

Celebrating 40 Years of Service



In 1972, a gallon of gas cost 55 cents, the Volkswagen Beetle was the most popular car ever sold, Canada won the Summit Series against the Soviet Union, and in Guelph Ontario, a fledgling organization known as the Ontario Universities' Application Centre (the OUAC) diligently worked away at its first official admissions cycle for first-year undergraduate applications.

But the OUAC's history started even before then, in 1963, when investigation into the possibility of co-operation among universities in the application process began...



How It All Started

Following the Second World War and the return of Canadian soldiers, demand for admission to Ontario universities started to grow. The “baby boom” of the 1950s and 1960s that followed intensified demand and new universities were created. Moreover, the advent of the Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP) made universities more accessible than ever. Universities responded by developing new programs and building residences to receive the students. Suddenly, universities were confronted with the need to be able to more accurately forecast their enrollments to plan budgets and facilitate resource allocations. The ability to make timely offers of admission, OSAP approvals and the assignment of residence spaces were among the challenges faced.

Today, these are known as the key components of “Strategic Enrolment Management”. Prior to the development of the OUAC, students applied directly to individual universities and replied to offers of admission as received. Inevitably, some universities had to cope with a surplus of registrations and others suffered from “no shows”; students had to cope with a somewhat uncoordinated multi-application environment.

British Universities Central Council on Admissions

This experience was by no means unique to Ontario. The universities in Great Britain – and their applicants – were experiencing similar challenges. Their solutions influenced what was later done in Ontario. The following summary analysis by the British Universities Central Council on Admissions could just as easily have been written for Ontario. In 1963, the Council reported:

“The Universities Central Council on Admissions was set up in July 1961 by the universities of Great Britain in an attempt to solve some of the problems arising from increasing pressure of applications for admission. Hitherto each university had considered its applications without reference to other universities, although most candidates applied to several universities simultaneously. But although it was known that, for example, about 150,000 applications were received for admission in October 1960 to universities in Great Britain other than Oxford and Cambridge and it was clear that, on average, each candidate was applying to more universities, there was no means of knowing how many candidates these figures represented. The lack of such information, in a period of growing public interest in the means of entry to universities,

was embarrassing enough: but of particular concern to each university was the problem of knowing whether any candidate it considered for admission really wished to come or whether, having accepted an offer of a place representing a large investment of public money, he might – as far too many did – withdraw at the last minute in order to go somewhere else, too late for the university to be able to find a suitable applicant to take his place. No easier was the problem facing the candidates, or that of the headmaster or headmistress in dealing with universities each operating a different procedure”. (“The Universities Central Council on Admission, First Report 1961-3”, London England, page 1)

As a solution, the British Council set about in the early 1960s to form, staff and equip a “highly mechanized office” to act as a central application clearing house.

Planning for a Central Clearing House

In Ontario during 1963, the Committee of Presidents (later to become the Council of Ontario Universities, COU), created a working group to “...review the problem of students who do not report for registration after being admitted”. They also authorized drafting a long term plan for a central clearing house for applications in Ontario. The plan was drafted by A. P. Gordon, Registrar at the University of Waterloo; it was published in March 1965 but no implementation date was established.

Ontario Universities’ Council on Admissions

In 1966, the Committee of Presidents created the Ontario Universities’ Council on Admissions (OUCA). At its first meeting in October of that year, OUCA considered a list of recommendations submitted by a Committee of the Ontario University Registrars’ Association (OURA) regarding plans for what would later become the Ontario Universities’ Application Centre (OUAC). Although no immediate action was taken to establish the OUAC, the Council on Admissions did take several significant steps to improve the admission process, which included:

- The development of a common application form for currently registered Grade 13 students allowing four (later reduced to three) simultaneous university choices; however, other applicants continued to apply on a form for each specific university.
- A system to report on vacant places in various programs so admissions officers could make additional offers if needed.
- Agreement on common processing dates.



- A system to report applicant confirmations of accepting an offer.
- A new data reporting system.

Assessing the Needs and Design of a Processing Centre

In February 1971, the Committee of Presidents re-examined the matter of an application centre and appointed Herbert (“Herb”) Pettipiere, then Registrar of the University of Guelph, with the aid of an advisory committee provided by the OUCA, to assess the needs and design of a processing centre. Herb was given only two months to conduct his review and develop final recommendations, which built on the work of Gordon and the OUCA. Herb’s seminal report was presented on April 30, 1971, and it included the following summary statement:

“The climate for the establishment of a Centre during the two month period in writing this report has radically changed. The shroud of mystery on how many applicants are presently applying to universities, the meaning of the large increase in the applications being experienced and the question of whether we will have sufficient spaces for all qualified applicants surely must indicate the need for a Centre. The pressure to create an instant Centre must be resisted. It is essential that the Centre be properly designed and integrated with the various admission systems of the universities if we are to have an effective and efficient Centre. A hastily designed and implemented Centre will not serve anyone. The applicant, the universities, and the government can be assured that a properly established Centre controlled by the Registrars and admission officers will satisfy their needs in the admission of qualified applicants to Ontario Universities.”

The principles set out in this statement continue to guide the steady evolution of the OUAC today.

The OUAC is Approved

Following Herb’s report submission, much discussion took place, more suggestions were made, and feasibility questions arose. The outcome was a proposition that the processing centre begin operation for the 1972 admissions year. Though some university colleagues had reservations about the need for such a service agency, it was officially approved on June 4, 1971. Shortly after, Herb was appointed the Founding Director of the Ontario Universities’ Application Centre.

There are several speculations about how the Centre came to be located in Guelph. Herb’s

report made the following observations:

“The primary consideration for the location of the Centre is that it must have ready access to a service computer. Consideration was given to the use of an input device at the Centre but with updating of the file on a weekly basis and the cost of \$20,000 per year it was felt that during the first few years of operation it was not necessary. The Centre does not have to be readily accessible to the public so that it can be located outside of a metropolitan area. If possible the Centre should be located away from a university. The Centre ideally could be located in a low cost office rental area close to a computer centre.”

It is known that several locations in southern Ontario were considered, but it is believed that the location in Guelph was selected, in part, as a means to attract the very talented Herb away from the University of Guelph.

An integral part of the centre’s establishment was the importance placed upon it by the Minister of Colleges and Universities. Thus, during the admissions cycle of 1971-1972, the OUAC commenced operations.

The First Decade (1972-1982)

During the 1972-1973 admissions cycle, while Montreal was already beginning to prepare for the 1976 Summer Olympics, the OUAC became fully operative for the admission of applicants to full-time first-year university programs to Ontario universities...

The Faces of OUAC

Herbert (“Herb”) Pettipiere (Founding Executive Director, 1971-1989)

In 1949, Herb spent six months with Canada Packers doing cost of efficiency studies – his first industry job after receiving his Bachelor of Science in Agriculture degree. He then went to the Ontario Agricultural College (OAC) where he held the position of Assistant Dean of Men, and later, the Dean of Men.

By 1956, Herb became Registrar of the OAC. Six years later, Herb assumed the same position with the Federated Colleges, and by 1966, filled a dual role as registrar and senate secretary. From 1956 to 1962 as OAC registrar, Herb updated office administration and converted academic records to data processing, making the OAC the first institution of its kind in Ontario to make the move to computers. In 1964, Herb became registrar and secretary of senate for the newly developed University of Guelph and worked directly with the university president in planning and development.

When not in meetings or coordinating duties, Herb found time to relax with his wife and their three children, particularly at the family’s cottage. In 1971, Herb left the University of Guelph to help found the Ontario Universities’ Application Centre, where he remained until he retired in 1989.

Gerry Arthurs (Founding Assistant Director, 1971-1987)

While Herb was the Registrar at the University of Guelph, he hired Gerry. It is said that the two immediately got along. While Gerry worked in the Registrar’s Office he developed their first computer system. In 1971, Gerry followed Herb to the OUAC where he worked as the Assistance Director until his retirement in 1987. During his tenure, Gerry also set-up the OUAC’s first computer system and is said to have been very personable with the OUAC staff.

Gerry was a skilled engineer with a wife, Louise, and two children, Cathy and Steve. When he wasn't busy pioneering computer systems at work, Gerry and his family spent time at their cottage in Bala.

Richard (“Dick”) Riley (Manager of Data Systems, 1971-1993)

Dick joined the OUAC in 1971 where he continued to work for 22 years until his retirement. During his time at the OUAC, Dick held the position of Senior Systems Analyst and then Manager of Data Systems, and designed the OUAC's undergraduate, medical and teacher education application systems, as well as the OUAC's in-house accounting system.

Dick was also involved in the Association of Canadian Medical Colleges (ACMC) and attended meetings of the Medical Admissions Committee of the Council of Ontario Faculties of Medicine (MAC-COFM). Dick graduated from the University of Toronto with an Honours Bachelor of Applied Science and Civil Engineering degree, which he put to use with many projects. He was especially proud of his work on the Bay Street off-ramp from the Gardiner Expressway. He ensured his passengers were aware of his work during trips to the COU office.

Ronald (“Ron”) Scriver (Director of Operations, 1973-2005)

Ron joined the OUAC in 1973 where he continued to work for 32 years. During his time at the OUAC, Ron was a respected leader, known as the “real nice guy who always gets the job done as promised”. Ron had a great sense of humour and was often involved in practical jokes around the office.

On the professional side, Ron helped develop the Electronic Data Interchange (EDI) process and the early online application process. What he is most remembered for, however, is his close relationship with OUAC staff members and his effortless ability to motivate and inspire. Ron was a graduate of the University of Guelph where he received a Bachelor degree in Computer Science.

Ron passed away in 2005, after which a bursary was created in his name at his alma mater. The scholarship fund continues to grow steadily.

Staff

In the beginning, the number of full-time OUAC staff could practically be counted on one hand. There were about 10 to 15 full-time employees in 1972 and a handful of part-time employees.

The Technological Evolution

Student applications that were processed at the OUAC during the first decade consisted of five sheets of paper, each separated by carbon paper. Three copies were sent to the universities indicating the student's choices, one went to the student's high school (or was kept by the student), and one remained at the OUAC.

If legible, the carbon-copy applications were forwarded to the universities identified by the student. According to Herb, "by the time you got to the second or third carbon copy, more than 30 percent of them were beyond deciphering and had to be photocopied."

- In the 1970s, the OUAC did not have its own computer mainframe so staff utilized the one at the University of Guelph.
- The OUAC employed two in-house programmers who programmed in Mark IV programming language and utilized punch cards until the early 1980s.

Location, Location, Location

For the first few months of its operation, the OUAC was housed at the COU offices in Toronto. Shortly after, the organization moved to a 1,000 square foot space quietly "hidden" in the Omark Canada (now Blount Canada) manufacturing plant in Guelph as it didn't need to be accessible to the public. "There is not one university student in this province that has not heard of Guelph," Herb said in a 1982 newspaper article. And that's because the city's name was printed across the top of all university application forms.

In addition to being a convenient and central location (not just physically to Herb's house!), the OUAC's first location was also less expensive to operate than it would have been if the office been located in its own space in Toronto, as was the original plan.

Milestones

- Applicants from 1971-1973 paid a \$4.00 application fee, which in combination with a grant of \$65,000 from COU and a seed grant of \$150,000 from the Ontario government, funded the start up of the OUAC's operations. Since then, OUAC operations have been funded entirely by application fees.
- The OUAC is registered as a not-for-profit charitable agency, operating under the auspices of the COU. The activities of the OUAC are monitored by an Advisory Board, which includes representatives from all of the OUAC's user groups.
- The first admissions cycle for the Ontario Medical School Application Service's (OMSAS) took place in 1975.
- The first admissions cycle for the Ontario Teacher Education Application Service's (TEAS) took place in 1979.

The Second Decade (1982-1992)

In 1983, the metric system of weights and measures was officially adopted by the Government of Canada, and the essential job of processing applications at the OUAC was officially adopted by the universities – despite some initial apprehension when the system began in 1972...

The Faces of OUAC

Staff

During the second decade, the OUAC's full-time staff increased to about 20. As processing applications increased, the OUAC also employed the help of 120 part-time employees during the busy admissions cycle. Staff worked weekends to keep up with incoming applications and to cash cheques on time. OUAC employees lugged suitcases full of cheques to the bank before online payments became the norm.

The Technological Evolution

The early 1980s saw the advent of high-speed, high-volume photocopiers. Once applications reached the OUAC, the master copies went to the Xerox 8200 photocopier, where three copies of each form were made for the chosen universities. Then, the master copies went to the key punch operators who recorded the information in the OUAC's computer system.

- In 1983, the OUAC procured its own server – an IBM System/38, which at the time was “cutting edge”. Programmers used a programming language called RPG III.
- The OUAC upgraded again in 1988 to an IBM AS/400 model B35 (4.6 CPW). CPW is the measure of relative processing power.
- Since the OUAC didn't have its own internet connection at this point in time, data was saved to a tape drive, walked to the University of Guelph, put onto the university's internet connection and distributed via File Transfer Protocol over Onet.
- By 1991, the OUAC was connected to its own Onet (essentially, the internet) and upgraded to a D45 (6.5 CPW) model AS/400.

Location, Location, Location

During the second decade, the OUAC relocated to 90 Woodlawn Road, increasing in space from 1,000 square feet to 2,500 square feet. The OUAC remained there until 1989 when it had, once again, outgrown the building.

The OUAC later moved down the road to 650 Woodlawn Road to an 8,500 square foot building, which doubled to approximately 16,000 square feet while the OUAC was located there. This location also housed the OUAC's first meeting room, which allowed staff to host meetings with offsite members – something that previous office space didn't allow for.

Milestones

- In September 1991, the OUAC agreed to help produce and distribute INFO Magazine.
- During this decade, the first of many external OUAC groups were formed – the Committee on Admission Practices (CAP).
- The OUAC celebrated the anniversary of its 10th admissions cycle in 1982.

The Third Decade (1992-2002)

In 1992, the Goods and Services Tax came into effect in Canada, and at the OUAC, many new ventures came to fruition as the OUAC entered its 20th admissions cycle. The Toronto Blue Jays won back-to-back World Series, and the OUAC developed a logo.

In the 1995 Quebec referendum, citizens against a separation just barely won. At the same time, a review of the University Information Program (UIP) took place, questioning whether the program was still effective. The resulting fate was the same as Quebec's – the former would remain a part of the OUAC and the latter would remain a part of Canada. In 1997, the CTV News Channel began broadcasting; the same year the Ontario Universities' Fair was founded.

The Faces of OUAC

Gregory (“Greg”) Marcotte (Executive Director, 1989-2003)

Greg was appointed Executive Director of the OUAC on March 29, 1989. Prior to his time at the OUAC, Greg had worked in admissions since 1983, serving as Director of Admissions and Associate Registrar at the University of Ottawa, and Registrar and Secretary of Senate at Bishop's University in Lennoxville, Quebec.

During his tenure at the OUAC, Greg spearheaded many great successes. He took a leading role in promoting the OUAC and making it much more visible, both domestically and internationally, which included differentiating the OUAC with a distinctive logo. He was also the first bilingual director at the OUAC and helped mandate French service, which resulted in the OUAC becoming a fully bilingual organization. Greg is a graduate of Western University where he majored in Sociology. In 2003, Greg went on to serve as Director of Registrarial Services at the University of Windsor where he stayed until his retirement in 2012.

Staff

OUAC staff continued to grow throughout the third decade with the addition of middle management, and a publications coordinator and in-house translator (English/French). But the growing number of employees didn't deter from the small family atmosphere. Any excuse for food and fun was welcomed. An annual luncheon was held in June as a thank you to part-time staff after they finished work for the year. The large volume of data input could not be completed without the assistance of part-time staff.

The OUAC has always participated in fundraising efforts, including raising funds for the United Way through proceeds from chips and chocolate bar sales at the office. Since the OUAC was located far from corner stores, sales of such items have always been brisk.

The 1990s also saw the advent of celebrations and friendly competitions between the OUAC, the COU extended family and OCAS friends.

The Technological Evolution

- In 1993, the OUAC obtained its first file servers – Novell Netware and OS/2 server.
- Over the course of a weekend in 1995, the OUAC’s system was converted from AS/400 to 64-bit computing. This was also the year that the OUAC obtained its First Unix server and the OUAC website went live. The OUAC was the second organization in Guelph to have its own website (after the University of Guelph).
- Through the efforts of OURA, the Ontario universities developed a system whereby academic transcripts were exchanged electronically using Electronic Data Interchange (EDI) and the SPEEDE/ExPRESS standard – the Ontario Universities’ Electronic Transcript System (OUETS). The OUAC was asked to house and administer the OUETS on behalf of the universities. This also included a partnership with the Ontario colleges through a trading hub operated by OCAS.
- In 1997, the OUAC’s Referral Service went live on the web and became the first in-house web-based tool.
- The 105F web application for all other undergraduate applicants went live in 1998 with the 105D web application following in 1999.
- In 1999, the OUETS won the Postsecondary Electronic Standards Council “Best Practices Award”.
- In 2000, the TEAS online application went live with OMSAS following in 2001. The latter was the first high volume application at the OUAC.
- In 2001, the OUAC began to prepare for the upcoming double cohort year with a pilot among a handful of school boards across Ontario.
- In 2002, the OLSAS web application went live and the Ontario Secondary School Application went live for the double cohort – both with success!



Location, Location, Location

In 2001, over the Easter weekend, the OUAC moved to a new 25,000 square foot building at 170 Research Lane. The OUAC celebrated its Grand Opening on May 25, 2001. Those who have been to a meeting at the OUAC have likely heard the names of the OUAC's various meeting rooms, each named after a prominent person in the OUAC's history:

- Pettipiere Room – Named after Herbert W. Pettipiere, Founding Director 1971-1989.
- Arthurs Room – Named after Gerry Arthurs, Founding Assistant Director 1971-1987.
- Riley Room – Named after Richard Riley, Manager of Data Systems 1971-1993.
- Ron Scriver Conference Room – Named after Ronald W. Scriver, Director of Operations 1973-2005.

Milestones

- In 1992, an INFO Editorial Board (IEB) was formed to help guide the ongoing development of INFO Magazine and determine its content.
- For the 1992-1993 admissions cycle, the base application fee increased to \$50.00, representing the OUAC's new mandate to be a partial cost recovery agent for the universities.
- As a result of the 1995 review of the University Information Program (UIP), OURA established the Ontario Universities' Fair (OUF) in 1997 as a tool to help secondary school students gather information about universities in Ontario.
- The first admissions cycle for the Ontario Law School Application Service (OLSAS) took place in 1997.
- In 2000, the Ontario Rehabilitation Sciences Programs Application Service (ORPAS) began providing application processing services for applicants to the Ontario schools of rehabilitation sciences.

In 1992, the Ontario colleges opened their own application service in Guelph, called the Ontario College Application Service (OCAS). Shortly after OCAS' arrival, Guelph postal services began confusing OCAS with the OUAC and both operations began receiving large quantities of one another's mail, which is why Greg determined that a distinctive logo be placed on all OUAC printed materials to reduce post office confusion.

Four logo concepts were created for the OUAC. The logo that was chosen continues to be used today.

In addition to differentiating the OUAC from OCAS, the OUAC logo also represents:

- the processing and movement of information in an interactive manner;
- free and open space;
- a path (e.g., to higher education);
- a synthesis of ideas and information;
- open exchange of ideas and information;
- having a capacity for adaptive change;
- service;
- flowing knowledge;
- open communication channels;
- receiving and sending;
- individual movement;
- teamwork; and
- the circle represents the collective Ontario university system.

The Fourth Decade (2002-2012)

In 2003, Canada's first space telescope was launched, and in the smaller universe of the OUAC, many exciting endeavours were underway...

The Faces of OUAC

B. George Granger (Executive Director, 2003-present)

George joined the OUAC as the Executive Director in 2003. His career includes experience as a Trust Officer with The Canada Trust Company (now TD Canada Trust) followed by a move to the University of Guelph in 1980 where he worked as an Admissions Counsellor before moving on to Wilfrid Laurier University as Associate Registrar and Director of Admissions for 14 years. In 1995, George joined McMaster University as University Registrar.

George has maintained numerous professional affiliations throughout his career, including positions as past president of the Ontario University Registrars' Association; past member of the Ontario University Council on Admissions Executive Committee, and Chair of its Committee on Admissions Practices Committee; and past member of Educational Testing Services (Princeton, NJ) TOEFL Advisory Board. Raised in the Niagara region, George is an economics graduate from the University of Guelph.

Trudy Sykes (Director of Operations, 2005-present)

In 2005, Trudy joined the OUAC as the Director of Operations. She began her career at McGill University after graduating from Concordia University with an Honours BA in programming. Before arriving at the OUAC, Trudy spent 25 years at McMaster University where she first worked as a Systems Analyst and helped develop a new student records system. She went on to the Registrar's Office and continued her career as a Senior Associate Registrar, and, incidentally, became the principle user of the system she previously helped develop. Since coming to the OUAC, Trudy has introduced project management, business analysis, and quality assurance as part of the OUAC's strategic initiative to modernize many components of its business.

Staff

The OUAC now employs 60 full-time and approximately 10 part-time employees. As George says, “The OUAC’s most important asset is its staff. Our commitment to high quality service and results-oriented management can only be realized with the help of our committed and highly skilled employees.” Particularly, the OUAC is continually grateful to its part-time staff, who have played, and continue to play a valuable role in the OUAC’s success.

Food has continued to be a theme with many of OUAC’s milestone celebrations, of which there is more opportunity to celebrate since staff has steadily grown. Marriages, milestone birthdays, retirements, new babies and grandbabies are all celebrated at the OUAC; but staff also finds ways to celebrate on a daily basis. Fundraising efforts continue at the OUAC with a number of external charities. For instance, after Ron Scriver’s passing, the OUAC staff team pulled together to assist with fundraising efforts for the Ron Scriver Memorial Bursary. More recently, the team has held fundraisers to assist with the local Children’s Foundation of Guelph and Wellington (Adopt-a-Family program) during the month of December.

The Technological Evolution

- In 2003, the Review & Change option for online applications went live, making this aspect of applying much easier for both applicants and OUAC staff.
- In 2006, the OUAC rewrote web applications using our own framework in order to remove dependence on Websphere Commerce Suite.
- A disaster recovery site was established in 2006 at an Ontario university with plans to develop high availability back-up for critical systems.
- In 2010, the OUAC introduced a new telephone system with a telephone number exclusively for applicant inquiries.
- Work began in 2011 to re-develop applications in PHP (from RPG).
- In 2012, the three existing IBM POWER servers were 12,700 times more powerful than in 1988 at more than 58,000 CPW of processing power. The OUAC also has numerous Windows, Linux and VMware servers in addition to its IBM POWER servers.
- The OUAC maintains nearly 1.5 million lines of code that support applicant and reporting systems and more still with regards to eINFO and the Admissions and OUAC websites.

Location, Location, Location

Compared to the first meeting that was held in the OUAC's first meeting room during the second decade, the current Conference Room hosts so many meetings each year that Applicant Services had to initiate a new meeting request process to keep organized.

For instance, from April 1, 2010 to March 30, 2011, the OUAC's Conference Room hosted 68 meetings – 37 of which were for OUAC invitees only, 28 that included OUAC staff plus external guests, and 3 that were for external groups that needed the Conference Room space.

Milestones

- In 2002, the OUAC printed 128,443 kilograms worth of publications. In 2010, the OUAC printed only 10,544 kilograms.
- The OUAC celebrated the completion of its 30th admissions cycle in 2002.
- By 2003, all of the OUAC's divisions had online applications available and it began processing graduate study applications.
- In 2003, the OUAC's mission and values statements were created – derived from the COU strategic review of the OUAC, concluded in May 2003, and revised by the OUAC Advisory Board on May 29, 2009 and May 27, 2011.
- The online version of INFO Magazine (eINFO) went live in December 2005; a new version was launched in September 2006; and the site was redesigned in 2007.
- In 2010, the OUAC introduced its Green Committee to officially implement environmentally friendly endeavours, both internally and externally, though environmental initiatives have been entrenched in the OUAC's operations since the early 1990s.
- When the OUAC moved from paper to PDF documents in university distributions in 2011, approximately \$50,000 was saved in postage and delivery costs per year.
- In 2011, the OUAC began work on a number of accessibility policies and procedures in response to the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) standards.

The Future Evolution (2012 and beyond)

A corporate anniversary is as much about the future of an organization as it is about its past. As the OUAC embarks on another 40 plus years of success, it has evolved to establish more strategic planning. Some of the high-level goals include:

- Ensuring financial and organizational sustainability;
- maintaining operational excellence;
- promoting compliance standards;
- evolving a sustainable hardware/software infrastructure;
- modernizing business practices; and
- maintaining a healthy workplace.

Thank you for joining the OUAC's journey so far. Here's to the past, present and future of the Ontario Universities' Application Centre!