INTRODUCTION

In terms of overall access to post-secondary education, Canada leads by international standards. According to recent statistics from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), almost half of Canada’s working age population aged 25-64 has completed a college or university education. Amongst the population aged 25-34, 56% of individuals have completed a college or university program (OECD, 2009). Recent studies of youth transition in Canada suggest that upwards of 75% of the country’s youth participate in some form of tertiary education within the first two to four years of completing high school (Malatest & Associates, 2007; Shaiken, Eisl-Culkin, & Bussière, 2006).

Given the economic benefits of a more highly educated populace and significant investments of public funds in post-secondary institutions and programs, a great deal of research effort has been directed toward uncovering attributes and factors associated with youth transition and successful progression through post-secondary studies. One branch of this body of transition research has focused on the factors which influence high school students’...
career paths and their choices of programs and institutions. Another major branch of youth
transition research has examined factors that impact students’ continuation in post-secondary
studies from one year to the next, ultimately to successful completion of a program. Models of
post-secondary choice and student retention that span the educational transition continuum
have tended to consider the influences of similar student characteristics and contextual factors.

Post-Secondary Choice and Participation

Considerable study has been given to high
school students’ post-secondary education
choices (Lapan, Tucker, & Kim, 2003). This
body of research has been directed toward gain-
ing a better understanding of how students make
decisions about their post-secondary education
opportunities. Some of the more important
influencing factors include gender, student
academic ability, expectations and educational
attainment of parents, race and ethnicity, and
socio-economic status (Malatest & Associates,
2007; Sweet & Anisef, 2005).

Choice and Participation Models

A number of conceptual models have been
devised to explain the stages in students’ post-
secondary education decision-making (Hossler,
Braxton, & Coopersmith, 1989; Hossler &
Gallagher, 1987). A frequently cited model
developed by Hossler and Gallagher (1987)
identified three stages in post-secondary choice
decisions: a) predisposition, b) search, and c)
choice. In the first stage, grade school students
decide to investigate the possibility of enrolling
in a post-secondary program following high school. During the search stage, in which
parents often play an influential role, students
refine their options, develop preferences, and
consider their qualifications for admission to
a particular post-secondary program as well as
their options for covering the costs associated
with the program. In the final stage, a variety
of social and economic factors influence the
choice of institution and program.

Differences in post-secondary participation
behaviours between youths of differing socio-economic backgrounds have also been
accounted for using the theories of social re-
production. The notion of habitus, defined as “a
system of durable, transposable dispositions”
which predisposes individuals to think and act
in particular ways is highly relevant to student
academic intentions and ambitions (Bourdieu,
1979). One’s habitus is a product of individual
and collective past experiences, shaped over
time across contexts and circumstances. For
students who are approaching high school
graduation and considering their career options,
the disposition toward or against choosing to
study at the post-secondary level is a product
of their social class, values, culture, and iden-
tity. The formation of habitus is also closely
associated with the concept of social capital.
Social capital, as represented by Bourdieu
(1979, 1986), facilitates the transaction and
transmission of information among individu-
als through their relationships and increases
one’s ability to advance her or his interests. It
is suggested that individuals who have access
to information about post-secondary education
through their social networks are more likely
to be at an advantage in accessing information
and attitudes relevant to making decisions about
post-secondary options.

Factors Influencing Choice and Participation

Unsurprisingly, strong academic performance
in high school is a significant predictor of
participation in post-secondary education, es-
pecially in university programs which require
higher grades for admission (Educational Policy
Institute, 2008; Malatest & Associates, 2007;
Parkin & Baldwin, 2009). In Canada, as in
other Western industrialized nations, there are
notable differences between the post-secondary
education participation of male and female
youth. While the university participation rates
of females and males were nearly equal in
Canada in the late 1970s, female students now
account for approximately 58% of university
On-Demand E-Learning Content Delivery Over the Internet
www.igi-global.com/article/demand-learning-content-delivery-over/1669?camid=4v1a

eCampusAlberta: A Story of Strategic Partnership and Collaboration Success in Distance Education
www.igi-global.com/chapter/ecampusalberta-story-strategic-partnership-collaboration/75648?camid=4v1a