



Standing Committee on Student Recruitment (SCSR)

OURF Chair's Report

Date of Report: November 28, 2022

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2022 the Ontario Universities Regional Fairs' (OURF) returned to an in-person offerings for the first time since 2019. The 2022 OURF launched in a new format, delivering on an adaptation of a pilot initially proposed for the 2020 cycle. This pilot built on the strong foundation of previous years, which was 8 weeks and typically hosted in secondary schools (70+ events), to a model that aimed to offer fewer, larger events in central locations.

This pilot was adopted as it continued to provide access to Ontario's universities to most communities, while reducing the resource requirements on institutions.

The 2022 OURF pilot was a success, with some notable areas for improvement. We hosted 32 events across 5 weeks, welcomed over 12,500 guests, and safely navigated a return to in-person offerings. Some events were over capacity, and opportunities for improvement regarding venue selection, event promotion and logistics are noted in this report.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve as the OURF Chair. Working alongside our provincial and Ontario Universities' Application Centre (OUAC) colleagues has been extremely rewarding, and I am proud of the work we have accomplished together to support our students.

OURF EVENTS – BY THE NUMBERS:

		Attendance (approx.)	Data Collection	Data Collection Participation Rate
Northwestern Ontario				
Thunder Bay	6 – 8 p.m.	Numbers are not available, as we did not have volunteers as door counters for this region.	17	
Marathon	10:15 – 11:15 a.m.		1	
Red Rock	2 – 3 p.m.		0	
Dryden	10:30 – 11:30 a.m.		0	
Kenora	2 – 3 p.m.		3	
Fort Frances	10 – 11 a.m.		2	
Atikokan	2 – 3 p.m.		0	
Northeastern Ontario				
Espanola	10 - 11 a.m.	70	0	0%
Blind River	1 – 2 p.m.	38	3	7.9%
Sault Ste. Marie	6 – 8 p.m.	200	22	11%
Wawa	10 - 11 a.m.	35	0	0%
Chapleau	1 – 2 p.m.	20	0	0%
Timmins	6 – 8 p.m.	150	9	6%
Kirkland Lake	10 - 11 a.m.	50	0	0%



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New Liskeard	1 – 2 p.m.	36	0	0%
North Bay	6 – 8 p.m.	172	12	7%
Sturgeon Falls	1 – 2 p.m.	42	12	28.6%
Sudbury	6 – 8 p.m.	537	36	6.7%
Central Eastern Ontario				
Kingston	5 – 9 p.m.	550	180	32.7%
Peterborough	5 – 9 p.m.	950	150	15.8%
Parry Sound	4 – 8 p.m.	100	13	13%
Barrie	9 a.m. – 1 p.m.	1600	259	16.2%
Ottawa and Eastern Regions				
Renfrew	10 a.m. – 1 p.m.	225	27	12%
Kanata	6 – 9 p.m.	893	322	36.1%
Nepean	5 – 9 p.m.	695	187	26.9%
Ottawa	6 – 9 p.m.	525	245	46.7%
Cornwall	6 – 9 p.m.	250	34	13.6%
Southwestern Ontario				
St. Catharines	5 – 9 p.m.	1163	440	37.8%
Kitchener	5 – 9 p.m.	2104	914	43.4%
Kincardine	10 a.m. – 1 p.m.	126	23	18.3%
London	5 – 9 p.m.	1269	436	34.4%
Windsor	5 – 9 p.m.	528	160	30.3%

What We Learned

Locations and Travel

Overall

- Frequent expressions of appreciation that we visited these communities.
- Most events were very well attended across the province. Counsellors in Northern communities were thankful for the opportunities for their students.

Feedback, Suggestions and Things to Consider

- Consider adding Kapuskasing and Hearst back to Northwestern Ontario week.
- Add evening events for larger school boards in Northern weeks.
 - This year we relied on daytime events, which meant they were often only 1 hour, so nearby schools were less likely to bus students in.
- Consider adding francophone communities to the Ottawa and East Regions (i.e., Orleans, Vanier, Casselman, Hawkesbury).
 - This year we visited primarily anglophone communities, with the exception of Cornwall (which was hosted in an English-speaking high school).
- Parry Sound (Central Eastern Ontario) and Kincardine (Southwestern Ontario) were not well attended.
 - Could eliminate these events or select different communities moving forward.
- Bussing worked well in the Northern weeks for the most part (1 breakdown and 3 COVID cases).



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- Anecdotal feedback that travelling on the bus was preferred.
 - **Recommendation:** The GCSR consider a return to bus transportation for all weeks.
 - Pro:
 - Remove additional stress related to travel during an already busy week of events
 - Increased camaraderie among reps
 - Con:
 - Cost of bus rentals for all regions

Venues

Overall

- Venues generally served our purposes, but there were numerous challenges relating to the initial booking process and capacity issues.

Feedback, Suggestions and Things to Consider

- Barrie (Central Eastern Ontario).
 - The venue was too small, staff were not helpful and crowds were too large.
 - This was a daytime event and many local schools bussed students in, thinking it was equivalent to the OUF. This led to chaos – an unsafe environment, overcrowding, frustration over wait times and volume, and several other issues.
 - **Recommendation:**
 - This event needs to be booked in a larger venue in Barrie or the surrounding area (e.g., Nottawasaga Inn, Alliston). It may also be worth considering a longer event time or an additional offering (e.g., add an evening event).
- Kanata venue was too small for crowd size.
 - **Recommendation:**
 - This event needs to be booked in a larger venue in Kanata or surrounding area. It may also be worth considering a longer event time or additional offering (e.g., add an evening event).
- Booking a venue in the Ottawa area proved a challenge.
 - **Recommendation:**
 - The 2023 OURF team should aim to secure space in Ottawa in January/February at the latest for October events.
 - If larger venues cannot be secured, the GCSR should consider going back to high schools for the Ottawa and Eastern Regions week.
- Events hosted at universities (Trent and Windsor) worked very well.
 - These events received high praise from coordinators and reps for venue size, set-up, staff support, etc.
 - Some universities did express that they would like the opportunity to host for their region.
 - This requires further discussion amongst the GCSR to determine an equitable process moving forward.
- Some high school counsellors have reached out asking about hosting events at their high schools again in the future.



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Communications and Data Collection

Overall

- Large crowds indicate that people were aware that these events were happening – that's good! There were some gaps in understanding regarding the size, scale and scope of these events in some communities.

Feedback, Suggestions and Things to Consider

- Some confusion/miscommunication led to some attendees expecting the size and scale of these events to be the same as OUF, but hosted in their region, rather than smaller regional fairs.
 - **Recommendation:**
 - The GCSR should consider how to clarify the purpose of these events to set up realistic expectations for students, counsellors, etc.
- Communication with university representatives was a challenge because the non-Northern weeks were treated as standalone events. Some folks missed updates to locations, changes to timing, wanted more details around hotels/restaurants, etc.
 - **Recommendation:**
 - Clarified distribution lists and planning for these events. For example: Some regions created a Whatsapp group on their own during the week, which seemed to work well.
- Data collection via QR code worked well, but not a lot of uptake amongst attendees.
- Students appreciated not having to sign up at each table (and with the volume of people, that would not have been possible anyway).
- Events with big crowds saw higher data collection, likely due to longer wait times to enter.
 - **Recommendation:**
 - The GCSR should consider how we can further promote pre-registration for OURF and share the numbers with universities in advance.
 - May increase data collection
 - May allow university representatives to plan quantity of viewbooks needed (many indicated they ran out because the volume of people was higher than anticipated).

Planning Process Recommendations

Overall

- In general, those who provided feedback were happy with the OURF and the work that was done by coordinators, bus captains and the OUAC. Given this was a pilot year, some areas for improvement have been identified in this report to streamline the process and deliver a better experience for all involved in planning and implementation.

Feedback, Suggestions and Things to Consider

- Ensure volunteers are available at each venue to staff doors, count attendees, encourage data collection, etc.
 - Some locations had volunteers, while others relied on university representatives to take turns at the door – thank you to those who helped in this way!



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- Establish a “set-up required by” time for each event.
 - In some cases, crowds were lined up 30+ minutes early, but university representatives were not arriving until 5-10 minutes prior to the event start.
- Venue and date booking
 - Need to streamline the booking process to avoid the back-and-forth between coordinators, OURF Chair and the OUAC.
 - The OUAC has offered to book the venues based on recommendations and guidance from folks in the given regions, and I wholly support this concept.
 - Final decisions and reservations must be done earlier
 - In Ottawa, for example, it was specifically mentioned that venues need to be booked early in the new year to secure the space.
 - I recommend we select a shortlist of venues for the subsequent year in December/January. This will allow the outgoing executive (with recent experience in these spaces) to make informed decisions, rather than the new team attempting to action this in February-April.
- Implement a process for reporting concerns about the OURF, university representative conduct, etc., and escalating those concerns to the appropriate manager, etc.

Additional Considerations

- Avoid booking OURF/OUIS events on the same night.
 - Additionally, be mindful of busy Postsecondary Information Event (PIE) weeks, if possible.
- Book 5-day Northern weeks.
 - The Northwestern Ontario region was only 4 days because of the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation and the OUF, which made scheduling across a large area of the province a challenge.
- Many universities sent multiple representatives to handle large crowds, and this was recommended by a number of people in the feedback.
 - Recognizing this may not be possible given staffing considerations at individual institutions, it is worth determining how we can disperse the crowds, reduce wait times, etc.
- Consider hosting 2 events (perhaps a daytime and evening) in the same venue for high-volume locations.

Sincerely,
Courtney Keogh -- OURF Chair, Standing Committee on Student Recruitment