

# Recruitment Review Trent University



Arthur Stephen  
January 2015

## In Memoriam

This project was initiated through a friendship and professional appreciation between Leo Groarke and Arthur Stephen, who for many years were colleagues at Wilfrid Laurier University.

Leo's career took him from the classroom to the administrative ranks and when he became the President of Trent University, he turned to his friend, Arthur, for his thoughts on the recruitment activities at Trent.

Arthur Stephen, after retiring from Wilfrid Laurier, linked up with his life-long friend, Douglas Geddie, who for many years operated a marketing, design and consulting firm, with expertise with higher education clients. Arthur became the head of consulting.

Arthur and Doug worked on a report for Trent that Arthur delivered to President Groarke on Friday, January 10, 2015. On Saturday, January 11, suddenly and tragically, Arthur died of a massive heart-attack.

The final conversations between Leo and Arthur are reflected in this final version of the report and were completed by Doug Geddie.

Arthur will always be known for his lifetime achievements in university advancement. His passion was statistics, and Arthur became well recognized for his abilities in interpreting application data. He was also widely recognized for his work in university rankings, and became adept at interpreting, analyzing and bettering a school's rankings.

Everyone who knew Arthur will miss his gentle manner and insightful analysis. This report is dedicated to him and it reflects the delight he received by analyzing and interpreting the Trent facts for the betterment of that University.

DJG

## Objective

Through a number of site visits to the University and interviews with key personnel, conduct a review of Trent's recent enrolment data and current student recruitment activities.

Upon completion of site visits, interviews and data analysis, provide the University with a comprehensive list of recommendations designed to increase the number of prospective students applying to Trent University.

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# Recruitment Review Trent University

By Arthur Stephen

## Executive Summary

Counsel began the review by examining recent student recruitment data, assessing student recruitment communications and meeting with key personnel in recruitment and admissions. Counsel also reviewed a wider portfolio of communications that play a part in projecting Trent's image and reputation to wider audiences in Ontario and across Canada.

## Enrolment Management Data

After reviewing application data over the last few years, Counsel was struck by how well Trent had out-performed the Ontario system. Increases in first choice applications to Trent were the second highest in the province behind McMaster University and ahead of the University of Waterloo. (Appendix 1)

Trent's application record over the last five years also demonstrated increases well ahead of most Ontario universities. First choice applications between 2008 and 2014 increased by 20% placing Trent in fifth position among Ontario's 18 universities. (Appendix 2) In that same period 11 Ontario universities had single digit increases or significant decreases in first choice applications.

Increases in Trent's undergraduate enrolments in recent years however are not commensurate with the application increases. Over the last seven years Trent is the only university in Ontario with a decrease in fulltime undergraduate students. (Appendix 3) And in making a 10 year analysis, Trent has the second lowest percentage growth increase in Ontario. (Appendix 4)

Retention rates are a major factor inhibiting enrolment growth at Trent. For the last decade Trent's first year attrition rates are among the highest in Ontario. The cumulative impact of a 17% attrition rate in a four-year cycle is the most significant factor affecting Trent's enrolment and finances. Over the last four years Trent's first year attrition rates decreased enrolment by 1200 students. Senior student attrition rates are also a major concern.

## Recruitment and Admissions Outreach

Counsel met with all the key players in Recruitment and Admissions to review current practices with prospective students and applicants. It is Counsel's opinion that

significant improvements have taken place over the last three years in how Trent executes its student recruitment program.

There has been steady growth in the number of recruiting visits to Ontario high schools. Prospective student and applicant communication programs are more sophisticated than in previous years. The systemic approach of applicant correspondence and offers of admission linked to the Student Information System did not exist four years ago. The leadership team is motivated, dedicated and professional. They are also aware there is further room for improvement.

The upsurge in first choice applications to Trent over the last six years has certainly been aided by the increases in Science and Nursing applications in the province. Part of Trent's recent application success is also a result of improvements in the execution of the student recruitment program. (Appendix 2)

It is also unlikely that the recent increases in applications to Trent will continue. High School demographics and more intensive competition among universities will make it even more difficult to maintain Trent's current niche in the Ontario system.

## Student Recruitment Communications

Counsel reviewed all major publications directed at prospective students for both campuses. This review included the viewbook, faculty specific brochures, as well as correspondence and other publications sent to prospective students and applicants.

The recruitment publications reviewed by counsel are of a high standard. Design and photography are first rate. The collection also benefits from having a coordinated look that advances the overall institutional identity of the University. This coordination also extends to the look and feel of the first tier of pages of Trent's website.

The most pressing issue for 2015 publications is reviewing the overall messaging in recruitment publications. Counsel recommends more emphasis on the unique aspects of a Trent education. As a primarily undergraduate university with few professional programs most Ontario high school students do not have a clear picture of Trent's programs and outstanding features. Greater emphasis on student profiles and why they chose Trent can focus prospective students on the University's special attributes.

Counsel would go further and suggest that reaching consensus internally on the three key messages that should dominate all Trent recruitment communications should be a priority for the 2015/2016 recruitment cycle. Giving prospective students a clearer picture of what makes Trent different, and how its key attributes especially benefit undergraduate students will go a long way to increasing applications and admission standards.

## Student Infrastructure Support

Trent University is the only university in southern Ontario without significant development adjacent to its campus. Businesses and facilities that cater to student needs surround all of Trent's competitors. This is long-range issue for the University involving town and gown. On campus the recent decision by the Board of Governors to approve a Student Centre for 2017 will be a welcome addition to student life. A Student Centre can play an important role in attracting and retaining students.

## Trent Positioning Strategies

The Department of Marketing and Communications was not the primary focus of this review however their work positioning Trent has a profound effect on student recruitment. Their overall positioning strategies and communication initiatives provide a large part of the context in which student recruitment operates.

Counsel therefore conducted an extensive review of communication initiatives beyond those targeted at prospective students. This included ad campaigns, alumni communications, a series highlighting research and an accountability report to the community. Again Counsel found these publications to be of a very high standard. They are comparable to the best work being done in Ontario university communications.

Counsel also reviewed the Department's report on Reputation Management. This is an excellent document asking the right questions. There are significant positive comparisons in the document detailing student satisfaction results in NSSE, CUSC and Maclean's. It would be dangerous however to read too much into these rankings. Smaller universities in NSSE and CUSC rankings always outperform larger institutions when measuring student satisfaction.

Trent out-performs Ontario in first year student responses to the question, "Starting over would you go to the same institution?" These responses do not align with having one of the highest attrition rates in the Province.

A pointed observation is Strategic Counsel's conclusion that among business leaders, "The findings show that awareness and familiarity are critical to perceptions of reputation, and that Trent's low profile accounts for subdued impressions of its reputation."

With the above caveats to interpreting results, there is much to recommend in this document. It also demonstrates a proactive approach to reputation enhancement by the leadership in Marketing and Communications.

Going forward Counsel concurs with the decision to realign Marketing and Communications and with Student Recruitment and Admissions. In the larger strategic picture the opportunity to integrate positioning with recruitment initiatives will strengthen Trent's enrolment management objectives.

# Interviews

Counsel had the opportunity to meet with the following Trent staff. I thank them for their assistance time and candor.

- Leo Groarke, President and Vice Chancellor
- Gary Boire, Vice President Academic and Provost
- Michelle Wilson, Associate Vice President Financial Services
- Julie Davis, Vice President External Relations & Advancement
- Joe Muldoon, Head, Trent University Durham Campus
- Marilyn Burns, Executive Director Marketing & Communications, Recruitment & Admissions.
- Mellissa Joseph Hill, Director Recruitment & Admissions
- Sasha Trivett, Manager, Recruitment
- Tracy Al-idrissi, University Registrar
- Kevin Whitmore, Manager Admissions
- Kent Stringham, Director, Institutional Research
- Kate Ingram, Government & Community Relations
- Nona Robinson, Associate Vice President Students
- Jacquie Muldoon, Dean of Education and Professional Learning
- Holger Hintelman, Dean of Science
- Kristen Woodend, Dean of Nursing
- Bruce Cater, Dean of Social Sciences
- Hugh Elton, Dean of Humanities
- Ray Dart, Director & Associate Professor Business Administration
- Torben Drewes, Professor Economics
- Mark Parnis, Professor and Chair of Chemistry
- Adam Hopkins, Acting Director of First Peoples House of Learning

Counsel also reviewed the following documents

- Office Of Recruitment and Admissions Strategic Plan 2012 to 2015
- External Relations and Advancement Operating Plan 2014/2015
- Reputation Management Framework, May 2014
- Review of the Trent International Program, January 2014
- Trent Varsity Sports External Review 2013
- The Strategic Counsel Report to Trent University 2013

Counsel would be remiss in not acknowledging the considerable support received from the Office of Institutional Research at Trent throughout the review.

# Recommendations

## Reputation Initiatives

There is a clear disconnect between how well Trent performs in various magazine ranking exercises against peer institutions, and how well that translates into reputation rankings. Even when comparing results in faculty research, faculty awards, student awards, scholarships and student services against comprehensive research universities Trent scores in the upper tier.

When these same institutions are ranked by reputation however Trent finishes 15 out of 16 universities. (Appendix 5)

Trent's reputation rankings have fallen significantly over the last decade. The reputation slide is currently impacting student recruitment and if it continues Trent's overall position in the rankings is at risk. This becomes a self-prophesizing circle that can only worsen Trent's position with prospective students. The reputation score in Maclean's is the largest single factor in the ranking exercise worth 20% of your final score. (Appendix 6)

### 1. Execute Reputation Enhancement Initiatives to Influence Maclean's

Maclean's is by far the most important media influence on Canadian university reputations. Whether you agree or disagree philosophically with ranking universities it is influential. Like US News and World Report in the United States and the Times of London in the UK it is the publication of record in this sphere in Canada. Its shelf life and influence dwarfs the Globe and Mail Report on Canadian universities.

In 2015 execute strategically linked communication initiatives focused on the key influencers to Maclean's reputation scores. Target Canadian Academics, Corporate CEO's. Corporate Recruiters and Guidance Counsellors. These initiatives should be timed to coincide with Maclean's outreach to these individuals.

### 2. Participate Annually in CUSC and NSSE

Always participate in the satisfaction studies run by CUSC and NSSE. Trent student satisfaction responses are always high and each year you ensure positive coverage in Maclean's University issue and the follow up winter issue highlighting student satisfaction responses.

### 3. Trent Family Communications

Through internal and external communication vehicles target current Trent students and alumni reinforcing positive attributes of a Trent education. Make sure the positive CUSC and NSSE responses are highlighted.

## Curriculum Development Initiatives

Curriculum development is the key to almost every recruitment success story at individual Ontario universities over the last 30 years. Arguably this is an area where Trent has not excelled. Curriculum initiatives started or planned for Trent Durham however are exceptionally strong. The University needs to concentrate on curriculum innovation on the main campus. Given the current demographic projections facing Ontario it is time for bold decision making.

### 1. Launch a Review of Existing Programs in Social Science, Humanities and Sciences with Trent's Academic Leaders

Begin a review of existing undergraduate programs at Trent with a view to possible realignments and repackaging of Trent offerings to prospective students. This initiative will only be successful if it truly has the support of academic leadership. Early in 2015 host a retreat with the Deans, Chairs and Vice President Academic on Trent's challenges in enrolment management. Begin with a balanced context to the current situation and engage leadership in possible solutions.

While there are potential clusters in Health and Life Sciences, Physics Math and Computing, Pre Law and Pre Med, Management the Environment and Communications, these suggestions should not be the starting point of the debate. The initial discussions need to concentrate on broad strategies going forward. You will need more than one retreat to reach consensus on the broader strategic initiatives Trent should embrace. At this point a smaller representative task force should be formed to move the debate forward and report back to the larger group and eventually the University Senate.

### 2. Reposition the Business and Economics Programs at Trent

While Trent has offered Business for 20 years it lacks depth and is not competitive with other programs in Ontario. Recently Accounting has been upgraded to offer all the relevant courses for students aspiring to complete the Institute of Chartered Accountants program. With additional resources added to the Finance area, Trent should consider repositioning Business and Economics within the academic hierarchy of the University. This repositioning tells prospective students you are taking these disciplines seriously. It is not a threat to the historical or current ethos of the University.

It is however the most significant curriculum change you can make to increase overall enrolment at Trent between 2015 and 2021

### 3. Emphasize Joint Programs with Business and Economics

The unique aspects of the current programs in Business and Economics should be maintained. Design programs that still enable students to complete double degrees in other disciplines. This would be a key point of difference for Trent Business and Economics. For students choosing a double major they would need to have more flexibility in electives. A full court press in this initiative has the potential to also increase majors throughout Social Science, Humanities and the Sciences. It also speaks to Trent's long history in encouraging interdisciplinary studies.

## Recruitment Department Initiatives

### 1. School Visit Outreach Strategies

Consider raising the bar even further in the GTA by a further increase in visits to this region. The current target of 182 planned visits should be raised to well in excess of 200.

Trent registered only 186 students from the 18,600 metro Toronto students who confirmed with Ontario universities in the last year. Assign an extra Liaison Officer who preferably lives in Toronto and only visits GTA schools. Find high performing first or second year students from the GTA to return to their high schools as Trent Ambassadors. (Appendix 7)

A concerted effort in the GTA has the most potential to raise applications and confirmations to Trent over the next five years. It is also the most cost effective way to increase enrolments.  
(Appendix 8)

### 2. Review International Recruitment at Trent

Review Trent's international outreach program to ascertain why there has been a recent drop from 6.3% to 3.9% among first year international students on the campus. The above figures relate to 2011 through 2013 and it may have recovered in 2014. Review the targets for 2015 and 2016 and also examine the retention rates for international students. The drop in international students between 2011 and 2013 are not in line with enrolments of international students at other Ontario universities. (Appendix 9)

### 3. Cross Canada Recruitment

Trent's confirmations from other Canadian Provinces are extremely low (1.0%). Strong efforts in this arena would be prohibitively expensive and the potential yield would be insignificant. This arena does play into reputation however.

Trent should consider identifying key Alumni across Canada to represent the University at Education Fairs. An alliance between Liaison and Alumni Affairs could play a part in shared costs for visits to major population centres in Western and Eastern Canada to visit Alumni and visit key schools.

### 4. First Nations Recruitment

Historically Trent is a major player in Ontario in Native Studies and in attracting first nation students. It is probably timely to review activities in this area and reassess programming and outreach activities including targets for 2015/2021.

### 5. Open Houses

Trent should review its approach to open houses with an aim to maximizing their effectiveness.

In particular, it should try to schedule Open Houses on a weekday so that students and parents have the opportunity to interact with faculty and students during class times.

Current Zap banners for programs are out of date and need to be upgraded.

Open Houses should be scheduled in a way that displays the campus in the best possible way (with regard to issues like weather), and plans should be made for alternative days with enhanced tours for those who can't make the main Open House day.

# 2015 Trent Classroom Recruitment Presentations 2015

## 1. Internal Recruitment Market Research

Complete focus group studies with prospective high school students to assess the current strengths and weaknesses of Trent's current recruitment vehicles.

Emphasis should be on the Viewbook, the website and the current ad campaign. This initiative should be conducted anonymously with the assistance of guidance counsellors and involve six to 10 schools. Ideally it should be completed before the end of February and involve over 100 students. This research should provide the basis for tweaks or major changes to Trent's major recruitment communications.

It would also be useful to repeat this exercise in June with a smaller number of schools to assess the Applicant Communications flow from December through June.

## 2. Viewbook Classroom Synergies

The 2015 Trent Viewbook should be reviewed to strategically link its content and page plan to the needs of the liaison officer in the classroom. The current Viewbook is professionally well executed, however it could be improved if its content is more closely linked to strategic objectives of the classroom presentation.

## 3. Trent Profiles in Recruitment

While there are many excellent profiles in current Trent recruitment materials it would be helpful to review these as a group and increase the ratio of Trent narratives throughout the communications portfolio. Are the current profiles reinforcing key recruitment messages going forward?

## 4. Multi Media Classroom Presentation.

While counsel saw an outdated media presentation during the review it would appear there is still room for improvement in this area. This is an important area to assess and improve for the 2015 recruitment cycle.

The multi-media presentation should also be linked to the Viewbook and the objectives of the Liaison Officer in the classroom. This is important not only for the Toronto Fair but also for the hundreds of school presentations done each year. If done well it improves the morale of the Liaison team.

More importantly the current YouTube generation of prospective students are visually sophisticated and expect universities to meet their expectations. Many of Trent's competitors in the University sector and the College system are already meeting these expectations.

## Retention Initiatives

Trent's first year retention rates are among the lowest in Ontario (82.8%). (Appendix 10)

Counsel is aware that there is a committee currently looking into this issue. At present there does not seem to be reliable data on why students are leaving. This study should be an absolute priority in assessing enrolment challenges for Trent going forward.

Along with curriculum changes and enhanced efforts in the GTA this area can also profoundly improve Trent's enrolment prospects over the next 5 years.

### 1. Internal Market Research on Trent Retention

Working with Student Services develop a friendly questionnaire to send to students who left Trent over the past three years. It should be no more than two pages with multiple-choice answers leaving space for the student to describe their reasons for transferring or dropping out. The survey can be a combination of mail/online depending on contact information. To be useful the response target needs to be over 50 students.

### 2. Upper Year Retention Rates

Compounding first year attrition losses Trent also suffers from low retention rates among upper year students. Many major programs are still losing 18% of their students at the end of second and third year. A recent internal study shows attrition rates for second year students in Psychology, History, Anthropology, Biology, Sociology and Cultural Studies averaged 22%. Counsel recommends that equal attention be focused on upper year attrition research and possible initiatives to retain more senior students.

### 3. Review Counsellor Resources

At present the two campuses have five counsellors for 7,000 students. Is this comparable with peer institutions? Is it possible additional counselling resources could impact retention rates?

Attrition rates at Trent are higher for students who have not declared a major in first year. Trent has a very high proportion of first year students who are undeclared. Launch a counselling initiative to have staff meet with undeclared students before the

end of the fall term to proactively assess their progress and intentions for the following year.

Early intervention with undeclared students has the potential to lower attrition rates. Like the drop out surveys it has to be accomplished with a low-key, helpful approach.

#### 4. Review First Year Classes

This is a sensitive area, however a review of who teaches first year classes has occurred at many Ontario universities. Review which programs have the highest attrition rates. Who is teaching the largest first year classes? Counsel suspects the relevant committee is already addressing these issues.

#### 5. Career Services

Today's students are looking for programs that will allow them to enter the workforce. This makes Career Services (placements, co-op arrangements, and career advising) a key component of any university.

Trent is under-developed in this regard and should review Career Services and establish a plan to increase its activity and visibility on all fronts.

#### 6. Student Fees

Under the auspices of the AVP of Student Services (currently Nona Robinson), Trent should survey student fees across the province to see if its student fees are in line with what students pay at other universities.

# Trent-Durham Initiatives

The challenge to double the Trent-Durham campus over the next few years will not be easy. While the population growth in this area will be significant, the lack of mature campus facilities will make it difficult to attract traditional grade 12 students.

The key will be geographic convenience and curriculum innovation. Counsel commends the current strategy of expanding articulation agreements with Community Colleges and targeting transfers from other Universities.

The curriculum planning is bold with new programs in Social Work and Media Studies, Environmental Health, and Child and Youth Studies. The planned Certificate Programs in Management, Entrepreneurship and Industrial Psychology can also appeal to a wide spectrum of students. In combination with the current Business program the new programs in the planning cycle have the potential to double enrolment at Trent-Durham by 2020.

## 1. Fulltime Trent-Durham Liaison Officer

Assign a Liaison Officer to Trent-Durham reporting jointly to Joe Muldoon and Melissa Joseph Hill. Both individuals should share in the hiring responsibility and performance reviews. The direct line responsibility should be to the Trent Recruitment Office.

## 2. Trent-Durham Publications Portfolio

The current brochure on Trent-Durham is first class in design, content and photography.

Counsel recommends however a more substantial recruitment piece be produced before the 2015 Toronto Fair. While the campus is not mature enough for a separate viewbook it would benefit from a mini viewbook approach. The objective would be to expand the academic areas of the brochure.

Add more profiles on Trent Durham students and professors. Expand the academic areas with abbreviated course descriptions. Change the use of "Why Trent" to "Why Trent-Durham". In the absence of a full campus infrastructure a more substantial recruitment piece would provide the image and vision of where Trent Durham is going with a section on Trent-Durham 2020. A more substantial recruiting piece can also influence more students to take Trent-Durham seriously.

## 3. Trent-Durham Toronto Fair 2015

For the 2015 Toronto Fair there should be a significant visible presence of Trent-Durham within the Trent display. Guelph-Humber and Laurier-Brantford are excellent

models to follow and the recruitment team should also explore other ways to differentiate Trent-Durham at the Fair. The curriculum plans for Trent-Durham are bold and these should be prominently displayed at the Fair.

**Appendix 1**

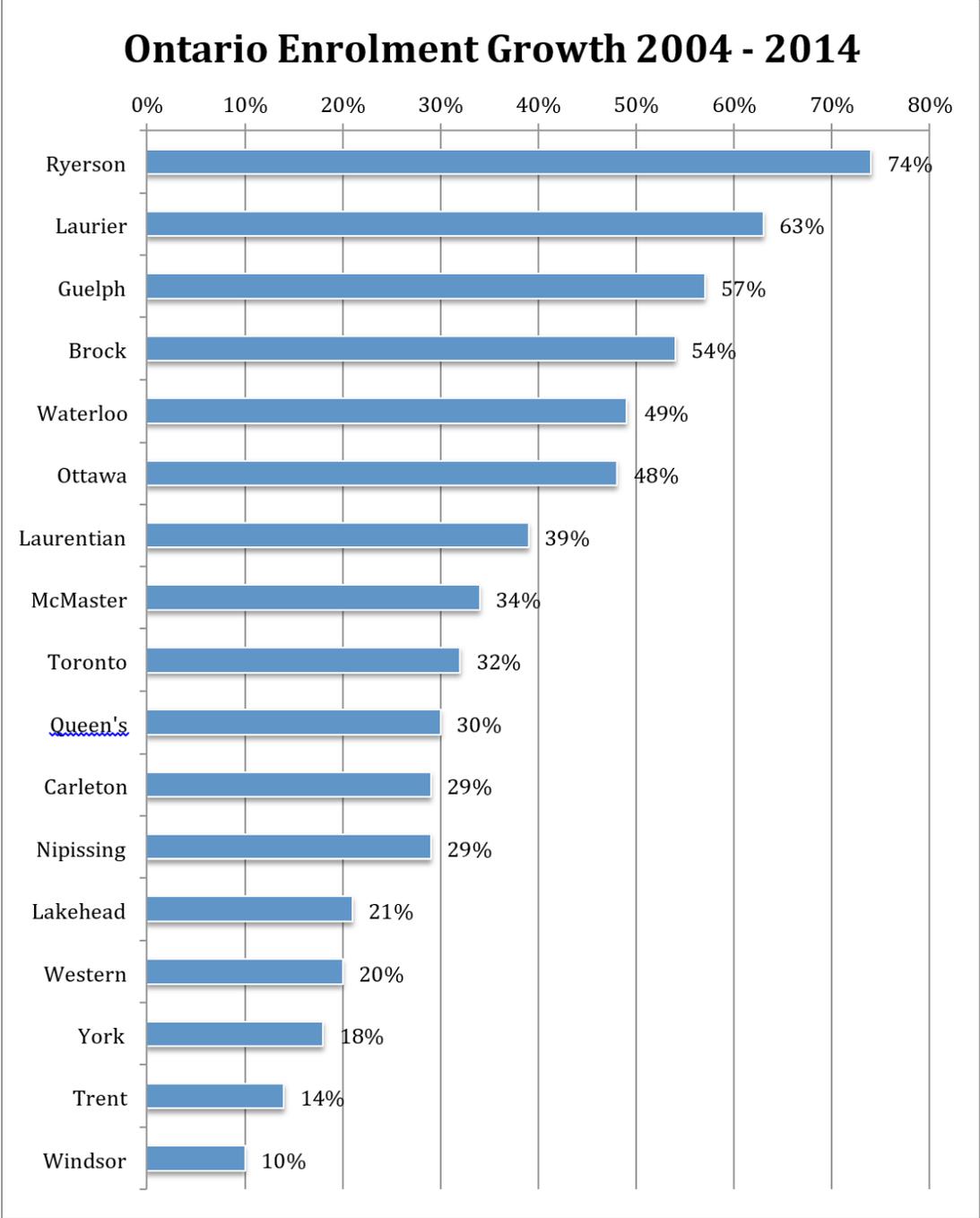
**Ontario Universities First-Choice Applications 2013--2014**

McMaster	+2.1%
Trent	+1.9%
Waterloo	+1.8%
York	+1.2%
Brock	-1.1%
Ryerson	-2.5%
Toronto	-2.8%
Laurentian	-3.7%
Carleton	-5.1%
Queen's	-5.5%
Western	-6.9%
Guelph	-7.6%
Ottawa	-7.8%
UOIT	-8.1%
Lakehead	-9.3%
Windsor	-9.6%
Nipissing	-10.9%
Laurier	-11.3%

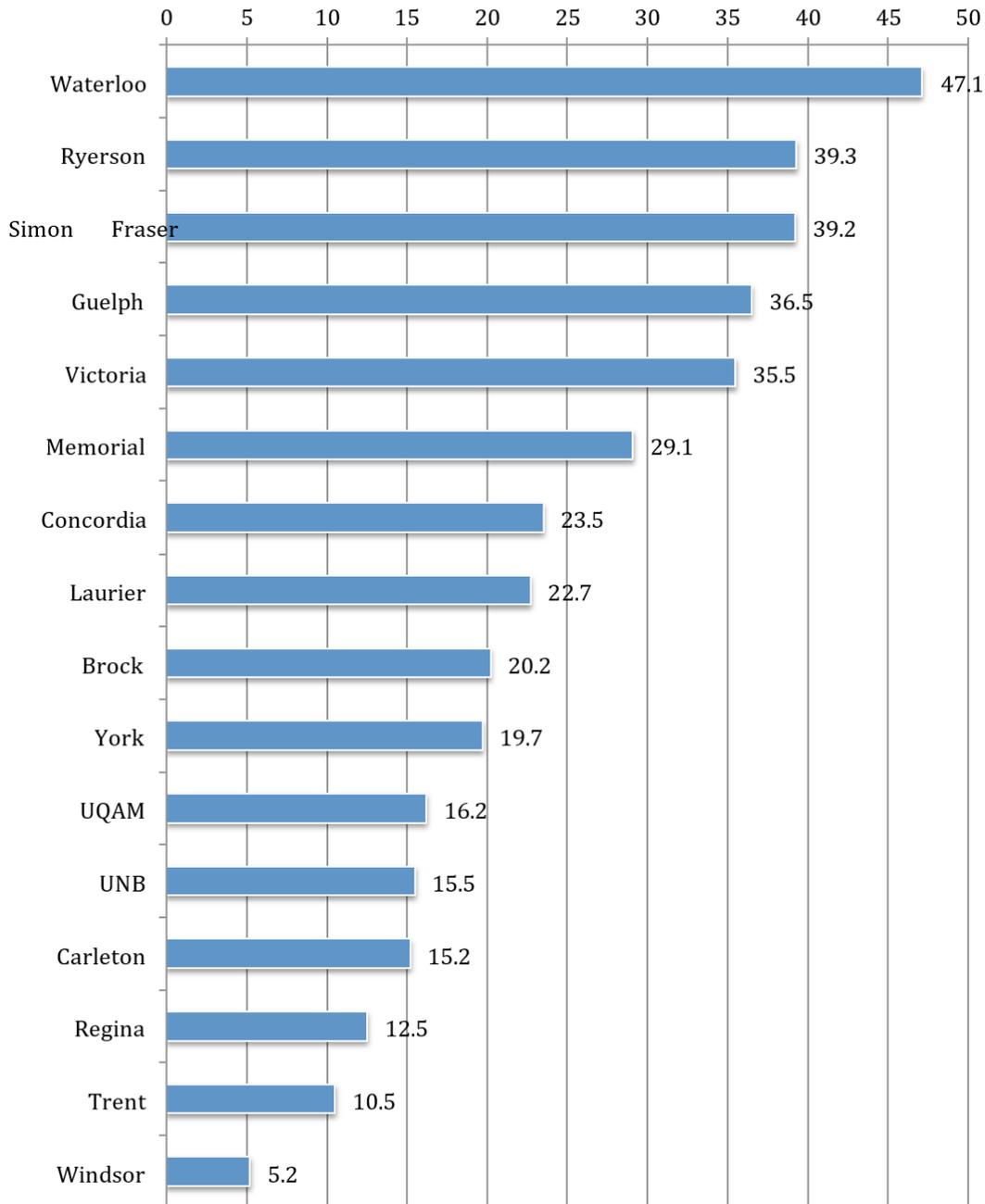
<b>Ontario Universities First-Choice Applications 2008–2014</b>
UOIT +26%
McMaster +23%
Ryerson +22%
Guelph +21%
Trent +20%
Toronto +16%
Waterloo +10%
Ottawa +9%
Windsor +8%
Laurentian +6%
Queen's +3%
Carleton +0%
Lakehead -2%
Brock -5%
Western -6%
York -17%
Laurier -21%
Nipissing -24%

Appendix 3

<b>Ontario Universities Full-time Enrolments, 2007 – 2014</b>				
	2007		2014	% Change
Guelph	17,183		24,981	+45%
Ryerson	16,730		22,420	+34%
Waterloo	24,396		32,239	+32%
Laurier	12,467		16,206	+29%
Ottawa	27,694		35,700	+28.9%
Queen's	17,161		21,049	+22.6%
Lakehead	6,093		7,100	+16.55%
McMaster	21,231		24,456	15.1%
Carleton	19,176		22,016	+14.8%
Toronto	63,819		73,061	+14.1%
Brock	14,208		15,582	+11%
Nipissing	3,6335		3,979	+9.4%
Western	30,197		32,712	+8.3%
York	42,468		45,164	+6.3%
Laurentian	6,495		6,682	+2.7%
Windsor	13,496		13,708	+1.5%
Trent	6,910		6,825	-1.2%



## Maclean's Reputation Rankings 2014



Maclean's 2014 APPENDIX 5

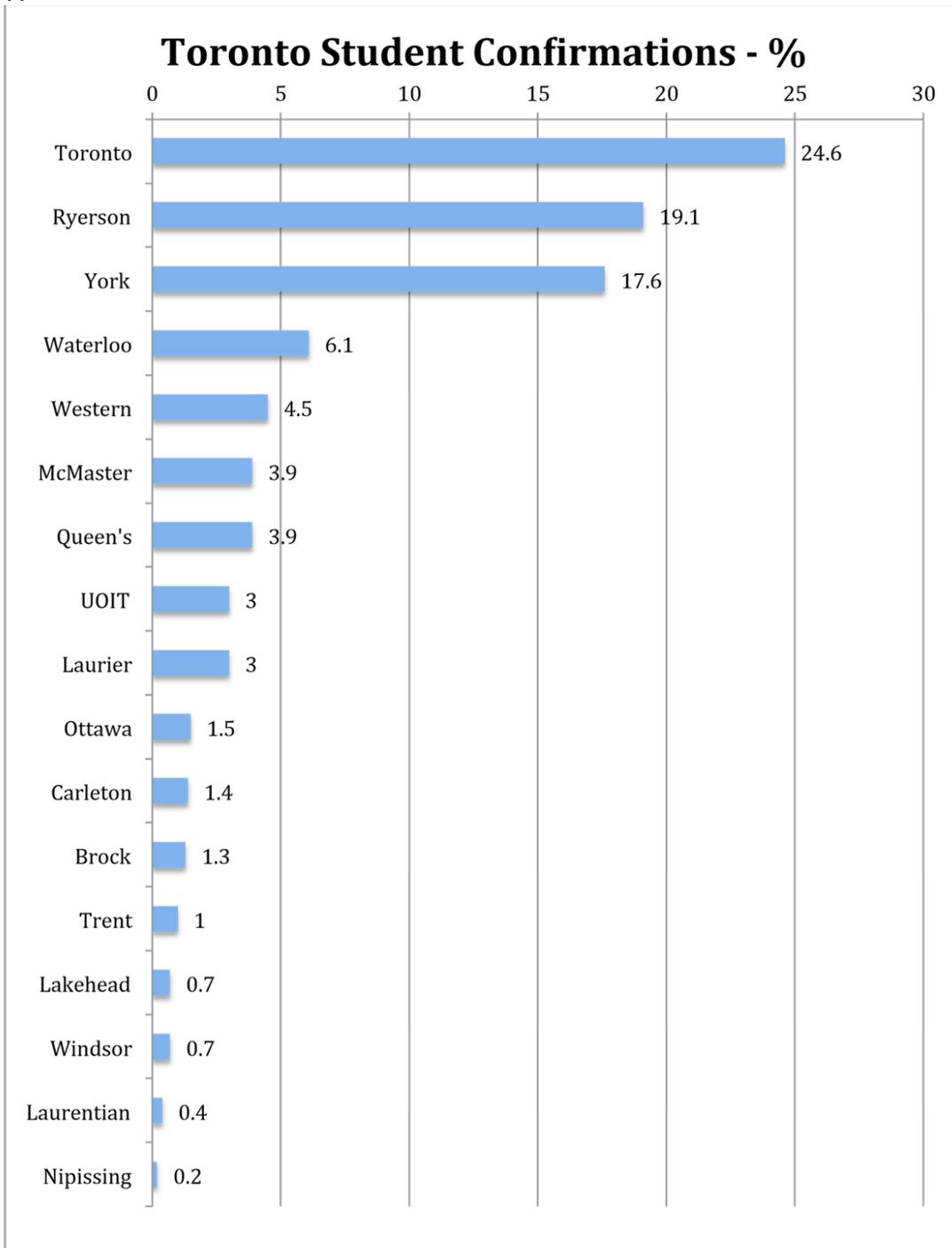
Rankings based on Maclean's scores in Best Overall, Highest Quality, Most Innovative, Leaders of Tomorrow

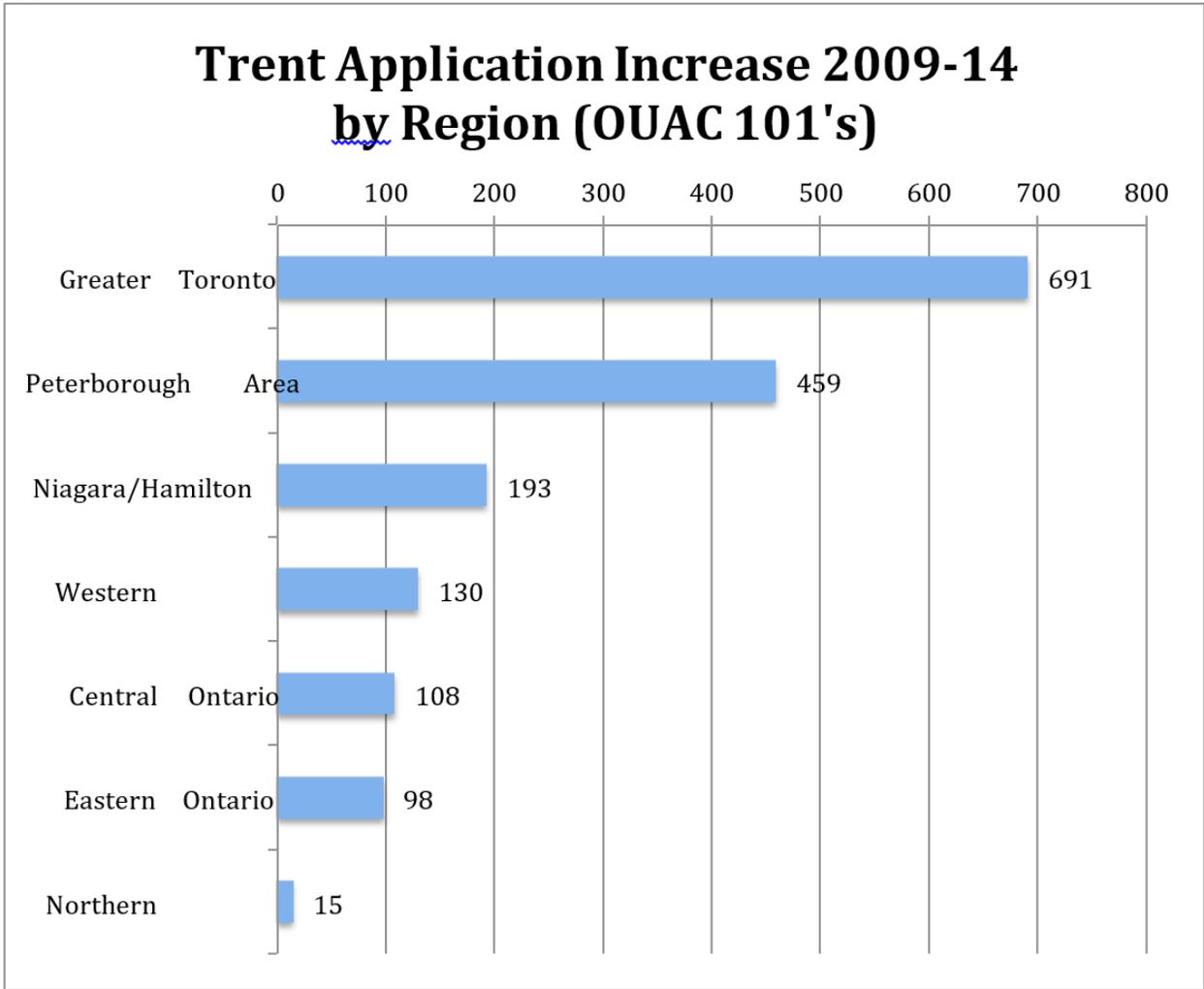
**Maclean's Reputation Rankings 2000 to 2014**

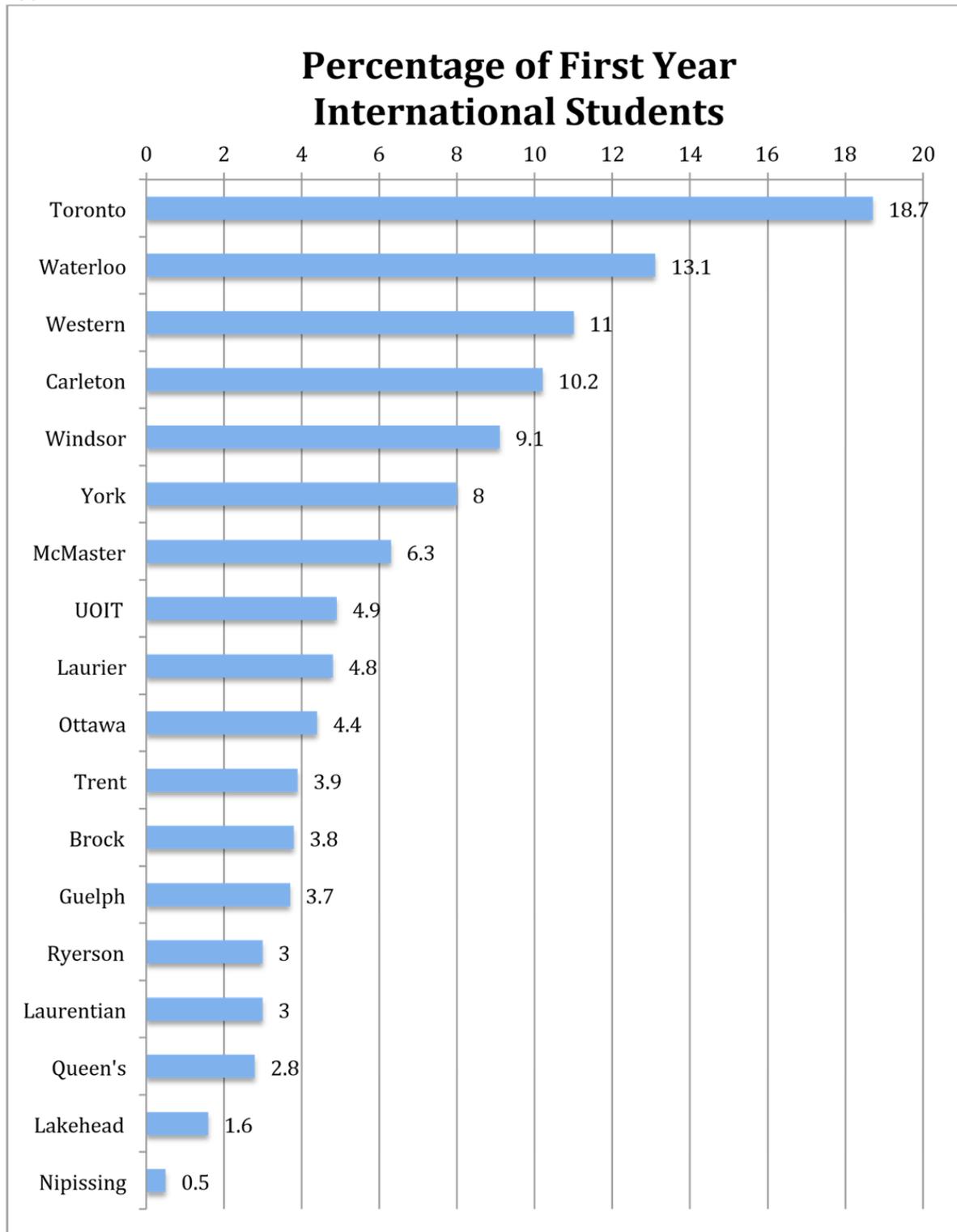
Ottawa +22
Brock +20
Ryerson +18
Western +7
UOIT +5
McMaster +1
Waterloo 0
Toronto -1
Queen's -13
Carleton -14
Windsor -16
Nipissing -17
Guelph -22
York -34
Trent -36
Laurier -40

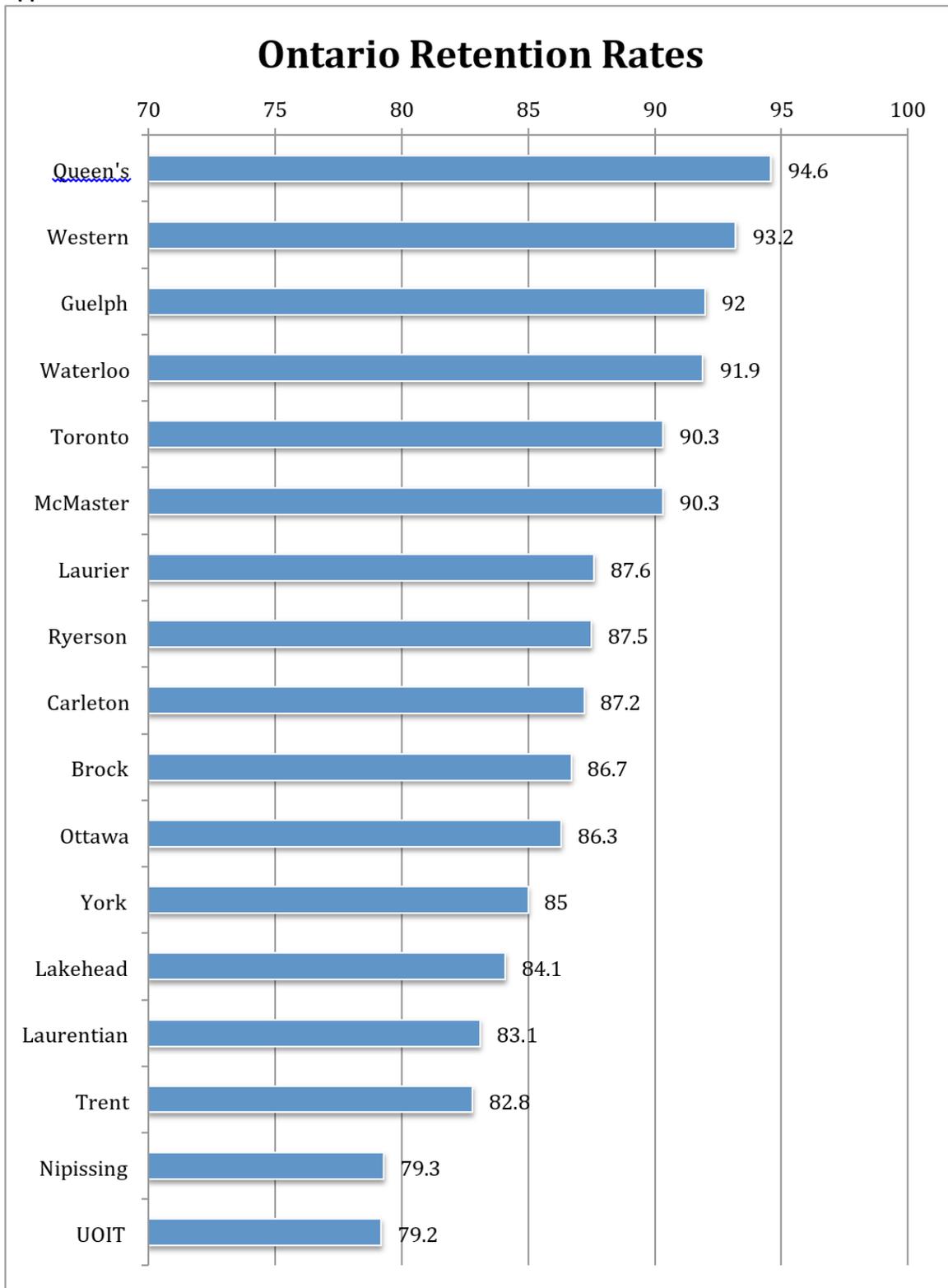
Maclean's APPENDIX 6

Rankings based on Maclean's scores in Best Overall, Highest Quality, Most Innovative, Leaders of Tomorrow











Recruitment Review – Trent University, Arthur Stephen of Geddie Advertising, January, 2015