A CCE White Paper

TRENDS IN CONTINUING EDUCATION

DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY

College of
Continuing Education

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Executive Summary

Canadians have a high respect for education and see the importance of lifelong learning. Nearly everyone participates in informal learning activities, and about half of working age adults are involved in more formal education or training every year. As lifelong learning becomes a necessity, higher education institutions will have to adapt to serve the varying needs of nontraditional students. Two demographic populations that currently present opportunities for program expansion within continuing education are seniors and immigrants. However, several different access barriers continue to prevent many learners from furthering their education.

Continuing education develops and changes programming at a much faster rate than other areas of higher education. Much of the recent development in the industry is happening as partnerships between CE institutions and other schools, businesses, and communities. New courses are being created in a multitude of subject areas, but technology and health courses appear to be predominant during the last couple of years. When it comes to course development, a current challenge for CE institutions is to determine what areas fall within the "skills gap" so often reported by employers.

Successful university continuing education departments often operate more like a business than an educational institution. Decentralization provides CE units with the much-needed flexibility to adapt to rapidly changing markets. However, collaboration between CE departments and their main campus lead to both being more successful education providers. Customer service is one area of business that profitable continuing education divisions have spent more focus.

Course delivery has experienced a substantial change in the last few years. The number of online courses offered by continuing education departments across Canada has exploded, and this has increased revenue for these institutions. Despite this development, most learners still prefer to learn in a classroom setting. This dichotomy would indicate that nontraditional students are often participating in learning

opportunities that accommodate their life circumstances rather than personal preference. One area that is seeing a lot of development right now is related to qualification rather than delivery. Microcredentials are moving beyond being just a trend and may soon be considered a necessity among institutions wanting to remain relevant in lifelong learning.

Looking ahead, it is somewhat difficult to anticipate how continuing education will change. The current pandemic has already caused immense disruption to higher education, and the effects are likely to extend into the long term. However, prior to the rise of COVID-19, stackable credentials and subscription-based tuition models were both positioned to be the next major changes within higher education. Blockchain, in spite of the potential benefits it offers to education, has encountered skepticism among educators and will likely take considerably longer to be adopted by higher education institutions.

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Introduction

When first asked to research trends in continuing education, I felt somewhat daunted by the vastness of the task. Continuing education (CE) is a complex field that experiences changes at a more rapid pace than traditional fields of education. As if to illustrate this challenge with CE research, the industry was completely upended as I was nearing the end of my allotted research time. A common part of examining trends in any industry is to try to anticipate the next major disruptor. No one expected the next disruptor to arrive with such sudden force, speed, and unpredictability.

The current pandemic is still in a relatively early stage here in Canada, yet it has already greatly impacted nearly every aspect of everyday life. We are seeing educational institutions scrambling to change their operating procedures, illustrating the need for flexibility as part of their business models. The complete ramifications of this disruption have yet to be seen, but the political, social, and economic impacts will doubtlessly be felt for years to come. Anticipating those effects on continuing education would be another area of research entirely.

The trends and recommendations outlined in this paper were the result of pre-pandemic research and should be viewed with the caveat that the changes to the world we live in now could render some of this information less relevant. However, some will be more important than ever, and indeed may see an acceleration as a result of the current crisis.

What is Continuing Education?

Before delving into the research of such a broad topic as continuing education, it was important to accurately define it. The definition that seemed to best suit this complex concept comes from Study Canada, who defines continuing education as:

a wide variety of courses, programs, and organized learning experiences that are usually

taken after a degree is obtained to enhance personal or professional goals…. the goal of

Continuing Education courses is to provide new information or supplement and expand

existing knowledge and skills with up-to-date information. ("Continuing Education

Programs in Canada," 2002, para. 1)

Though this definition encompasses much of what we traditionally view as continuing education, it does

not directly acknowledge the courses and programs designed to assist students to gain admittance and

remain in post-secondary degree programs.

When looking at universities and colleges throughout North America, the scope of continuing

education is quite broad. Any course that does not fit within a traditional credit-bearing degree program

is often placed under the continuing education umbrella, creating a department with varying certification

levels and course lengths in a multitude of subjects and skills. The format of these learning opportunities

can be as a program, course (credit or non-credit), certificate, workshop, lecture, camp, or conference.

Even the terminology used to refer to this unique blend of education and training varies from one

institution to the next. The names of continuing education departments often contain adjectives such as

extended, continuing, professional, or lifelong. They may be labelled as a department, faculty, school, or

college. It would not be surprising if the multitude of terms caused confusion among learners seeking

specific education opportunities among different institutions.

Because continuing education is comprised of nontraditional students, it is necessary to describe

the difference between traditional and nontraditional students. A traditional student is generally thought

to be aged 18-24 and entered university or college directly after high school. However, even within that

group, there are those who would be considered nontraditional. The following are contributing factors

to the definition of a nontraditional student:

- Mature students (25 years of age or older)
- Historically underrepresented or underserved students in the higher education sector, (Indigenous, Black, students with disabilities, etc.)
- Students with major responsibilities beyond education, (dependents, jobs)
- Students with delayed enrollment or returning after a break of a few years
- Students from lower socio-economic households, (Harvey, 2004)

Any one or combination of these factors can place a student in the nontraditional category. Such diversity in student profiles contributes to the complexity of the continuing education sector, but it can be an asset as well. The more we understand our student base, the better we will be able to tailor programs and services to meet their needs.

Perhaps just as important as examining the "what" of continuing education is looking at the "why." University of Calgary Continuing Education provides a wonderful summary of the purposes of continuing education:

- Strengthening individuals and communities
- Strengthening universities
- Broadening access to education and learning
- Building profitable businesses and good jobs
- Engaging our citizens and institutions with issues that matter, ("An Introduction to University Continuing Education," 2020)

The most noticeable aspect of these purposes is the level of interaction beyond the traditional student/teacher/staff relationship. We can see that continuing education is dependent on fostering and maintaining connections to the university, community, and businesses.

Methods

Purpose

The purpose of this research was to explore current trends in continuing education in order to provide Dalhousie University's College of Continuing Education with recommendations. The following questions were used to guide the scope of the research.

1. What is continuing education? How has it changed in the past five years?

2. Who are the leaders in continuing education in Canada? In North America?

3. Who are the private companies that are moving into the continuing education/professional development space? What are their models?

4. What are the current trends in continuing education in Canada? In North America?

5. Who are the thought-leaders on continuing education?

6. What are the current issues/challenges/problems in continuing education?

7. What is the future of continuing education? How is it predicted to change in the next five years?

8. What recommendation(s) would you make to the College of Continuing Education with respect to the continuing education it should offer moving forward?

9. What are areas of future research that we should engage in in order to further understand continuing education?

Process

To gain an overview of the current situations within university continuing education programs in Canada, two types of sources were used. The first was a survey of individual websites belonging to CE units in various universities. The information provided by each website varied widely, so this was mainly used to look at programming. The second was the institutional highlights provided by each school at the

2020 Deans and Directors Meeting held by the Canadian Association of University Continuing Education (CAUSE). This allowed for a better look at business models and areas of expansion.

In order to gauge trends in other areas of the CE realm, a survey was done of online publications, conference presentations, and industry webinars. This revealed patterns in common topics and issues of concern, but also provided more detailed insights from leaders in the field.

A broad examination of higher education statistics helped to better understand the learner demographics in Canada and within Nova Scotia. Most of this information came from the Statistics Canada census and survey reports. This data provides perspective on continuing education's place within higher education, as well as the possibilities for increased enrollment.

Determining leaders in continuing education was a challenge. As research was conducted, notes were made of the institutions which were associated with innovation in the field or success in this industry. Organizations were easier to determine, as ones dedicated to continuing education are limited in number. The publications that are listed in this paper are ones that were reporting the same kinds of trends that came up in other sources. Businesses moving into the continuing education sector were a little more difficult to identify. Though there are well-known companies that provide learning opportunities, the line between informal and formal learning is much more blurred in this area. As well, many of the companies provide courses in partnership with higher education institutions, so they act more as a marketplace rather than an educational provider.

Limitations

A traditional literature review did not provide much relevant information. Sources such as journal articles and books were either too narrow in focus or outdated for the purposes of this report. Perhaps it is not surprising that alternative sources of information were needed to provide more details and insight

into CE trends. These alternative sources included online journals from industry organizations, online blogs from industry experts, and online newspaper interviews with leaders in continuing education.

Access to information was also an issue. Though there has been research conducted on trends in continuing education, it was rarely available to the public. For example, the University Professional and Continuing Education Association (UPCEA) provides market research and benchmarking information in industry several times a year. However, this information is exclusively for its member institutions.

Incongruencies in information provided by universities also made it difficult to make accurate comparisons in gauging overall trends. For instance, some universities indicated new programming on their websites or in reports provided to CAUCE, whereas others did not.

Evaluating leaders in continuing education involved some degree of subjectivity. The institutions which came up in CE publications, especially if they were mentioned by more than one, are the ones listed in the "Leaders" section. As this process relied to some degree on happenstance, the final list does not give a complete picture.

Learners

Canada enjoys a reputation for being one of the most educated countries in the world. Since 2010, Canada has consistently been ranked as having the highest educated adult population by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development ("Canada Ranked OECD's Most Educated Country," 2017). Figure 1 shows the level of post-secondary education achieved in various countries.

Figure 1
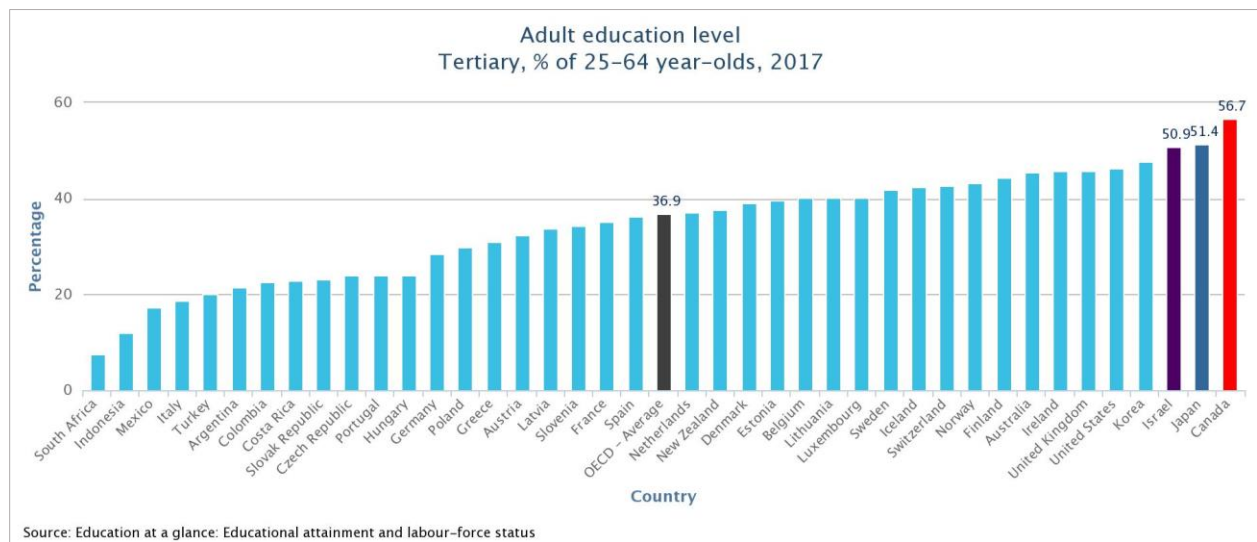
("Canada Ranked OECD's Most Educated Country," 2017)

According to the most recent data, the number of Canadian adults who attained tertiary level education in 2018 increased slightly to 57.9%. This is considerably higher than the OECD average of 36.9% (OECD, 2020).

Sustaining such a high level of education has been challenging for Canadian universities in recent years. To mitigate a decline in Canadian student enrollments, universities have been making significant efforts to attract international students. Between 2017 and 2018, enrollment of international students in Canadian universities saw a growth of 9.3%, yet overall enrollment grew only by 0.3% (Statistics Canada, 2020). In Nova Scotia, there has been a decline in university enrollments. Whereas the enrollments in

the rest of Canada in 2015 were 102% of enrollments in 2011, Nova Scotia showed a slight decline at 99.6% (Arora, 2018). Declining fertility rates has long thought to be the greatest contributing factor to the decline in domestic enrollment, but we may also be seeing more students opting for educational opportunities that offer greater accessibility, lower costs, and shorter durations.

To gain a better understanding of the learners in Nova Scotia, statistics from the most recent Canadian census (Statistics Canada, 2017) were used to create a chart (Figure 2) showing highest level of education attained by Nova Scotians. Figure 3 specifically illustrates the highest level of education attained by people in Halifax.

Figure 2

Highest certificate, diploma, or degree for the population aged 25-64 in Nova Scotia, (by number of people)

Legend:
- No certificate, diploma or degree
- Secondary (high) school diploma or equivalency certificate
- Apprenticeship or trades certificate or diploma
- College, CEGEP or other non-university certificate or diploma
- University certificate or diploma below bachelor level
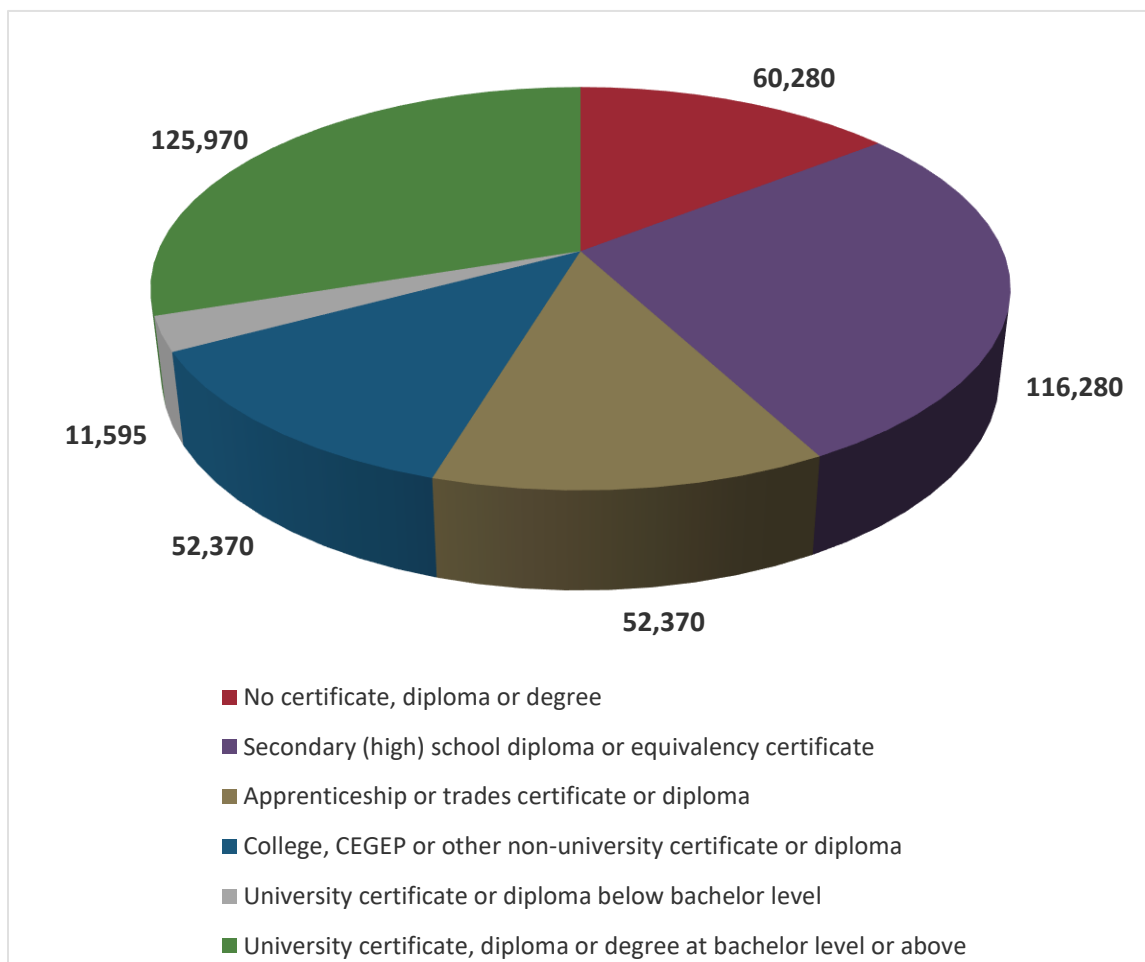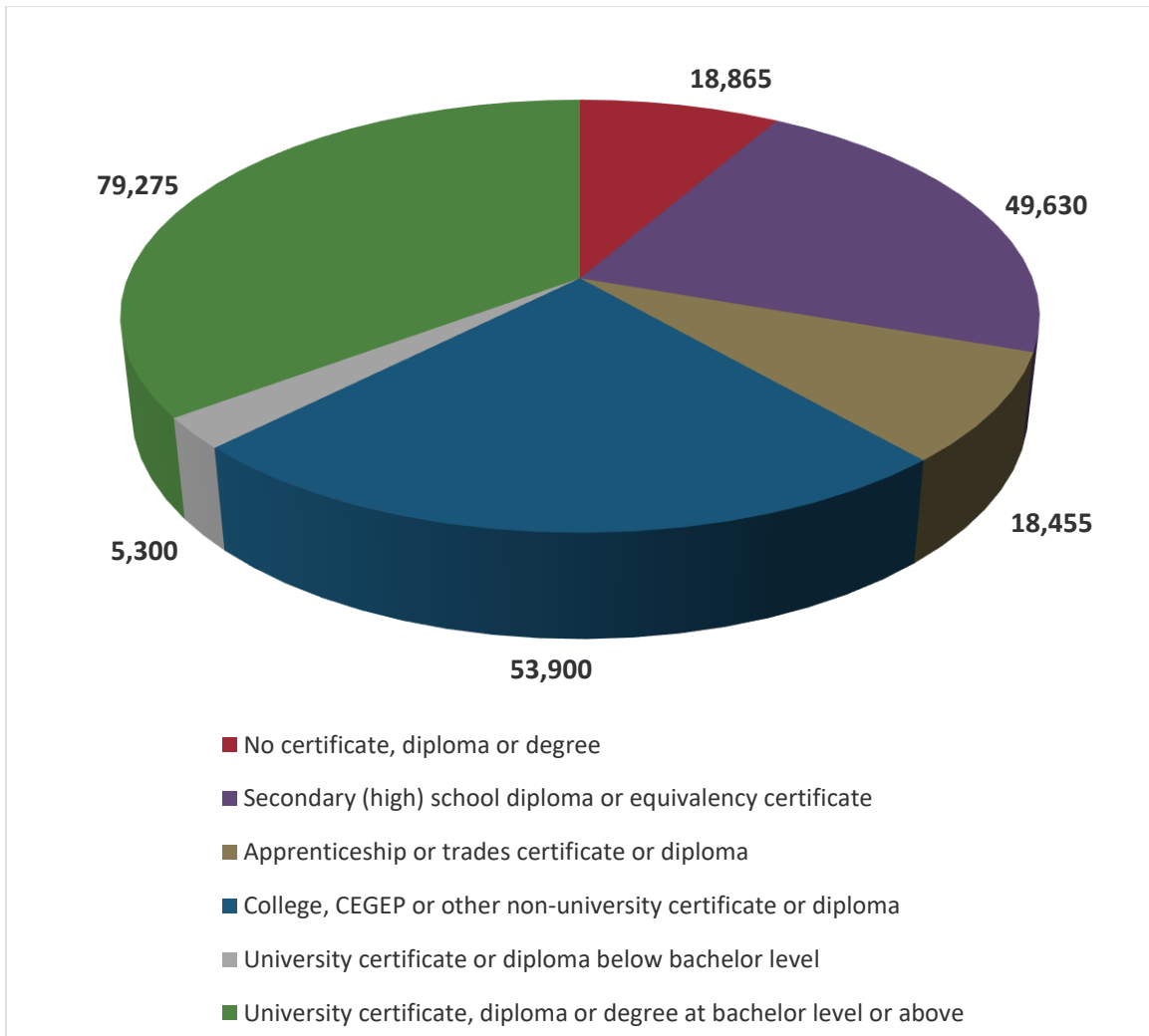- University certificate, diploma or degree at bachelor level or above

Figure 3

Highest certificate, diploma, or degree for the population aged 25-64 in Halifax, (by number of people)

Legend:
- ■ No certificate, diploma or degree
- ■ Secondary (high) school diploma or equivalency certificate
- ■ Apprenticeship or trades certificate or diploma
- ■ College, CEGEP or other non-university certificate or diploma
- ■ University certificate or diploma below bachelor level
- ■ University certificate, diploma or degree at bachelor level or above

Unsurprisingly, a comparison of the data between the two regions shows a higher concentration of people who have achieved a college degree or higher within Halifax. Though this education demographic represents less than half of all Nova Scotians, we can see that the proportion is about two thirds of the population of Halifax.

The preceding education statistics are significant to continuing education in several ways. Research has shown a correlation between education level and pursuit of further education. An individual

is more likely to participate in further education if they have attained a high level of schooling. Additionally, though universities are struggling to maintain enrollment numbers, the rise in nontraditional student participation in education has continued. This trend has been aided in no small part by continuing education facilities. The final area of significance is the comparison of formal education participation to informal learning. Even though some institutions have seen declines in certain enrollment areas, it is not necessarily an indication of disinterest. Many learners may be participating in one of a growing number of informal learning opportunities to meet their educational needs.
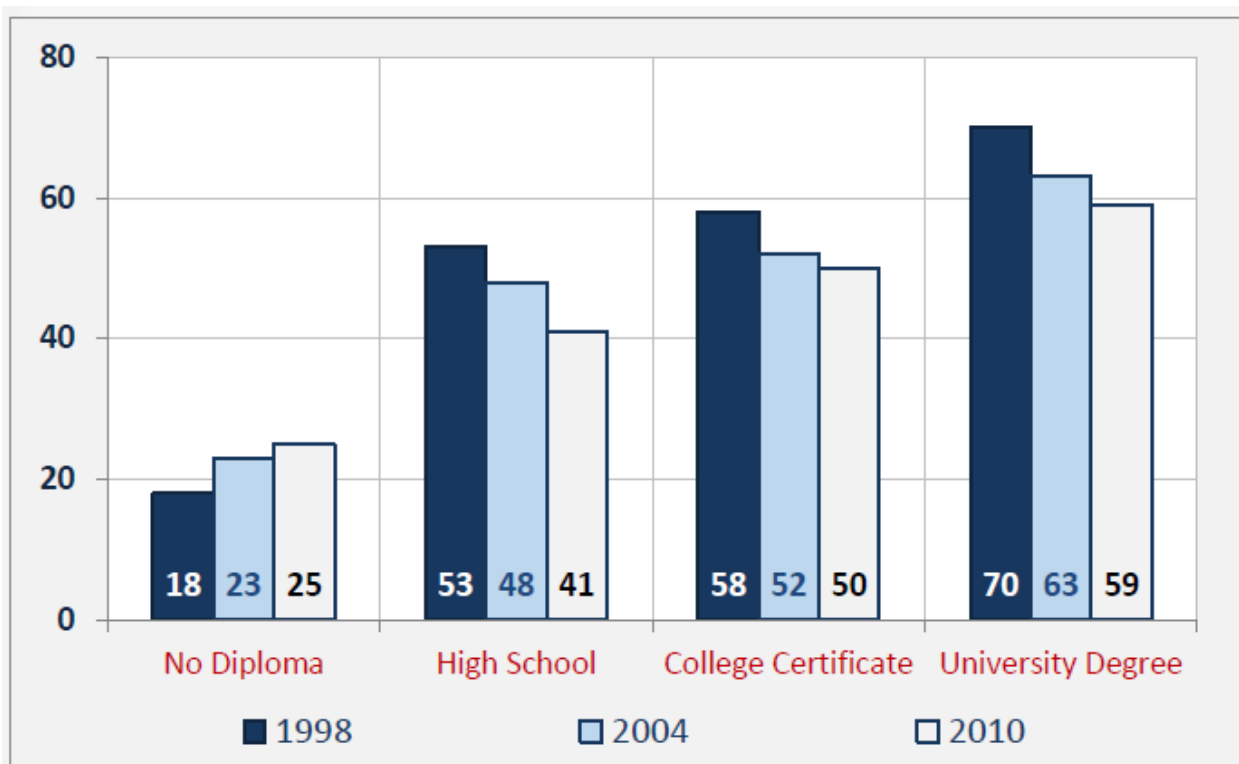
Further Education

Canadian philosopher Marshall McLuhan once stated, "Already it is becoming clear that the main "work" of the future will be education, that people will not so much earn a living as learn a living," (McLuhan & Leonard, 1967, p. 25). His prediction from more than 50 years ago has become reality, as more people are seeking education throughout their entire lives. Virtually all Canadians (98%) agree that access to lifelong learning is important (EKOS, & Colleges and Institutes Canada [CICan], 2019). This is not merely opinion, but it is reflected in the number of adults who participate in further education each year. In the year prior to June 2008, 47% of Canadian adults (aged 18-64) reported participating in some kind of education or training (Knighton, Hujaleh, Iacampo, & Werkneh, 2009). That high level of educational engagement continued to 2010, when again nearly half the adult population participated in further education, (Livingstone & Raykov, 2013). Even when narrowing the focus to enrollment in continuing education, the numbers continue to be impressive. In the spring of 2017, approximately 400,000 learners were enrolled in university continuing education programs (Shepard, 2017).

The report titled *Adult Learning Trends in Canada* defined further education as "when adult learners opt to acquire further knowledge or skill by using an organized curriculum," (Livingstone & Raykov, 2013, p. 4). By this definition, we can assume further education includes both continuing

education as well as traditional degree programs attained as adults. For our purposes, it is helpful to understand who is seeking further education. Level of education is an important predictor of continuing education. Figure 4 illustrates that as the level of education rises, so too does the possibility of participating in additional education (Livingstone & Raykov, 2013).

Figure 4

*Participation in Further Education by Level of Schooling, 1998–2010 (%)*

It is worth noting the decline in further education participation in all areas except those with no diploma from 1998-2010. Without more recent information, it is difficult to know where these participation levels would be for 2020. The report did not offer reasons for the decline, but it did mention that accessibility barriers remain a problem.

Informal Learning

Perhaps one of the most interesting pieces of information to come from the *Adult Learning Trends in Canada* report was the high level of informal learning among every adult demographic. Informal learning was defined as "when we engage in intentional learning, either individually or collectively, without direct reliance on a teacher/mentor or an externally organized curriculum," (Livingstone & Raykov, 2013, p. 4). They found that approximately 95% of Canadian adults reported they participated in some form of informal learning.

Figure 5

Age by Participation in Further Education and Any Informal Learning, 2010 (%)
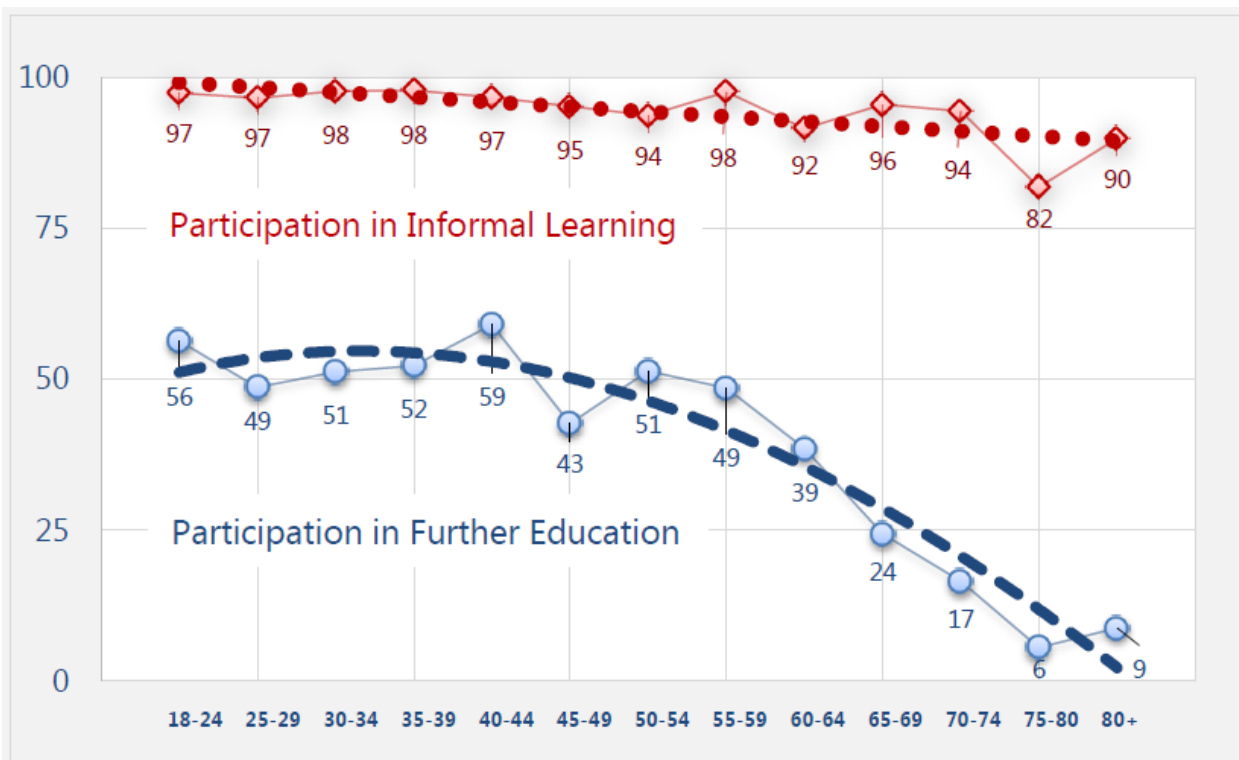
(Livingstone & Raykov, 2013)

Livingstone and Raykov accurately pointed out that "humans inherently cope with their changing environment by learning and that informal learning can be done anytime, anywhere, whereas formal schooling and further education both require sustained effort and present substantial access barriers"

(2013, p. 8). This presents both a challenge and an opportunity for education institutions: how to translate that desire for knowledge and skills into students who want formal recognition for that learning. Programming such as MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) and microcredentials could help bridge the gap between informal and formal learning. Another possible avenue would be to provide assessment services for independent learners to gain formal recognition for their acquired knowledge.

Nontraditional Students

Continuing education has often been viewed as "alternative," something outside of formal institutional learning that encompasses a minority of education-seekers. However, we are currently looking at shift in educational expectations and learner profiles. Nontraditional students have become the majority of today's learners. This presents a growing number of opportunities and challenges for the world of continuing education.

Approximately half of all adults (aged 25-64) in Canada participated in further education in 2010, (see Figure 5). Since this segment of the population is considerably larger than that of traditional students (18-24), nontraditional students represent a far greater share of education-seekers. This information is significant for two reasons. One, it shows that there is a staggeringly large market of lifelong learners. The challenge for continuing education institutions is to identify the various and rapidly changing needs of these students. The second significance is for credit-bearing degree programs. If main university campuses want to sustain or grow enrollment numbers, they will need to attract and retain more nontraditional students. Continuing education units, being experts in managing nontraditional students, can assist their respective universities in this task.

Seniors and Retirees

Canada is faced with an aging population, mostly due to lower fertility rates and longer lifespans. The situation in Nova Scotia is even more pronounced. From 2018 to 2019, Nova Scotia saw population growth of 1.2%, which is below the national average of 1.4%. Though this number has increased from previous years, the growth was only the result of international and interprovincial migration, as there were more deaths than births in the province. The three other Atlantic provinces also saw more deaths than births during this time period, being the only region in Canada to experience this trend. The higher proportion of seniors in the province is a contributing factor. The median age in Nova Scotia is 44.9, compared to the national average of 40.8 (Statistics Canada, 2019). Coupled with the decline in university enrollments, participation in lifelong learning is even more essential for higher education institutions to survive.

As a result of this demographic shift, the senior population is increasingly being targeted by continuing education programs. An examination of conference seminars and various publications showed older adult education to be of much interest to continuing education facilities. Though older Canadians no longer need education for employment purposes, there are still possibilities of further education with this segment of the population. More then ever before, seniors and retirees are healthier, wealthier, and understand the importance of keeping both body and mind active. This presents an even greater opportunity within Nova Scotia. According to the Canadian census (Statistics Canada, 2017), the percentage of people aged 65+ was 15.7% in Halifax and increased to 19.9% when looking at the whole of Nova Scotia. That equates to more than 63,000 people in Halifax and close to 184,000 throughout Nova Scotia.

Immigrants

All across Canada, immigration is a main contributor to population increase. Continuing education faculties play a large role in providing education to newcomers, covering subjects such as language, job skills, and citizenship. Research was commissioned by Colleges and Institutes Canada (CICan) last year to examine Canadian's perceptions of post-secondary education. A large majority of Canadians (87%) agreed that the purpose of post-secondary is to help with employment. However, a nearly the same amount of people (84%) also agreed that education is essential to social and economic integration for new Canadians. Additionally, the report found that more people born outside of Canada (44% compared to 38% of all participants) agreed that the purpose of post-secondary education is to instill a sense of community and Canadian national identity, (EKOS, & CICan, 2019).

As mentioned earlier in this paper, the increase in Nova Scotia's population comes from international and interprovincial migration. Not only are there opportunities for courses created specifically for the newcomer demographic, but there could be increased participation in other areas of lifelong learning. Since people with a higher level of education are more likely to participate in further education, the immigrant population should be examined more closely. In Nova Scotia, 47.3% of immigrants have a bachelor's degree or higher, whereas only 23.5% of Canadian-born residents do. The percentage rises (52.9%) when we look specifically at immigrants who arrived between 2011 and 2016 (Statistics Canada, 2017).

The growth of the immigrant population presents an additional opportunity for continuing education departments. As diversity increases, workplaces will need to reexamine their current policies and procedures. Other CE units have already stepped up to fill this knowledge gap, creating courses such as "Cross-Cultural Interviewing" and "Cultivating Diversity in the Workplace."

Barriers for Learners

There is a substantial portion of Canadians who want to participate in further education, but face barriers which prevent them from doing so. *Adult Learning Trends in Canada* found that in 2010, 19% of Canadian adults were not enrolled in a further education course, but wanted to be (Livingstone & Raykov, 2013). That translates to approximately 4 million adults with unmet education or training needs. The CICan report surveyed the prime retraining demographic (ages 35-54), and they identified the following as moderate or major barriers to further education:

- funds for tuition (71%)
- living expenses while in training (69%)
- time commitment (62%)
- access to affordable loans/grants (56%)
- family support (48%) (EKOS, & CICan, 2019)

This survey also found that in adults in Atlantic Canada were more likely to state that access to childcare (37%) as well as recognition for prior work experience (44%) were barriers. In fact, 83% of Canadians think that post-secondary institutions should provide more credits or credentials for past work experiences.

Prior learning assessment and recognition (PLAR) can help to reduce access barriers such as cost and time, as well as bring some of the massive demographic of informal learners into the world of formal education. In 2010, many Canadians expressed interest in PLAR. Of those who were already enrolled in a course, 62% expressed interest. A slightly higher percentage of people not enrolled but wanting to take a course were interested in PLAR (65%). Thirty-three percent of Canadians who were not enrolled in a course and who did not have interest in one said they were more likely to enroll if prior learning was recognized (Livingstone & Raykov, 2013).

This presents an opportunity for continuing education units. In some Canadian universities, such as University of New Brunswick, PLAR falls under the purview of CE departments. Such a model can

facilitate movement between various parts of the university by offering a centralized service. This could

also provide an additional revenue stream for these departments that are so heavily reliant on profit.

Programs

Partnerships

Perhaps the most noticeable trend among continuing education units in North America is the growing number and greater importance of partnerships. A larger number of courses are being developed and/or delivered in partnership with other institutions. The types of institutions are as diverse as the courses being offered. Some of these partners are as close to home as other faculties within the same university. Interestingly, CE departments from different universities and colleges are partnering with each other as well, usually crossing provincial lines. Other partners include businesses, organizations (from local to international), communities, unions, government bodies, and correctional facilities.

The majority of partnerships appear to be with businesses and organizations that can provide specialized training particularly in demand in their specific geographic region. Learners see immense value in this type of partnership. The *Survey of Canadians' Perceptions of Post-Secondary Education, Retraining and Lifelong Learning* found the following:

A large majority (87 per cent) agree businesses should advise PSE [post-secondary education] institutions to make sure students graduate with skills they need in the workplace. Similarly, eight in 10 agree that all students should get experience in a workplace as part of their programs (86 per cent). (EKOS, & CICan, 2019, p. 9)

Seniors and Retirees

Programming for seniors and retirees has seen an increase in recent years. The types of courses can vary quite widely from one institution to another. Many CE faculties that offer courses for older adults focus on subjects we would typically expect to be of interest to that demographic:

- Healthy aging

- Thriving in retirement

- Understanding new technologies

- "Intro to" courses

- Mental health

- Leisure activities such as gardening, birding, and photography

Harvard University, being the one of the innovators in the continuing education field, has a very different approach to capturing the older demographic. They created the Harvard Institute for Learning in Retirement under the umbrella of their continuing education unit. This school is unique in several ways. Firstly, the courses are designed and delivered by retirees with master's and doctoral degrees rather than professional educators. Another interesting aspect is the payment structure. The institute operates on a subscription basis. For an annual fee, learners can take up to three courses per semester. The courses are seminar style without any assessment components, as this demographic is not interested in certification. The courses are quite diverse, but each semester courses in the following subject areas are usually offered:

Art & architecture   *Biology*

Economics   *Geopolitics*

History   *Literature*

Music   *Philosophy*

Photography

This model is obviously dependent on having a sizable portion of the older population with a high level of education. The most recent statistics show that 30% of the population aged 65 and over in Halifax, (approximately 19,000 people), have a bachelor's degree or higher. About 4,000 members of that segment possess a master's or doctoral degree, (Statistics Canada, 2017).

Course Development

After reviewing numerous university websites, continuing education publications, and institution reports, patterns about new programming emerged. The following subjects were identified as the most common areas for new courses or program expansion among continuing education departments.

Addiction studies	*Artificial intelligence*	*Cannabis (business)*
Conflict resolution	*Corporate training*	*Cyber security*
Data science	*English as a second language*	*Environmental studies*
Equity & diversity	*Gerontology*	*Indigenous studies*
Leadership & management	*Mental health & mindfulness*	*Social media marketing*

In addition to these subject areas, some CE units are developing programs in collaboration with or for the use of international institutions. Canada's reputation as a leading education provider makes it its institutions desirable partners for global alliances. Additionally, Canadian businesses recognize the advantages of their employees possessing international knowledge and experience. A paper issued by Universities Canada and CICan promoting global education stated that:

> Adaptability in the face of change, problem-solving, working well in diverse teams, language and cross-cultural competencies are the new essential skills in a disrupted and dynamic world. A recent survey found 82 per cent of businesses that employ individuals with international and intercultural experience stated these workers enhanced their firm's competitiveness. Banks, manufacturers, law firms, and resource industries told us their top performing employees were most often those with an international perspective (2018, p. 3).

If employers continue to recognize the importance of global knowledge, students will likely place more value in courses and programs that can provide such experience.

Skills Gap

A term that has gained usage in recent years in both business and education is "skills gap." Employers are finding that new employees are often lacking necessary skills to effectively perform their duties. Graduating students in post-secondary degrees worry that they are not learning the skills needed to be competitive in the workforce. A study in 2013 by McKinsey & Company in nine different countries found the following:

> While 72 percent of higher education institutions believe they prepare their students well for the workforce, half of students are not sure if their credentials improve their opportunities of finding a job. This disconnect can also be seen in the private sector where only 11 percent of business leaders 'strongly agree' that students have the vital skills for the labour market, compared to 96 percent of chief academic officers who believed their institutions were either somewhat or very effective at providing the necessary skills to students. (as cited in Desire2Learn [D2L], & Colleges and Institutes Canada [CICan], 2018, p. 9).

Neither of these issues can be much of a surprise since knowledge and technology are developing at astounding rates. In fact, it is estimated that "nearly 50 percent of the subject knowledge studied in the first year of a four-year technical degree will be outdated by the time the individual graduates" (D2L, & CICan, 2018, p. 11).

Continuing education is perfectly situated to address the skills gap. Obviously, the skills which are deemed to be missing will vary from one industry to the next, but some skills are widely needed. LinkedIn

identified the most needed skills by businesses in 2020 in both hard and soft skills. It should be noted that these particular skills were not identified as belonging to the skills gap, but instead they were the most commonly requested skills in job postings.

	Soft Skills	Hard Skills
1	Creativity	Blockchain
2	Persuasion	Cloud computing
3	Collaboration	Analytical reasoning
4	Adaptability	Artificial intelligence
5	Emotional Intelligence	UX design
6		Business analysis
7		Affiliate marketing
8		Sales
9		Scientific computing
10		Video production

(Pate, 2020)

These skills identified by LinkedIn are probably not surprising to many people. Most hard skills are technology-based, and though the specific skills might change from one year to the next, technology will undoubtedly be a driving force behind the skills requested by employers in the future. The soft skills in the list above are ones often associated with arts and fine arts degrees. The push of young learners into STEM disciplines might account for a larger number of graduates lacking these types of skills.

Though it has not been identified as a skills gap as of yet, employers anticipate lack of international skills could have serious consequences for Canada's future economy. "Two out of three hiring managers say Canada is at risk of being left behind dynamic global economies like China, India and Brazil unless young Canadians learn to think more globally" ("Facts and Statistics," 2017).

Operations and Delivery

Business Model

The 21st century is witnessing drastic changes in many industries, and higher education (HE) is no exception. HE institutions are renown for being rigid, highly bureaucratic, and slow to change, so they are at risk of becoming obsolete as the century marches on. *EvoLLLution*, an online newspaper focused on HE, recognizes this in one of its guiding principles: "The traditional higher education model does not meet the needs of today's society, meaning we must rethink its identity." Later in the list of principles, it identifies the importance of continuing education within the HE industry. "Many of the most forward-thinking innovations and ideas in higher education have — and will continue to — come from divisions that serve non-traditional students" ("About us," 2020). From the fringes of higher education, continuing education is poised to become the leader in educational services in the days to come.

A recurring theme in continuing education publications, webinars, and conferences is adopting efficient business practices to run CE units. Hunt Lambert, the Dean of Continuing Education and Extension at Harvard University, says that "It all comes back to knowing who you serve, knowing your strategy and your positioning and serving your students well. If you do this, you'll be able to charge enough money to make a surplus" (2015, para. 10). He adds that about half of the services his department provides, (the small classes), do not make money but are viewed as vital to the students. The words "strategy" and "positioning" also indicate that this is a business which is proactive rather than reactive to changes in the market. The Executive Director of the College of Extended Learning at the University of New Brunswick, Ian Allen, may serve a smaller institution than Harvard, but he echoes the same proactive business approach:

> We're always trying to find new ways to be relevant to the needs of our students. Of
> course, that doesn't mean trying to figure out what people are going to need now or next

week, but what are they going to need next year and five years down the road. (McRae

et al., 2019, para. 4)

Decentralization

The position of continuing education departments within their respective universities varies from

one institution to the next. A noticeable trend is that the more decentralized units are experiencing

greater success in just about every area, such as revenue, enrollments, and new programming. A good

example of this is in funding. Both the Ontario and Alberta governments have cut funds to education in

recent years. The CE divisions that are more centralized reported being severely impacted by these cuts,

whereas the units which are structured as self-sufficient businesses did not mention any impact at all.

(CAUCE, 2020). Decentralization can also allow CE departments to operate with greater flexibility,

allowing them to meet the ever-changing needs of the nontraditional student population in a more

efficient manner.

It is important to note, however, that decentralization does not mean complete separation from

the university. In fact, many CE units are making more connections to their respective universities. One

area where this can be seen is in collaborating with other faculties to create online or professional

programming. Some CE departments are also taking over the delivery of non-credit courses from other

faculties. Another noticeable area of collaboration is streamlining administrative systems so that a

student can easy move from the CE department to the main campus and vice versa. Carolyn Young, the

Director of Continuing Studies at Western University, mentions that facilitating this movement is a goal

for her school but notes the barriers. "It's small things like library access but it's also big things like getting

into the system of record" (2015, para. 14). If lifelong learning is the goal, then this ease of movement

will be key to student retention over the long term.

Customer Experience

An aspect of business that is consistently a focus within continuing education is the consumer experience. Carolyn Young believes that her department's approach to customer service is not only a contributing factor to its success, but it could be a lesson to the main university campus.

> When I think about excellence in customer service, it's everything from the way that your team answers the phone to the way they interact with prospective customers at open houses to the way that the website presents itself. Students expect an online registration experience that is trustworthy and user-friendly. Once they've registered in a course, students expect the communication between themselves and the continuing ed team, and even the instructors, to be respectful and timely. If they've taken several courses from us, they want to be able to go into our system, access those records, print off the grade report and take that to their employer. (2015, paras. 7-8)

She later compared that customer service experience to interactions with a bank or shopping on Amazon. Students will be deterred from dealing with an institution if they feel they have to jump through hoops to complete simple transactions or communications.

Another area which is trending in continuing education is data analytics. Jim Fong, the Director of UPCEA's Centre for Research and Strategy sees this reflected in the statistics compiled by his department. "More UPCEA marketers are using customer relationship management systems (CRMs), conducting analytics and producing metrics, and adopting more social and digital media" (2020, para. 4). The value of these processes is apparent to any business, but Fong warns that many CE divisions are erring in their approach to capturing prospective student information. He remarks that the upcoming generation of adult learners "research providers more, as well as being more likely to abandon shopping carts. They get creeped out by our efforts to extract too much information at once or essential information at the

wrong time" (2020, para 1). As these young learners participate more in continuing education, it will be even more essential for CE websites to provide a user-friendly, informative, and efficient experience.

Learning Preferences

Technology has caused major changes in where, when, and how people learn. It is a consistent source of discussion among educators as new devices and programs enter the world of higher education. Yet in spite of all these technological advances, the majority of Canadians still prefer to learn in a classroom setting.

Figure 6

Preferred Format for Accessing Training

"Which of the following formats would you prefer for accessing training?"

Format	
In a classroom at a post-secondary institution	64%
In a simulated workplace at a post-secondary institution	46%
Learning online through text and reading material	45%
Visiting a workplace to learn from employees there	42%
Learning online through pre-recorded video/audio	40%
Learning online through one on one video/audio tutoring	39%
From a trainer visiting your workplace	32%
Taking lessons by mail, through assignments and books	20%
Other	1%
None	3%
Don't know/No answer	3%

EKOS Research Associates Inc.   n=1030   Colleges and Institutes Canada Survey, 2019

(EKOS, & CICan, 2019)

The survey found that Canadians aged 18-34 have a greater preference (78%) for learning in a classroom than the national average (64%). However, the report goes on to state that "respondents in this age range

are consistently open to all forms of learning and seek a diversity of learning options" (EKOS, & CICan, 2019). Though the preference for learning may be in classroom setting, enrollment in online courses and programs continues to rise. It is likely that personal or professional circumstances may not allow students to follow their top learning preference.

Online Delivery

One of the biggest trends in continuing education is the expansion of online programming. The *EDUCAUSE Horizons Report* (2020) found that in the last five years, the number of student enrollment in fully online programs has increased by nearly 10% per year. A highlight mentioned by many of the CE units in the CAUCE Deans and Directors Meeting (2020) was the expansion and fiscal success of online courses. Several CE institutions have positioned themselves as experts in developing online curricula and have forged partnerships with other faculties in order to provide greater program flexibility in credit programs. As well, many continuing education departments are expanding their own number of online offerings, aiming to reduce some of the barriers to learning faced by nontraditional students. A few of these institutions reported that online enrollments have or will soon outpace in-person enrollments.

A barrier to online learning has been the perception among employers that online degrees are of lower quality than ones attained in a classroom. Fortunately, that perspective is changing. A survey in 2018 by Northeastern University's Center for the Future of Higher Education & Talent Strategy found that 61% of hiring managers viewed online degrees to be of equal quality as traditional degrees, which was a significant change from only five years before (Gallagher, 2019). This acceptance by employers, coupled with the fact that online delivery reduces many access barriers for adult learners, will likely cause the demand for online programming to continue to increase.

Microcredentials

Although much research has already been conducted on the topic of microcredentials, it is necessary to acknowledge it as an important trend in continuing education. Many leading CE institutions have already begun offering this type of alternative credentialing. "A current UPCEA/Mindedge survey shows that 70% of our membership offers alternative credentials with another 27% planning on doing so in the near future" (Fong, 2020, para. 3). A main topic of discussion around microcredentials is whether they will be the next disruptor of higher education.

Currently, employers see the value of alternative credentials as a means for professional development. "Many employers view microcredentials as signals of commitment to continuing education and skill development, often serving as certifications of competency or qualifying an individual for a promotion or functional change, rather than acting as a standalone, foundational job qualification" (Gallagher, 2019). The workforce is not prepared to accept alternative credentials as replacements for traditional degrees, but as we have seen with online degrees, employers can be slow to react to changes in higher education.

The preferences of the consumers, in this case the students, must be taken into account when anticipating future trends. Millennials are the primary demographic for lifelong learning for the near future. Already, they have caused disruptions in other industries, such as music, television, and utilities by refusing to pay for large bundles, and might cause the same to happen in higher education (Fong, 2016). Microcredentialing is poised to be the foundation of that disruption. In fact, this could be the key to successful lifelong learning. The report *The Future of Work and Learning* notes the potential benefits:

Breaking programs down into stackable micro-credentials creates the building blocks for recognition of lifelong learning by giving students and workers clean on and off ramps to the education system. These smaller credentials allow individuals to acquire the specific

skill sets the need to advance in their careers, without redundancy, while keeping costs

in check. (D2L, & CICan, 2018, p. 17)

Fong (2020) points out that this shift has already begun, as some higher education institutions are "looking

at unbundling or repackaging their degrees into more stackable formats as a potential future offering"

(para. 3).

Leaders in Continuing Education

The subjective nature of determining what constitutes a leader made this aspect of the research challenging. Each section below used different criteria to determine which organizations would be included.

Universities

Canada has a total of 96 universities across the country. However, not all have continuing education units or are active in the within the industry. Only 42 universities are currently institutional members of CAUCE, the Canadian Association of University Continuing Education. There is a far greater number of American universities with CE departments actively contributing to the continuing education field. The following universities demonstrated success (fiscal, growth, etc.) over a sustained period and/or innovation in continuing education.

- **The Chang School of Continuing Education, Ryerson University** – This institution advertises itself as "Canada's largest, most successful continuing education program, with approximately 70,000 enrolments each year" ("About the Chang School," n.d.). Though they do not define what they mean by "most successful," the enrollment numbers alone are impressive. To offer some perspective, the main campus of Ryerson University reports enrollment of approximately 45,000 students. The CSCE boasts of over 1,500 courses, many of which are entirely online.

- **College of Extended Learning, University of New Brunswick** – Not all the leaders in continuing education are large institutions. The University of New Brunswick may only have a student population of just over 9,500, but the continuing education division is extremely successful. Executive Director Ian Allen says that "after tuition, our net return to the institution is the single largest source of revenue at the University of New Brunswick" (McRae et al., 2019, para. 4). One

of the departments under the purview of the CEL worth mentioning is the prior learning assessment Centre of Excellence.

- **Lifelong Learning, Simon Fraser University** – This institution is notable due to its Liberal Arts for 55+ Program. Though numerous Canadian institutions offer courses for seniors, fewer seem to offer certification specifically targeting the older population. There can be no denying the program's success; it just celebrated its 45th anniversary.

- **Continuing Education, Mount Royal University** – Continuing Education at MRU is a Canadian leader in forging partnerships to develop and deliver curriculum. This department has an impressive total of over 200 community partnerships (Mahon, & Fotopoulos, 2015).

- **Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) –** Though MIT has a Professional Education division, the advances in continuing education have come from the university itself. Most notably, MIT is credited with igniting the open education resource movement (which later led to the development of Massive Open Online Courses) with the launch of MIT OpenCourseWare in 2002.

- **Boise State University –** This university, in partnership with its Extended Studies department, launched a subscription-based tuition model for two online degrees in 2018. Since it is still in the early stages, it is too soon to measure its potential success, but it will be worth watching its progress in next few years.

Resources

There are a few organizations that support the continuing education industry by conducting market research, creating networking opportunities, and sharing the expertise of CE leaders and educators. Additionally, there are a couple of publications that stand out as being especially relevant to keeping informed about changes and trends in continuing education.

- **CAUCE (Canadian Association for University Continuing Education)** – This is the national organization representing continuing education divisions within universities. This organization provides a few networking and conference opportunities annually, as well as offers webinars for professional development. Unfortunately, CAUCE no longer publishes a journal for university continuing education, but it encourages its members to submit articles to the Canadian Journal for the Study of Adult Education.

- **UPCEA (University Professional & Continuing Education Association)** – UPCEA is an organization similar to CAUCE in its purpose, but it encompasses North America. Perhaps more than any other organization, this one offers the most resources for CE institutions to keep current with trends and innovations in the industry. It hosts several conferences and conducts market research for its members throughout each year. Access to the research as well as the numerous webinars is limited to members only. Currently, 15 Canadian universities are members.

- **CICan (Colleges and Institutes Canada)** – Though this organization is primarily focused on college education in Canada, it conducts many studies, surveys, and reports that are also relevant to continuing education.

- **Unbound: Reinventing Higher Education** – This is an online journal published by UPCEA. Rather than being a scholarly journal, it focuses primarily on industry trends. Most contributors are professionals within continuing education, but perspectives from businesses and communities are represented as well.

- **EvoLLLution** – This online newspaper is published by Destiny Solutions, a software provider for nontraditional higher education divisions. Since the publisher is a business, it is perhaps not surprising that most articles have a business perspective. However, these articles are either written by or based on interviews with professionals in the field of continuing education, mainly deans, directors, and presidents of CE departments.

Businesses

Determining what the predominant businesses are in the continuing education field is challenging for a few reasons. First of all, the number of education businesses out there is astounding. As well, the line between formal and informal education is being increasingly blurred as businesses quickly adapt to a changing market. For example, Duolingo, a company which has been offering free language learning for almost a decade, has recently started offering English language certification. This certification is being accepted by some universities a proof of language proficiency, which could potentially impact this sector of CE in Canada.

There were three criteria used to select the companies listed below. Firstly, they have to provide courses in a variety of subject areas. This eliminated the more specialized businesses like Duolingo and Udacity. Next, the company must offer certification or credit based on some type of assessment. It is not necessary for every course offered but should be an option for learners who want it. Of course, not all certificates are made equal. Lastly, only companies which have a high number of learners were considered, as researching smaller businesses would have been too time-consuming.

- **EdX** (nonprofit) – Started by MIT and Harvard, EdX is one of the most renown Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) providers. It was the first platform to offer a microcredential in 2013, though other companies quickly followed suit. Many distinguished higher education institutions offer courses through this platform, but world-famous organizations and businesses such as Amnesty International, Microsoft, and IBM do as well. Unlike other companies, EdX uses an open source platform for institutions to build their courses.
- **Coursera** (for-profit) – From MOOCs to microcredentials, credits to full degrees, this company offers education opportunities to meet many different needs in continuing education. It provides a larger number of courses (over 4,200) when compared to other MOOC platforms. Like EdX,

Coursera's courses are designed by institutions and business that are recognized around the world.

- **Udemy** (for-profit) – Having over 100,000 courses, Udemy unquestionably has something to offer every learner. The main aspect that sets it apart from the two previous companies is not the course list, however. Rather than courses created by universities, Udemy's courses are made by any individual who wants to make one. Depending on the learner's purpose for taking the course, this may not satisfy the needs of those seeking continuing education.

- **LinkedIn Learning** (for-profit) – Formerly Lynda.com, LinkedIn Learning combines employment metrics gained from the main LinkedIn website with courses aimed to fill skills gaps. Though courses can be purchased individually, it largely runs on a subscription model. Interestingly, many learners (within Canada, at least) can access any of these courses for free, as most public library systems have subscriptions. Courses are created by individuals rather than institutions and are generally much shorter in duration than courses from other companies. These factors could cause greater reluctance among employers to accept these courses as proof of knowledge or skill.

- **Khan Academy** (nonprofit) – Though Khan Academy does not meet all the criteria to be included in this list, it deserves an honourable mention. The company positions itself as a supplementary education provider rather than a primary one, so it does not offer any kind of certification. However, it has been using a points system and badges to successfully engage learners, (particularly the younger ones), since 2010.

Trending Topics

Knowing who the leaders are can help us better understand the continuing education industry, but knowing what they are talking about can be even more valuable. Listed below are the topics that were most commonly mentioned in articles, webinars, and conference over the last five years.

- Data analytics

- Mental health, particularly for online learners

- Seniors programming

- Online programming expansions and scalability

- Alternative credentials & stackable programs

- Partnerships

- Cybersecurity

- Best business practices

- Diversity & inclusion

- Community engagement

- International collaborations

- The use of new technologies, particularly AI and Blockchain

Future Trends and Disruptions

Anticipating what continuing education will look like five years from now, especially as we watch the drastic changes already occurring due to the pandemic, involves some degree of speculation. However, in order to remain competitive, industry members need to be proactive rather than reactive to changes in modern education. To predict what these changes might be, it helps to look at the ones happening right now. The table below shows current shifts in higher education, though each has progressed to a different stage.

From	To
Cohorts	Cohort of one
Once in a lifetime	Lifelong pursuit of knowledge
Push education	Just-in-time learning
Degrees	Outcomes
Educational achievement	Lifetime experience
Single institution credit recognition	Universal outcome acceptance
Knowledge for knowledge sake	Knowledge for employability
STUDENT	CONSUMER

("About us," 2020)

These shifts are general in nature and could lead to different strategies on behalf of CE institutions to manage them. However, CE professionals as well as other members of higher education are making more specific predictions based on technological developments, learner preferences, and trends in other industries. For example, the Scenarios section of the *EDUCAUSE Horizon Report* (2020) provides an interesting glimpse into the future of higher education based on different potential situations. The anticipated growth areas seem to correlate with patterns emerging from other sources, as well as commentaries from leaders in the continuing education field. Most notably, the growth scenario expects a significant increase in adult learners, (which we are already seeing), progress in equity and inclusion

contributing to the success of nontraditional students, and an increasing acknowledgement from employers of skills-based competencies leading to greater demand for microcredentials.

Stackable Credentials

The microcredentialing trend is well underway in continuing education, but presently it is only a method of supplementing or upgrading skills acquired from traditional forms of higher education. Some members of the CE industry believe that the next part of this evolution will be the deconstruction of degree programs. The "one size fits all" degree model is already struggling to meet the needs of students, so its perceived value is declining.   By breaking down degrees into stackable credits, it allows for a learner to tailor their studies to meet their own needs. The ability to customize or personalize one's education will have great appeal, especially if doing so saves the learner both time and money while attaining their career objectives. This kind of deconstruction would also allow greater access to higher education for students who are not interested in pursuing a full degree. The division between continuing education and traditional higher education will become difficult to distinguish as learners fluidly move between the spheres.

Economic shifts also support this kind of change to further education. In *The Future of Work and Learning*, researchers acknowledge that the workforce is becoming increasingly transient, so they will be responsible for more of their professional development and training. They point to the expanding gig economy as an indicator of this shift, (D2L, & CICan, 2018). If learners are assuming more responsibility for their education, they will seek more control over their education as well. Stackable credits will assist in filling that need.

Subscriptions

Education is becoming a lifelong process rather than being primarily an occupation of youth, so it is no surprise that higher education providers are eyeing subscription-based tuition models with great interest. As education becomes more commercialized, building brand loyalty will become an objective for these institutions. A subscription model can help schools to retain students over long periods of time and even increase course completion rates. *The Future of Work and Learning* envisions a transformation from tuition-based to subscription-based models, as they have the potential to provide far greater flexibility and personalization, facilitating the lifelong learning process (D2L, & CICan, 2018). It is easy to imagine this transformation, as subscriptions are already being used in the private sector by companies such as Udemy and Coursera, and they are starting to emerge in university settings like Harvard and Boise State University.

In order for a subscription model to be effective, a couple of conditions need to be in place. First of all, courses should be self-paced. Subscriptions are appealing to many learners because they incentivize quick completion. The faster a course is completed, the more money the student saves. This is the reason why all subscriptions thus far are for online programs. Universities could offer blended (in-class and online) subscriptions in the future, but since subscriptions are only just emerging in universities now, this is not being explored yet. Secondly, institutions should offer a wide variety of courses. This is a key part of retaining students over the long term. There needs to be a sufficient number of courses to appeal to any one learner, otherwise they will seek out another provider. Interestingly, offering stackable credits could help in this area because learners could choose from a larger portion of a university's catalogue rather than be limited to one particular degree.

Blockchain

Looking at future trends, this one is more speculative than others. Some have hailed Blockchain as the next big disruptor to education, but it has failed to make much of an impact as of yet. The current perception of Blockchain seems to be mixed among educators.

> The Gartner 2019 CIO Survey revealed that 2% of higher education respondents have
> already deployed blockchain. Another 18% of respondents were planning to do so within
> the next 24 months. However, nearly half of respondents (47%) cited a lack of interest,
> and that number is up from just 37% in the 2018 survey. (Moore, 2019, paras. 3-4)

A good example that higher education may not be ready to embrace Blockchain yet is Woolf University. Promoted as "the first Blockchain university" in 2018, any mention of Blockchain completely disappeared from Woolf's website prior to its launch in 2019. No statement about this change was issued by the university.

In spite of the mixed reactions so far, the potential benefits of Blockchain do align with current trends in education. Its decentralized structure could reduce some of the access barriers to education for learners. Using Blockchain for record-keeping provides a myriad of advantages to students, educators, and employers. A Blockchain record of every educational experience would offer students greater control over their qualifications and would improve efficiency in administration. "A verifiable lifetime transcript would reduce CV fraud, streamline student transfers between universities, reduce the overhead related to credential verification, and make moving between states and countries less complex" (Moore, 2019, para. 13).

Recommendations

1. Since a high level of education is a strong indicator of pursuing further education, the CCE ought to look at increasing marketing to that demographic. For example, forging connections with the alumni base at Dalhousie could provide a wider student pool for the college.

2. There should be greater collaboration between the CCE and Dalhousie University in three main areas: attraction and retention of nontraditional students on the main campus, facilitating student movement between the two parts of the university, and streamlining record-keeping and processes.

3. Conduct market research regarding the educational wants and needs of retirees and seniors.

4. Determine if there are gaps in the educational needs of newcomers to Nova Scotia. For example, there are many foreign nurses in NS who seek language instruction. So far, there do not appear to be any courses in Atlantic Canada designed to improve communication skills specifically in the area of nursing.

5. Consider creating courses for employers promoting greater cultural understanding and diversity in the workplace.

6. Examine the feasibility of establishing the CCE as a centralized location for PLAR within the university. This would, of course, require collaboration with other faculties.

7. Establish more partnerships with businesses, organizations, and/or communities to create and deliver new courses. This may require additional research, particularly in determining where there are "skills gaps" that need to be filled.

8. Consider if there are opportunities for expansion or new course creation in the subject areas listed under "Course Development." Strongly consider new development in the area of mental health and wellness.

9. Clearly define the positioning and strategy of the CCE.

10. Enhance the customer service experience by facilitating interactions with students, especially in areas related to registration and administration.

11. Further develop the CCE website to make it easier for prospective students to find courses and information.

12. Expand the number of online offerings but continue to offer in-person classes as many students still prefer this method of learning.

13. Approach faculties at Dalhousie about increasing the number of credit courses offered online.

14. Create a strategic plan for the design and development of microcredentials. Ideally, this would be done in collaboration with Dalhousie.

15. Increase participation in the continuing education industry through conferences and publications. Not only does this allow the CCE to keep current with what is happening in the industry, but networking opportunities can lead to more partnerships and course development. Strongly consider membership to the University Professional and Continuing Education Association (UPCEA).

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