

**Improving the Knowledge of Different Post Secondary Pathways  
for High School Students**

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## **I. INTRODUCTION**

### **A. Definition of Post Secondary Pathways**

In British Columbia, post-secondary pathways relate to educational options to students after completing high school. These pathways include college, university, and trades apprenticeships. Universities offer undergraduate degrees, master's and doctoral programs ("University vs College Canada: Difference between College and University in Canada"). The top three universities in British Columbia are the University of British Columbia, Simon Fraser University and University of Victoria (Abdi).

The top three colleges in British Columbia are Camosun College, Coast Mountain College and Langara ("Colleges in British Columbia: Top Colleges in British Columbia for International Students"). Most colleges offer certificates or an associate's degree which can take 2 years to obtain compared to a 4 year bachelor's degree. Many colleges provide an option to transfer to a university in your second or third year to complete a bachelor's degree. ("Colleges in British Columbia: Top Colleges in British Columbia for International Students"). There are alternative post secondary pathways such as trades apprenticeships which are intensive training for specific careers such as carpentry, construction, electrician and automotive fields ("BCIT Programs - Trades & Apprenticeship"). These post secondary pathways in British Columbia offer unique opportunities for students to pursue their academic and career goals.

### **B. Gaps in Knowledge of Post Secondary Pathways for High School Students**

The transition from high school to post-secondary institutions can be an overwhelming and complex process for many high school students. With various options, including university, college, trade apprenticeships, it can be challenging to make informed decisions and learn about different pathways. High school students aspire to study at the top universities in Canada such as

University of British Columbia (UBC), Simon Fraser University (SFU), McGill University and University of Toronto. Post secondary resources provided by high schools do not exhibit accurate and unbiased information for graduating high school students. If students are not given accurate information, they are likely making uninformed choices which impact their post secondary experience.

### **C. Purpose of Report**

There is a pressure to perform, compete and choose the top universities without realizing that colleges can be a realistic and affordable pathway. High school students are blindsided by the prestigious reputation of universities. Secondly, resources about post secondary options are more favorable towards universities than colleges.

### **D. Description of Data Sources**

The primary source will be obtained through online surveys to assess the types and quality of post secondary resources. Secondary sources will include news articles related to the differing opinions between colleges and universities.

### **E. Scope of this Inquiry**

To evaluate how to improve quality and accessibility of resources regarding colleges and universities for high school students, the report reviews six areas of inquiry:

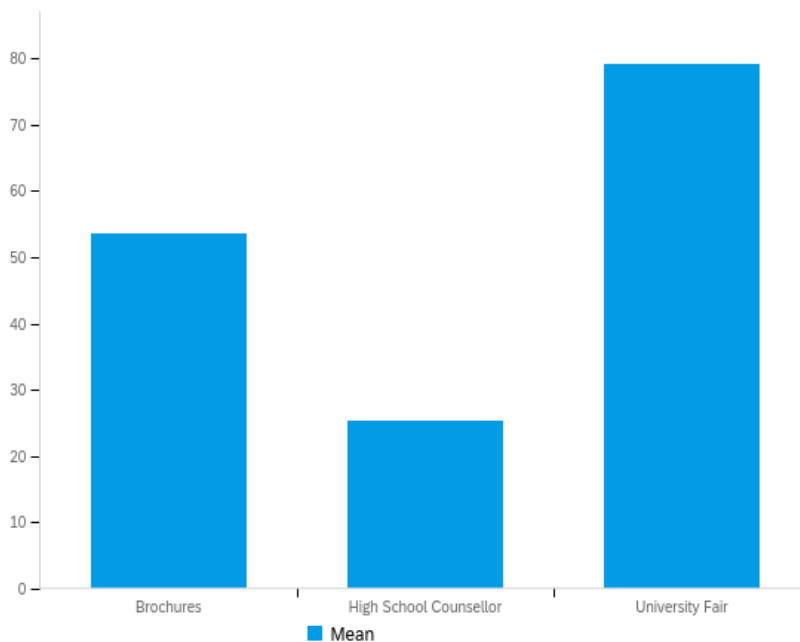
- II. What biases of major universities and colleges are displayed towards high school students?
- III. What post secondary resources are given to high school students as they approach graduation?
- IV. What are some areas of concern when applying to a university or college?
- V. How knowledgeable are students about financial assistance?

- VI. Do counselors set a realistic expectation regarding student life at post secondary?
- VII. How has the stigma surrounding colleges further placate success for students?

## II. DATA SECTION

### A. Current Post Secondary Resources for Graduating High School Students

Post secondary resources refer to various tools graduating high school students to be able to support the transition from high school to post secondary. These resources include high school counselors, university fairs, post secondary institutions' brochures, official post secondary institutions' websites, peers, teachers, and social media. These resources enable students to make informed decisions regarding the final decision of choosing the right post secondary option for them.

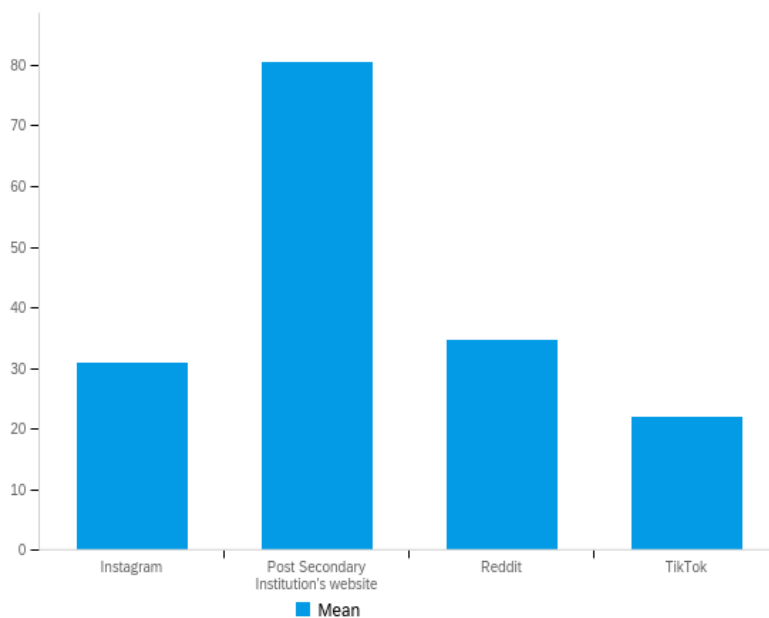


**Figure 1.** Graph representing the mean percentage of how effective were these three resources in gaining more knowledge about post secondary pathways.

While counselors are found to be at high schools more frequently than University Fairs, the data collected reveals the efficacy of accessible resources at school. Figure 1 compares three

resources — brochures, high school counselors, and university fairs. Based on the findings, high school counselors, on average, were found to be 25.4% helpful in aiding students to gain knowledge about post secondary institutions. In comparison, University Fairs were the most effective resource, with an average rate of 79.2%.

Consumption of media and influence from parents and peers can impact which school a high school student chooses to attend. Social media such as Instagram, Reddit and TikTok enables students to view what student life at different campuses can look like. The official websites of different post secondary institutions allow more insight to admission requirements, faculty and a tuition breakdown. Various factors can contribute to shaping a student's perspective and expectations regarding post secondary pathways.



**Figure 2.** Graph representing the mean percentage of how effective were these 4 resources students looked at independently.

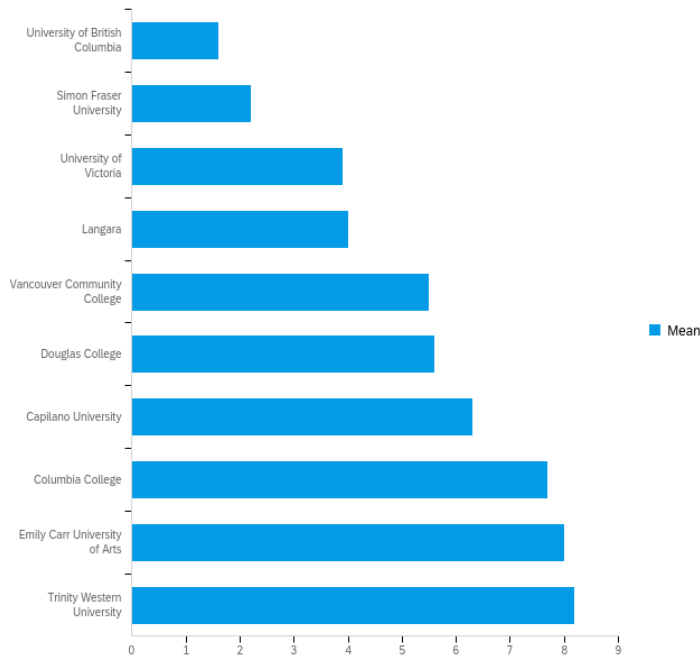
Survey respondents identified post-secondary institution websites as the most useful resource in comparison to other social media platforms such as Instagram, Reddit, and Tiktok. Results

indicate students prefer to acquire information directly from the post secondary institutions instead of basing their opinions on other individuals' posts on social media with an average of 80.5%. The data from **Figure 1** and **Figure 2** indicates that university fairs and post-secondary institution websites provide more specific and relevant information about individual institutions. The results demonstrate that students value the opportunity to have their questions answered directly and to obtain detailed information about the programs and resources available at a specific institution.

### **B. Factors Impacting Post Secondary Decisions**

Based on the survey data, parents and friends were an influential factor in the decision making process of post secondary schools. Parents can impact their child's decisions through guidance and expectations for their academic career. An institution's ranking was another impactful factor. The reputation of post-secondary institutions and their programs such as UBC and the Sauder program played a key role in influencing the decision to apply for UBC. However, the combination of these three factors will influence an individual to pursue their choice. While the survey data indicates UBC, SFU and Langara as the top choices. Survey respondents often stated that Langara was a "back-up choice" if the other two universities did not accept their application.

### C. Top University/College Choices

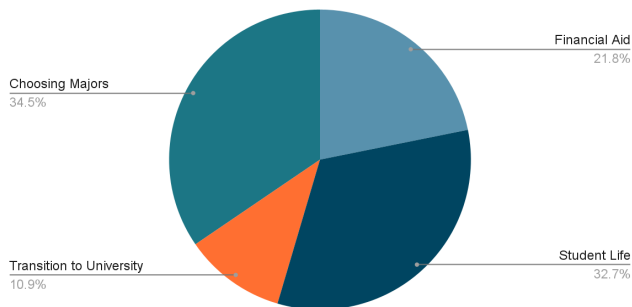


**Figure 3.** Rating of universities and colleges with 1 being the best option and 10 being the least popular option.

According to Figure 4, UBC was rated as the top pick followed by SFU and UVIC. The fourth to sixth spots were held by colleges such as Langara, Vancouver Community College and Douglas College.

### D. Post Secondary Topics which Still Creates Confusion

What are some post secondary topics that still create confusion after accessing these resources?



**Figure 4.** Topics which still created confusion after accessing online and in-person resources.



Despite the availability of brochures, university fairs, and high school counselors offering general information on post-secondary pathways, students still experience confusion on specific topics such as student loans, transitioning from college to university, selecting a major and student life. According to Figure 4, 34.5% of respondents were uncertain about choosing a major, while 32.7% of survey participants identified student life as the second area of confusion.

### **E. Proposed Solutions and Feasibility Discussion**

One way to support students in their transition to post secondary pathways is to implement a Q&A session with current post-secondary students from different universities and colleges. This will enable graduating high school students to ask questions and gain more insight into the experiences of what student life is at each university. Additionally, a campus tour to various universities and colleges could be beneficial. A tour would allow students to learn about different programs and faculties, learn more about the student life and community. A combination of these solutions can mitigate the risk of raising more confusion about the overall experience of post secondary institutions.

Radcliffe and Bos recommend that attending presentations hosted by college students can increase post secondary preparedness (139). Hosting specific presentations from representatives from colleges with topics surrounding student loans, registering in college, requirements pertaining to specific programs and tuition costs would be beneficial (Radcliffe and Bos 139).

Allowing high school students to observe a student in post secondary's day in addition to the campus tour allows for a personal experience to see what student life is about (Radcliffe and Bos 138). The evidence suggests that accessing these services can develop a positive experience with post secondary institutions in the pursuit of higher education.

## **IV. CONCLUSION**

### **A. Summary of Findings**

There is a disparity between the reputations of colleges and universities reflecting how eager students will apply. Reputation is not the only factor that needs to be considered when applying to a post secondary institution. High school students also emphasized that parents and peers were also influential factors. The survey respondents chose UBC, SFU and UVic as the top three choices of post secondary institutions to apply to. However, counselors were deemed as the least popular resource to reach out to when learning more about post secondary institutions compared to brochures and university fairs.

Despite accessing multiple resources, high school students still encountered confusion regarding post secondary pathways. Students still had questions regarding transitioning from a college to a university, choosing a major, applying to financial aid and student life.