



INVESTING IN THE INTERNATIONAL STUDENT EXPERIENCE

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We live in a world without borders, and one that is becoming ever more interdependent, interconnected and complex. There is global interaction on all planes – economic, political, and cultural. To secure Canada’s place amongst its global neighbours, it is well-recognized that Canada must ensure that its citizens are not only highly educated and skilled, but also that they have the international *savoir faire* to move forward successfully in an ever more global marketplace.

It is essential that Canadian campuses reflect the international and multicultural society in which we work and live. A diverse and cosmopolitan post-secondary experience is instrumental to preparing Canada’s students to work in a context of an interdependent global community. International students are consistently ranked as key to internationalizing post-secondary education, and to helping Canada develop human resources and intellectual capital. It is international students who will facilitate an international forum for the sharing of ideas, expertise, research, and scholarship, while bringing perspective to the issues that face us all. Today, international students represent more than 5% of undergraduate student population, and 17% of the country’s graduate student population.¹ Over 70,000 international students are currently studying at Canadian universities alone.²

The Government of Canada often speaks to the value and importance of innovation to securing Canada as a competitor in today’s global economy. Innovation is undeniably driven by a highly educated and skilled workforce. However, without a substantial increase in Canadians pursuing post-secondary and continuing to graduate study, Canada will not be able to take hold of the opportunities ahead. Attracting and retaining international students is central to Canada’s ability to meet the skills challenges of the future and to establishing itself as a competitive force.³

Yet despite the immeasurable contribution that international students make, Canada continues to trail other OECD nations in their actual support of international students. In fact, Canada sets many hurdles in the path of international students who aspire to pursue a Canadian post-secondary education. International students in Canada must meet the expense of international tuition fees which are triple those of domestic students⁴ with very limited access to student financial assistance. International students are not eligible for public or private loans, nor do they qualify for most federal scholarships or grants. At the same time, international students

¹ Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, *Trends in Higher Education*, 2002.

² Statistics Canada, *University Enrolment*, The Daily, October 11, 2005.

³ Government of Canada, *Achieving Excellence: Investing in People, Knowledge, and Opportunity*, 2002.

⁴ For the 2005/06 academic year, the average tuition fee for international undergraduate studying in Canada was \$12,587. International graduate students paid an average of \$13,051. Canadian undergraduate students pay on average \$4,214, while graduate students pay \$5,699. (Statistics Canada, *University Tuition Fees*, The Daily, September 1, 2005).

find themselves having to lay out hundreds upon hundreds of dollars in visa costs just for the opportunity to study and work in Canada. Weighed down with soaring tuition fees, administrative fees, and bureaucratic red tape, most international students are steered into a narrow corridor with few open doors. Canada is simply not meeting the standards of a quality international education, and the experience for international students is suffering as a result.

It is important that we consider the quality of the international student experience here in Canada. International students are our future partners in trade and business, and they will influence and make the decisions for tomorrow. By supporting international students, we can invest in potential ambassadors who can not only be a voice for Canada abroad, sharing Canadian interests, culture and values, but they will also strengthen international collaboration in higher education, research, trade, and diplomacy. International students will take their experience back to their home countries, and wherever their lives may take them. Whether international students leave as champions of Canada, its values, and its institutions, will depend highly upon the quality of their student experience.

Canada's economic, social and cultural prosperity hinges on our knowledge and our ability to strengthen and invigorate international partnerships. Yet unlike many other OECD nations, the Government of Canada has not so far articulated a national vision for international education which will encourage international students to study in Canada. What is more, Canada has yet to truly realize the value of international student financial support as an investment in international relationships, and an investment in the establishment of Canada's place among its global neighbours. Canada consistently underfunds international education, and has persisted in a fragmented approach to strengthening our innovative capacity.

The Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada has pointed out government investment needs to improve greatly in order to attract and retain international students⁵:

Canadian universities have been making significant financial and in-kind investments in order to recruit, process, and support international students...(and) although a number of Canadian missions and consulates abroad have given active support to recruitment efforts, the federal government has not yet developed an effective "toolbox" of supportive policies and programs in order to help universities maximize their current investment.

Competition for international students is intense, with other national governments making significant investments in this area, as well as revamping their policies, in order to position their universities competitively. For example, federal support for key international scholarship and student exchange programs and key tools for recruiting international students ranks low when compared to annual investments by several OECD countries on a per capita basis.

Indeed, according to the OECD, Canada's support in this area is severely lacking:

Per Capita Investment in Programs for Internationalization of Higher Education among OECD Nations	
Australia	\$9.07
Japan	\$4.94
United States	\$4.70
Germany	\$3.02
Netherlands	\$2.86
Canada	\$0.80

⁵ Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada *Brief on International Student Recruitment*, 2003.

It is time to recognize tremendous value of international students in the Canada's economic, social and cultural future. Continuing in a piecemeal approach to internationalizing post-secondary education does not effectively support Canada's students in reaching their full potential. Canada needs a pan-Canadian vision for international education which outlines national targets, and measurable standards for accessibility, affordability, mobility, and quality, but which also ensures their realization through supportive policies and sustainable funding. With health and early-childcare, the federal government has partnered with the provincial governments to realize the needs of Canadians. The federal government must use this impetus to forge a vision of post-secondary education, with all stakeholders at the table, to ensure Canada's social and economic prosperity today, and tomorrow.

Recommendation: A Pan-Canadian Vision for International Student Post-Secondary Education

- 1. That the Government of Canada establishes national standards of accessibly, affordability and quality for international student post-secondary education through a Pan-Canadian Accord to be cooperatively agreed upon by the federal, provincial and territorial levels of government.**

Impact of International Student Tuition

In recent years, the push to commercialize higher education has been highly visible with intensified promotion and recruitment efforts, and particularly with rapidly rising international student fees. Over the past twenty years, while domestic tuition fees have soared, so too have international student fees which are now three times those of domestic students. International undergraduate and graduate students pay \$12,779 in tuition alone. However, fees vary enormously with some fees exceed \$30,000 to \$40,000 per academic year.⁶ Most Canadian post-secondary institutions attribute these differential fees to the fact that international students do not contribute to public programs through taxation, and that additional campus services need to be provided for international students.

University International Student Tuition Fees by province, 2004-2005		
<i>Province</i>	<i>Undergraduate</i>	<i>Graduate</i>
British Columbia	\$4,462 - \$16,533	\$2,498 - \$45,000
Alberta	\$7,684 - \$11,665	\$5,550 - \$19,200
Saskatchewan	\$8,151 - \$11,482	\$,1630 - \$5,313
Manitoba	\$5,004 - \$7,470	\$3,759 - \$4,600
Ontario	\$6,900 - \$16,244	\$5,432 - \$34,554
Quebec	\$9,768 - \$11,085	\$8,808 - \$20,000
New Brunswick	\$6,473 - \$11,620	\$6,060 - \$9,461
Nova Scotia	\$7,473 - \$11,620	\$4,610 - \$18,800
Prince Edward Island	\$7,960	\$2,400 - \$3,600
Newfoundland & Labrador	\$7,980	\$1,896 - \$3,459

Source: Statistics Canada

⁶ For the 2005/06 academic year, the average tuition fee for international undergraduate studying in Canada was \$12,587. International graduate students paid an average of \$13,051. Canadian undergraduate and graduate students pay on average \$4,214 and \$5,699 respectively. Statistics Canada, 2005, Survey 3123.

Over and above tuition, compulsory fees are increasingly being imposed on students. These fees now average approximately \$600 per annum.⁷ Some universities and colleges are also looking to impose additional compulsory fees on international students to offset the gap between government funding and the institution's operating and deferred maintenance costs. Many institutions have begun to profit from deregulated international student fees, by charging far above the actual program delivery costs, with much of the revenue funneled into financing institutional operations, as well as promotion and recruitment efforts overseas. Very little of tuition revenue finds its way to international student financial aid or student services.

Despite a growing recognition that tuition fees can restrict access, and impact the diversity of the student demographic⁸, full-fare paying international students are now considered to have a very "high budget value". This perspective has provided governments and institutions with a powerful incentive to enroll international students, particularly in the face of the drastic cuts to federal transfers for post-secondary education throughout the 1990s.⁹

The cost of attending education in Canada weighs heavily on many international students. The unpredictability and the sheer size of tuition increases make it even more difficult for students to budget for the duration of their entire program of study. What is more, fluctuating currency exchange rates, in Canada and abroad, often aggravate already stretched student budgets.

Financial barriers are the most widely cited barriers to attending post-secondary, and arguably, the most crucial obstacle in continuing an education in Canada. International students also face a number of social and academic barriers in Canada.¹⁰ Many international students experience difficulties "fitting in" when they arrive in Canada, particularly as it can be challenging for international students to orient themselves to their new campuses and cities, not to mention Canada as a country. Too often orientation programs and student services are inadequate in facilitating international student participation in student academic, social, and campus life. Support services, such as academic writing centres, counseling services, and trained international student advisors, can considerably enrich the international student experience.¹¹ Institutions and government have a responsibility to respond to the needs of international student visitors by providing the services essential to positive integration into the Canadian academic landscape.

⁷ Statistics Canada, *University Tuition Fees*, The Daily, September 1, 2005.

⁸ International student differential tuition increases like those widespread in professional programs have impacted the international student demographic on campuses nationwide. For example, between 1985 and 1994, the proportion of international students from industrialized countries with more developed economies rose from 24 to 34% while those coming from lower income countries fell from 17 to 13%. Statistics Canada, 1994, *International Student Participation in Canadian Education*.

⁹ Lyakhovetsha, R., *The Impact of Differential Fees on International Student Enrolment at the University of British Columbia, BC*, unpublished paper, 2002

¹⁰ Canadian Alliance of Student Associations, *Report on First-Year, International, and Non-Traditional Student Focus Groups*, 2005.

¹¹ Ibid.

Recommendation: Canada Social Transfer (CST) Increases and Internationalization Funding to Ensure an Accessible, Affordable and Quality System of Education for International Students

- 2. That the Government of Canada increase core funding for post-secondary institutions through a dedicated education transfer to the provinces and territories, which takes account of international student numbers in to mitigate potential tuition increases for international students.**
- 3. That the Government of Canada provide earmarked internationalization funding for initiatives such as international student support services.**

Recognizing International Student Excellence and Need

Canada has fallen far behind other countries in its international student support. For the most part, financial assistance to international students is extremely limited. Beyond ineligibility for Canada Student Loans, there is a noticeable absence of scholarships and bursaries to help international students to tremendous cost of studying in Canada. Government of Canada funding opportunities are few and far between; through Foreign Affairs Canada, the federal government supports a few international student scholarship programs, including the Commonwealth Scholarship Plan, the Organization of American States (OAS) Fellowships Programs and the Government of Canada Awards Program, all of which are exclusively for graduate study at Canadian universities.¹²

Post-secondary institutions commonly offer a small handful of scholarships and bursaries to international students, though the value of the awards has a negligible impact on the ever-increasing costs associated with their education. International graduate students are more likely to be eligible for competitive institutional funding. However, with shrinking budgets, there are fewer assistantships. More often than not, student funding often depends on the availability of alternative sources of funding for international students. Not being citizens or permanent residents of Canada, international graduate students cannot compete for graduate fellowships administered by national granting agencies such as NSERC and SSHRC.¹³ International graduate students generally have to supplement institutional funding with private loans, national loans from their home country or, parental support.

Like Canada, many other countries are looking to attract more international students to their institutions. At the core of their visions are promotional programs and incentives, such as scholarships in key areas of interest, to showcase their countries as centres of excellence for learning and research. The European Union (EU) has decisively affirmed its commitment to international education through the recent establishment of the Erasmus Mundus scholarship program, with an initial 4-year budget of \$200 million to draw in more than 5,000 highly qualified international master's students.¹⁴

¹² Foreign Affairs Canada, *Government of Canada International Scholarship Programs*.

¹³ Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council.

¹⁴ EUROPA, Erasmus Mundus, http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/programmes/mundus/index_en.html.

Canada's social and economic prosperity leans heavily on its ability to create and strengthen its international relationships. International students unquestionably play a key role in furthering international coalitions in diplomacy, trade and security for it is our support for international students that will paint a favourable image of Canada around the world. To position Canada as a choice destination for international study, it must invest in reaching out to our future international leaders. International scholarship programs not only draw in talented students, but they also attest to a deep respect for the immense value and impact that students from around the globe have in higher education.

Recommendation: A Federal International Student Scholarship Scheme to Establish Canada as a Centre of Excellence in Learning in its Support for International Students

- 4. That the Government of Canada establish a series of federal grants, bursaries, scholarships and fellowships of merit and need for international students.**
- 5. That the Government of Canada permit international graduate students to receive funding through the national granting councils (CIHR, NSERC, and SSHRC), while also allocating increased support accordingly to the councils so that they do not displace existing research opportunities.**

The Cost of Working Off-Campus

For many years, Canada has stood out as one of the very few international study destinations that prohibited international student work.¹⁵ In May 2006, the Government of Canada moved to make national its international student off-campus work pilot program. This initiative, long awaited by the post-secondary institutions and students alike, has received a warm welcome, and will finally allow all full-time international students from coast to coast to work off-campus. Full-time international students, no longer restricted to on-campus work, may now pursue employment opportunities and work up to 20 hours while studying, and up to 40 hours during study breaks

For institutions, off-campus work is seen as a valuable recruitment tool, but for international students, the benefits are far greater. Off-campus work is a means to earn and pay some of their tremendous tuition and living costs. Just as importantly, international students can gain work experience to complement their degrees, integrate into the community, and make invaluable contacts and friendships.

Off-campus work will go a long way in realizing the government's intention to make Canada a leading destination for international students. However, on top of the outlay for study visas and steep tuition fees, international students will also have to shell out \$150 before they can even accept a job offer - a fee which eclipses the earnings for most students' twenty-hour work week. If a student is unable to find suitable employment, the application fee is non-refundable. Many international students have little choice but to accept the fee conditions for

¹⁵ AUCC, *Recognizing the Importance of International Students in the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act*, March 2001.

a work visa. It is interesting to note that unlike the off-campus work visa, there is no application processing fee for the regular work visa required for co-op/internship positions.

Making off-campus work available to all international students nationwide is a first step, and Canada must continue to seek out ways in which to provide international students with opportunities to participate fully in our society. Participation, however, should not require an entrance fee. Too long have international students have been the golden goose for institutions and government. Off-campus work is vital to enriching the international student experience in Canada, but it is also crucial in moving internationalization off university and college campuses and bringing the benefits of knowledge and diversity into the community. It is time that the Government of Canada recognize the tremendous contribution that international students make to Canada's social, cultural, and economic well-being, and the wealth of diverse knowledge and expertise they impart to each of our communities.

Recommendation: Make International Student Off-Campus Work Affordable and Accessible

- 6. That the Government of Canada eliminate the \$150 application processing fee for international student work off-campus visas.**
- 7. That the Government of Canada promote and improve the accessibility, affordability, and quality of employment opportunities for international students.**

The Post-Graduation Experience

Federal and provincial governments have been looking further down the road to international student graduates to help sustain Canada's place in the growing international marketplace, particularly in the face of an impending nationwide skills shortage. In fact, by 2024, the number of retirees is predicted to surpass newcomers to the workforce by 29%, a serious blow to a labour market accustomed to having at least two newcomers for each retiree.¹⁶

Citizenship and Immigration Canada's (CIC) Post-Graduation Work Program allows international students, after graduating from a Canadian post-secondary institution, to take a position in a field-related job for up to two years. The permit was previously non-renewable beyond the first year. However, second-year visa renewals have two key restrictions for international student eligibility. To be eligible for a second-year renewal, the international student must have:

1. Attended *and* graduated from an institution situated outside the limits of Canada's three major metropolises of Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver.
2. Located employment *outside* the greater Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver areas.¹⁷

The three metropolises of Montreal, Toronto, and Vancouver, represent three of the largest international student centres of Canada, and are generally also home to the most post-

¹⁶ Office of the Chief Actuary, *Actuarial Report on the Canada Student Loans Program, as at July 2003, 2004*

¹⁷ Citizenship and Immigration Canada, *Work Opportunities for Foreign Students, 2005*.

secondary institutions. In British Columbia, for example, about one-third of all the province's post-secondary institutions are found within the Greater Vancouver area, including three of its largest universities. As a result, international student graduates from any one of Greater Vancouver's ten universities or colleges are excluded from pursuing a second year of post-graduate work.

The federal government touts this five-year, \$50 million project as a smart investment in "the competitiveness of Canada's education industry".¹⁸ Many provinces also hope that this new initiative will encourage international students to consider moving outside the traditional immigrant centres. Saskatchewan, for instance, hopes that post-graduation work will act as a strong incentive for international students to not only fill skilled positions in the province but also, encourage students to grow ties and settle in its communities.¹⁹

Many international students share a desire to stay and work in Canada after graduation, but feel that government policy has yet to demonstrate a genuine appreciation of what they contribute to Canadian society. International students often consider themselves potential immigrants to Canada, but feel discouraged by the government's unwillingness to review its practice of saddling them with user fees and restrictive policies. For example, international student graduates have just three months to secure employment, and apply for a work visa before being required to leave the country. However, students are able to apply for a one-time "bridge" extension to extend their job search time, by simply paying out a \$125 fee for yet another study visa.

The Government of Canada continues to speak of the value and importance of attracting and retaining international students in its innovation strategy²⁰, however it has not taken all of the critical steps to making Canada an attractive country for immigration for its international students.

Recommendation: Make Post-Graduation Work Open and Accessible to All International Students

- 8. That the Government of Canada review its immigration policies, and make the necessary changes to better facilitate the immigration process for those international students wanting to work in Canada after graduation including, but not exclusive to:**
 - a. Extending the post-graduation job-search period from 90 days to 6 months, and eliminating the \$125 fee for the "bridge" extension study permit.**
 - b. Expanding post-graduation work visa renewal eligibility to include international students who studied in Montreal, Toronto or Vancouver, and that it also allow permit renewals to international students who locate employment *inside* the greater Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver areas.**

¹⁸ Citizenship and Immigration Canada, *An Immigration System for the 21st Century*, April 18, 2005.

¹⁹ Citizenship and Immigration Canada, *Canada and Saskatchewan Announce a Pilot Project for Foreign Students*, May 6, 2004.

²⁰ Citizenship and Immigration Canada, *An Immigration System for the 21st Century*, April 18, 2005.

Securing Canada's Future

A future of social and economic prosperity, security and international collaboration will depend on the capacity of Canadians to live, work, and compete in an international and multicultural environment. International students are vital to securing this future, for it is the fostering and development of Canada's international relationships that will be fundamental to instilling a deep and enduring international perspective in Canadian society. Not only do "international students enrich campus and community life with new ideas and new cultures", recently stated Minister of Citizenship and Immigration Monte Solberg, but they are also an essential pool of "potential future skilled workers that Canadian businesses *need* to remain competitive."²¹ Moreover, Canada's relationship with its international students does not end at graduation, for in the near future, these students will be our international colleagues, trade partners, and decision makers.

It is crucial that the Government of Canada recognize the immense social, cultural and economic contributions that international students make to our communities, campuses and society by investing in the international student experience. Through initiatives, such as the establishment of pan-Canadian standards of accessibility, affordability and quality in post-secondary education, Canada will be able ensure that its international reputation for outstanding higher education meets the actual quality of the student experience. What is more, CASA believes that it is through active support of international students in pursuing a post-secondary education, and helping them to participate fully in our society that the Government of Canada can truly begin to take the steps to securing Canada's future.

Summary of Recommendations

- 1. That the Government of Canada establishes national standards of accessibility, affordability and quality for international student post-secondary education through a Pan-Canadian Accord to be cooperatively agreed upon by the federal, provincial and territorial levels of government.**
- 2. That the Government of Canada increase core funding for post-secondary institutions through a dedicated transfer to the provinces and territories, which takes account of international student numbers in to mitigate potential tuition increases for international students.**
- 3. That the Government of Canada provide earmarked internationalization funding for initiatives such as international student support services.**
- 4. That the Government of Canada establish a series of federal grants, bursaries, scholarships and fellowships of merit and need for international students.**
- 5. That the Government of Canada permit international graduate students to receive funding through the national granting councils (CIHR, NSERC, and SSHRC), while also allocating increased support accordingly to the councils so that they do not displace existing research opportunities.**

²¹ Citizenship and Immigration Canada, *Off-Campus Work Permit Launched*, April 26, 2006.

- 6. That the Government of Canada eliminate the \$150 application processing fee for international student work off-campus visa.**
- 7. That the Government of Canada promote and improve the availability, affordability, and quality of employment opportunities for international students.**
- 8. That the Government of Canada review its immigration policies, and make the necessary changes to better facilitate the immigration process for those international students wanting to work in Canada after graduation including, but not exclusive to:
 - a. Extending the post-graduation job-search period from 90 days to 6 months, and eliminating the \$125 fee for the “bridge” extension study permit.**
 - b. Expanding post-graduation work visa renewal eligibility to include international students who studied in Montreal, Toronto or Vancouver, and that it also allow permit renewals to international students who locate employment *inside* the greater Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver areas.****