Introduction

Since 1997, Ryerson has been a member of the Canadian Undergraduate Survey Consortium, a group of approximately 20 universities across Canada that conducts student surveys across participating universities. In 2001, Ryerson, under the auspices of the Consortium, undertook the First-Year Student Survey. Students were asked about their decision to attend university and about their experiences at Ryerson. The survey was distributed to a sample of 600 students who came to Ryerson directly from secondary school. Students admitted directly from secondary school represented about 2/3 of all first-year students.

The overall response rate is 47.2 percent. The sample size and the high response rate contribute to a relatively low estimate of statistical error1.

Decision to attend university

First-year university students were asked about their reasons for attending university in general and their reasons for attending Ryerson University in particular. The survey also asked how important various forms and sources of information were in their decision to attend Ryerson. Respondents were provided with a three-point scale to evaluate the different factors: not important, somewhat important and very important.

Figure 1 shows the first-year students' evaluation of various reasons for attending university. More than 95 percent of respondents viewed “to prepare for a specific job or career” and “to get a good job” as very important reasons. Nearly all respondents also rated other academic and career-related reasons as somewhat or very important. The non-academic objectives, “to meet parental expectations” and “to meet new friends”, were of lesser importance. But both were viewed as somewhat or very important by more than 60 percent of respondents.

Figure 2 shows how the first-year students evaluated reasons for choosing Ryerson rather than another university. Highest ranked is “specific career-related program.” The top-rated reasons all relate to Ryerson's academic strengths: career-related programs; quality of academic programs; and the University's good reputation. The next three reasons relate to Ryerson's location: availability of public transportation; wanted to live close to home; and accessibility of campus from home. Ryerson's largely commuter student population is similarly reflected in the low ranking of “availability of on-campus residences” and “wanted to live away from home.” Most students also rated the attendance of family and friends at Ryerson as not important. A number of largely non-academic characteristics of the University, such as size, social life and school spirit are in the middle of the range.

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1 Nineteen times out of twenty, the percentages shown throughout this report are estimated to be accurate within 5.4 percentage points.
Figure 1: Students’ reasons for attending university

- To prepare for a specific job or career
- To get a job
- To develop a broad base of skills
- To increase my knowledge in an academic field
- To get a good general education
- To prepare for graduate professional school
- To meet parental expectations
- To become a more cultured person
- To meet new friends

Percentage of respondents (among those who reported on a given item) *

*NOTE: Over 99.5 percent of respondents reported on each item.

Very important
Somewhat important
Not important
Figure 2: Students’ reasons for attending Ryerson University

- Specific career-related program
- Quality of academic programs
- University has a good reputation
- Availability of public transportation
- Wanted to live close to home
- Accessibility of the campus from my home
- Tuition fees
- Co-op program
- Size of university
- Computer facilities
- Opportunity for international work/study abroad
- Offered financial assistance/scholarship
- Size of city/town
- Rich social life
- School spirit
- Contact with students from the university
- Advice from counsellors or teachers
- Parents/relatives wanted me to enroll here
- Availability of on-campus residence accommodations
- Special needs services
- Friends attending here
- Wanted to live away from home
- Other family member(s) currently attending here

Percentage of respondents (among those who reported on a given item)*

*NOTE: Over 97.8 percent of respondents reported on each item.
Figure 3 shows how first-year students evaluated the extent that various sources and types of information had influenced their decision to attend Ryerson. The students felt that brochures or pamphlets, a campus visit and the University web site were the most effective in determining Ryerson as their choice. The list on the questionnaire included sources of information that Ryerson does not use in recruitment (television and radio advertisements, CD-ROM, and calls from faculty and students), which were rated as not important by more than half of the respondents for those particular items. The fact that 50 to 69 percent of students responded, rather than indicating “not applicable”, suggests ambiguity in interpretation of the question.

Choice of program

In the survey, first-year students were asked to whom they talked at Ryerson about programs and courses, and how useful they found those discussions. As shown in Figure 4, faculty members were the most useful source of information. Admissions/registrarial staff and career counsellors were seen as less useful than peer student advisors and academic advisors. It is possible that students were thinking of high school counsellors, instead of Ryerson counsellors who normally have more interaction with upper-year students than with those in first-year.

Orientation experience

Students were also asked to rate their level of satisfaction with different aspects of the orientation program. Level of satisfaction was based on a four-point scale: very dissatisfied, dissatisfied, satisfied, and very satisfied. Students were also able to choose a “don’t know” category if they did not have an opinion.

Students generally felt satisfied with all aspects of the orientation program listed on the questionnaire. As Figure 5 shows, more than 80 percent of the respondents felt either satisfied or very satisfied with the following outcomes of orientation activities: providing information about campus life; providing information about student services; helping to understand university expectations; building confidence; and helping with personal and social transition to university.

Adjusting to university

Respondents were asked about their success in making adjustments to university life, with ratings on a scale: none, very little, some, very much. Alternatively, students could indicate “not applicable” to any of the items on the list.

As Figure 6 illustrates, most of the students were quite successful in adjusting to university life by the end of their first year. In particular, first-year students felt very comfortable with navigating around the University, their knowledge of computers, and their understanding of the content and information presented in courses. However, students did not appear to be getting involved in campus activities with less than 30 percent of respondents reporting some or very much success in this area.
Figure 3: Factors that influence students to attend Ryerson University

- Brochures or pamphlets *
- Campus visit +
- University web site +
- Maclean's magazine +
- Visit by a representative to my high school or CEGEP +
- Letters from university representatives to my high school or CEGEP ~
- Meeting with university admissions officer on the campus **
- Other media reports ~
- Calls from the faculty of the university >
- Calls from students of the university >
- TV or radio ads **
- CD-ROM >

Percentage of respondents (among those who reported on a given item)*

*NOTES:  
* 90.0 to 100.0% of respondents reported on this item.  
+ 80.0 to 89.9% of respondents reported on this item.  
~ 70.0 to 79.9% of respondents reported on this item.  
** 60.0 to 69.9% of respondents reported on this item.  
> 50.0 to 59.9% of respondents reported on this item.
Figure 4: Students’ reaction to discussions with people about Ryerson University programs

Percentage of respondents (among those who reported on a given item)

NOTES:  
> 50.0 to 59.9% of respondents reported on this item  
++ 40.0 to 49.9% of respondents reported on this item  
# 30.0 to 39.9% of respondents reported on this item  
^ 20.0 to 29.9% of respondents reported on this item  
< 10.0 to 19.9% of respondents reported on this item
Figure 5: Students’ reaction to orientation activities

Providing information about campus life

Providing information about student services

Helping you understand the university’s expectations

Building your confidence

Helping your personal and social transition to university

Percentage of respondents (among those who reported on a given item)*

100% 80% 60% 40% 20% 0% 20% 40% 60% 80% 100%

*NOTE: 70 to 75% of respondents reported on each item.
### Figure 6: Students’ success rate at university activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Percentage of Respondents (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Finding my way around campus</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting the computer literacy required for studies</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding content and information presented in courses</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choosing a program of studies to meet my objectives</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting academic demands</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making new friends with other students</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performing adequately in written assignments</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling as if I belong at university</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using the library</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performing adequately in courses requiring mathematical skills</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizing my time to complete academic work</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusting to living here</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding help with questions or problems</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding useful information and resources on careers and occupations</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting academic advice</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding suitable, affordable housing</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Becoming involved in campus activities</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**NOTES:**

* 90.0 to 100.0% of respondents reported on this item.
+ 80.0 to 89.9% of respondents reported on this item.
− 70.0 to 79.9% of respondents reported on this item.
++ 60.0 to 69.9% of respondents reported on this item.
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+++ 40.0 to 49.9% of respondents reported on this item.
# 30.0 to 39.9% of respondents reported on this item.
^ 20.0 to 29.9% of respondents reported on this item.
Perception of the University

First-year students were asked about their perception of several aspects of Ryerson University: average class size, personal safety on campus, instructional facilities, and concern shown by the University, using a scale from very dissatisfied to very satisfied. Students without an opinion were also able to choose a “don't know” category.

Figure 7 shows that more than 90 percent of first-year Ryerson students were satisfied or very satisfied with the size of classes and their personal safety on campus. Satisfaction with instructional facilities was rated nearly as highly, and about 75 percent were satisfied with the “concern shown by the university”.

Figure 8 summarizes student satisfaction with a list of services at Ryerson and also notes the proportion of students who reported on each item. At the top, more than 95 percent of first-year students indicated that they were satisfied or very satisfied with athletic facilities. Most campus services received positive ratings by the majority of respondents, including key academic services such as library facilities and study skills/learning support services. At the bottom of the ranking, more than 70 percent of the 23.3 percent of students who rated parking services were dissatisfied. Again, it is possible that some respondents who reported on a given service and indicated that they were dissatisfied or satisfied did not have any experience with it and should have indicated “no experience”.

Figure 9 shows the responses of students when asked about their agreement with five statements about their university experience, using a four-point scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Students generally were in agreement with statements about satisfaction with their decision to attend Ryerson (94 percent) and with the quality of teaching that they had received (87 percent). There was somewhat less agreement with statements about professors encouraging participation in class discussions and treating students as individuals (although about 80 percent still responded positively regarding these statements).

Academic profile of first-year students

First-year students were asked questions about their academic background such as their subject of interest, entering average grade from high school, and whether they were taking a full course load.

The average high school grade for the first-year respondents was an A- and the students expected to have an average grade of a B by the end of their first year of university. Most respondents (91 percent) were taking a full course load.
Figure 7: Students’ perceptions of Ryerson University

- Average size of classes *
- Personal safety on campus *
- Instructional facilities *
- Concern shown by the university for you as an individual +

Percentage of respondents (among those who reported on a given item)*

*NOTES: *
- 90.0 to 100.0% of respondents reported on this item
- 80.0 to 89.9% of respondents reported on this item

Very dissatisfied  Dissatisfied  Satisfied  Very satisfied
Figure 8: Students' satisfaction with services provided by Ryerson University

- Athletic facilities **
- Services for women students <
- Library facilities *
- Study skills/learning support services #
- Services for women students <
- University residences <
- Access to computers *
- Campus medical services <
- University day care services @
- Social activities >
- Food services ~
- Personal counselling services for students <
- Campus book store(s) *
- Services for students with disabilities @
- Services for international students @
- Student employment/placement services ^
- Co-op services <
- Parking facilities ^

Percentage of respondents (among those who reported on a given item)*

*NOTES:  
* 90.0 to 100.0% of respondents reported on this item.  
+ 80.0 to 89.9% of respondents reported on this item.  
~ 70.0 to 79.9% of respondents reported on this item.  
** 60.0 to 69.9% of respondents reported on this item.  
> 50.0 to 59.9% of respondents reported on this item.  
++ 40.0 to 49.9% of respondents reported on this item.  
# 30.0 to 39.9% of respondents reported on this item.  
^ 20.0 to 29.9% of respondents reported on this item.  
< 10.0 to 19.9% of respondents reported on this item.  
@ 0.0 to 9.9% of respondents reported on this item.
Figure 9: Students' satisfaction with the university experience

I am satisfied with my decision to attend this university

Generally, I am satisfied with the quality of teaching I have received

Most of my professors are reasonably accessible outside of class to help students

Most of my professors encouraged students to participate in class discussions

At this university, professors treat students as individuals, not just numbers

Percentage of respondents (among those who reported on a given item)*

*NOTE: Over 97 percent of respondents reported on each item

Strongly disagree  Disagree  Agree  Strongly agree
Financing of university education

First-year students were asked a series of questions about their plans to finance their university education and whether they believe they will have sufficient funds.

Approximately 37 percent of the respondents indicated that they were receiving government student assistance in their first year at university and 32 percent received a scholarship or other financial award from the University. Approximately 56 percent of the respondents reported that they were employed, while another 20 percent stated that they were looking for work. The average number of hours of work for respondents currently employed was 13.5 hours per week.

Students were also asked about whether they felt they would have sufficient funding to complete their university education: 37.8 percent indicated that they were very concerned, 44.9 percent had some concern but felt they would probably have enough funds, while 16.3 percent were not concerned because they expected to have sufficient funds.

Profile of first-year students

Nearly all of the respondents (98.2 percent) reported that their permanent home before attending Ryerson was located in Ontario. Approximately 82 percent of respondents were living with their parents or guardians while nine percent were living in on-campus housing, six percent in a rented home or apartment, and three percent in other accommodation.

Females are somewhat over-represented among the survey’s respondents: 57.6 percent of completed questionnaires were from females, but they comprised 51.1 percent of first-year students at Ryerson admitted directly from secondary school.

The average age of respondents at the time of the survey was 19.5 years. Population data consisting of first-year Ryerson students were consistent with survey data in age and gender.

Approximately one quarter of all respondents (24.7 percent) identified themselves as members of a visible minority in Canada. A total of 1.5 percent of respondents considered themselves aboriginal persons.

About four percent of respondents identified themselves as persons with a disability.

Table 1 shows a comparison of the survey and population data for age, average age, gender, and faculty.
### Table 1: Comparison of Survey Sample and Population Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Survey Sample</th>
<th>Population*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>GENDER</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>163 (57.6%)</td>
<td>1,073 (51.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>119 (42.0%)</td>
<td>1,122 (48.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Response</td>
<td>1 (0.4%)</td>
<td>0 (0.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>283 (100%)</td>
<td>2,195 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>AGE</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 18</td>
<td>2 (0.7%)</td>
<td>11 (0.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>16 (5.7%)</td>
<td>120 (5.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>222 (78.4%)</td>
<td>1,666 (75.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>32 (11.3%)</td>
<td>321 (14.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 and older</td>
<td>7 (2.5%)</td>
<td>76 (3.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Response</td>
<td>4 (1.4%)</td>
<td>1 (0.04%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>283 (100%)</td>
<td>2,195 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>19.5</td>
<td>19.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>FACULTY</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts</td>
<td>10 (3.5%)</td>
<td>97 (4.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>95 (33.6%)</td>
<td>647 (29.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication &amp; Design</td>
<td>59 (20.8%)</td>
<td>467 (21.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Services</td>
<td>38 (13.4%)</td>
<td>293 (13.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering &amp; Applied Science</td>
<td>81 (28.6%)</td>
<td>691 (31.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>283 (100%)</td>
<td>2,195 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Based on the November 1, 2000 registrants from which survey participants were selected. Population age distribution adjusted to match date of survey.
Method

Over a six-week period beginning in January 2001, questionnaires were mailed to 600 students in their first year at Ryerson University who had been admitted directly from secondary school. The 47.2 percent response rate is considered high for a mail-out format. The sample size was 283.

Limitations of the survey relate mainly to ambiguity surrounding respondents’ interpretation of certain questions. Given that the questionnaire was developed for use across a number of universities, there may have been variation in respondents’ understanding of questions in which terms such as “career counsellor” are used. Moreover, as previously mentioned in the case of student recruitment strategies not used by Ryerson and evaluation of various campus services, it is possible that some respondents who rated a given activity or feature of the University positively or negatively did not in fact have any direct experience with it and thus should have indicated “don’t know” or “not applicable”.

For further information about the First-Year Student Survey 2001, please contact the University Planning Office at 416-979-5033.