution's approach to admissions? Which programs are considered to be the most competitive for admission? Which are the least competitive?

Final Thoughts & Recommendations

5. On a provincial and/or institutional level, are there any changes you would like to see regarding admissions processes to higher education?
6. Is there anything else you would like to add?

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