

Key Learnings From the Study on Best Practices in Supporting International Students Enrolled in Toronto-area Colleges

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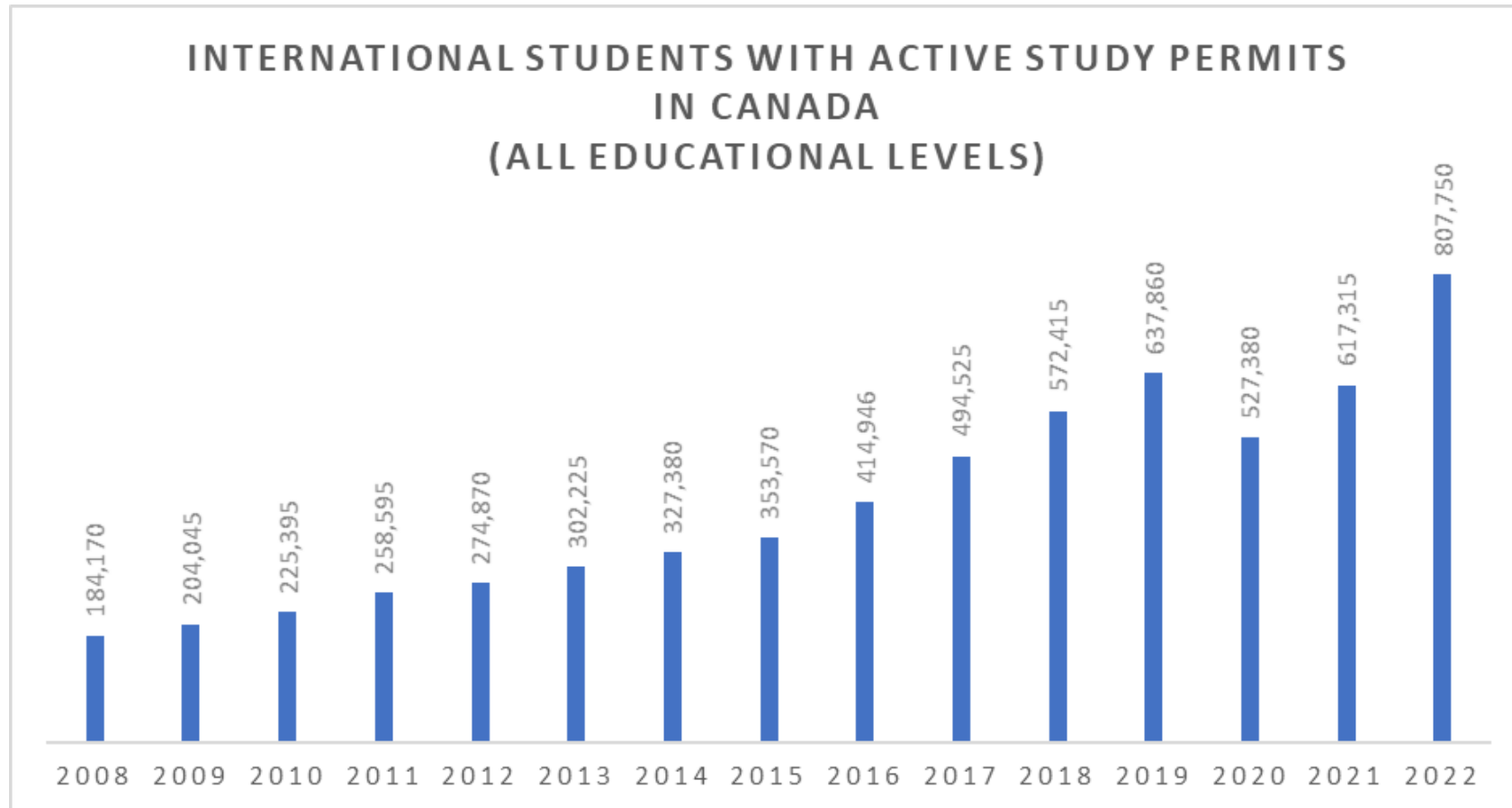
CERC in Migration & Integration

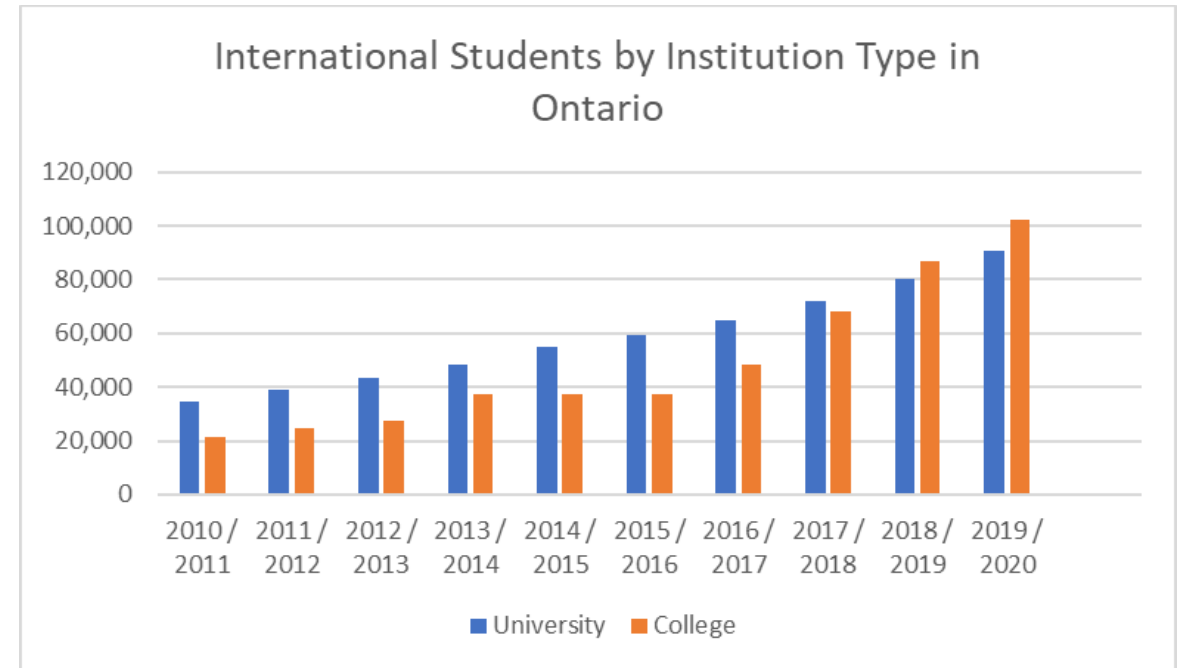
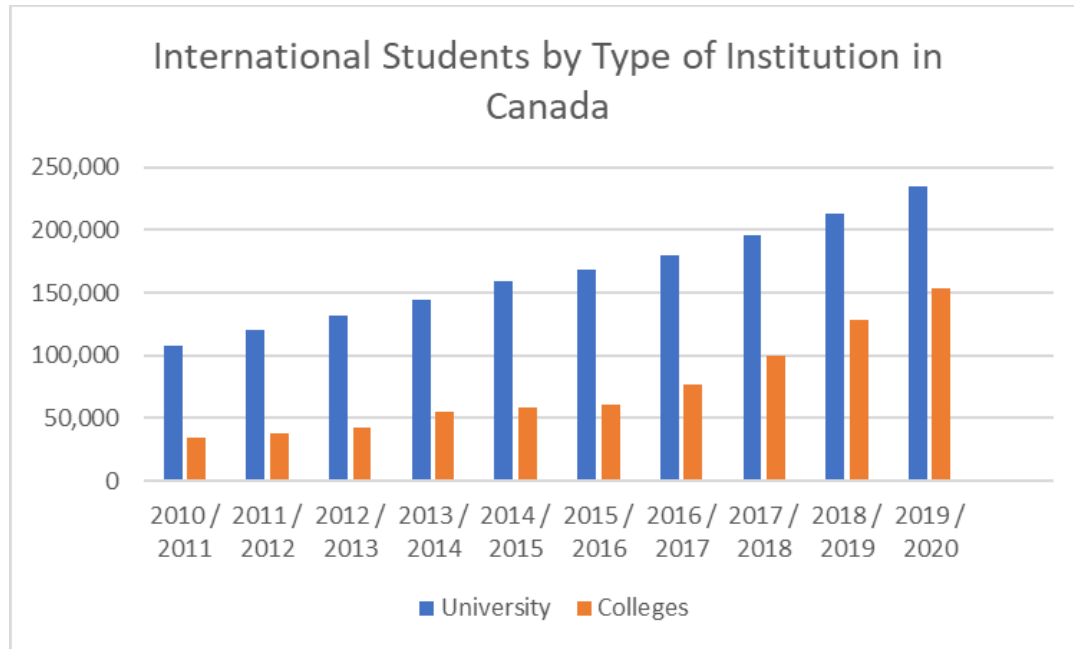
Toronto Metropolitan University

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The number of international students increased nearly 3 times in the last decade (2012-2022)





Although most (60.5%) international students in higher education were enrolled in universities in 2019/2020, the proportion studying in colleges (39.5%) has been on the rise

Ontario is the only province in Canada where colleges have attracted more international students than universities since 2018/19.

Data Source: Statistics Canada

Rationale and Objectives

□ Ontario's Key Role in International College Student Admission:

- In 2020/21, 52% of Ontario's international students were enrolled in colleges, underscoring their pivotal role in shaping education migration pathways.
- Ontario colleges are under scrutiny for their ability in providing adequate support to address social and economic challenges faced by international students.

□ Purpose of the Study

- The broad question: what are the best practices in supporting international college students in Toronto?

Specific objectives:

- • To understand the challenges and needs of international college students enrolled in Toronto-area colleges.
- • To learn about the policies and programs of colleges to support international students.
- • To provide recommendations to enhance the support infrastructure for international students.

Scope of the Study

Out of 24 publicly funded colleges in Ontario, 6 Colleges are selected for the Study:

<u>Selected Colleges -</u>	<u>Year of Establishment</u>
• Centennial College -	1966
• George Brown College -	1966
• Humber College -	1967
• Seneca College -	1967
• Sheridan College -	1967
• Durham College -	1967

Methods

- **Literature Review: 255 sources selected for review**
 - Only **60** out of 255 selected literature sources discussed international college students and issues related to internationalization policies, service provision and service needs, and the challenges facing international students in the college sector.
- **Interviews:**
 - Semi-structured interviews were conducted with **18** current and former international college students who were studying in/graduated from the selected **6** public colleges at the time of interview.
 - Interviews with **10** stakeholders from government sector, postsecondary institutions, settlement sector and non-profit sector were also conducted.

Key Learnings

❑ Systemic Challenges:

International students face employment, transition, and social integration challenges due to a systemic issue characterized by a lack of collaboration among Federal and provincial governments, Post-Secondary Institutions (PSIs), settlement organizations, and employers. This disconnect hinders access to accurate information, affecting their understanding of educational and professional pathways in Canada.

❑ Limited Support and Rights:

Many international college students and graduates experience difficulty adapting and succeeding in Canada due to their temporary status, which results in limited social support and labor rights. This lack of support further exacerbates the challenges they face during their academic and professional journey.

❑ Need for Collaboration:

Addressing the challenges faced by international students requires enhanced collaboration among Federal and provincial governments, PSIs, settlement organizations, and employers. By fostering cooperation, accurate information dissemination, and creating a supportive environment, these students can be better equipped to overcome the obstacles they encounter in terms of employment, transition, and social integration in Canada.

Policy Gaps

• Federal Policy Disconnects

☐ Coordination Gaps

- Federal policies facilitate international student admission (e.g., International Education Strategy, EduCanada, Two-step Immigration, Post-graduate work permit).
- However, it relies on PSEI's designated by the province to select students and to offer programs of study, supports and services .
- Limited federal oversight on provincial and PSI effectiveness and collaboration.

☐ Exclusion from Services:

- International students are excluded from federally funded settlement services despite policy shift towards 2-step immigration.

☐ Transition Criteria:

- Federal criteria for Post-Graduation Work Permits (PGWPs) and PR status often hard for international students to meet.

• Provincial Policy Gaps

☐ Funding Shift:

- Provincial government reduced funding to PSIs and froze domestic tuition fees.
- Public funding decreased to 30% during the same period (Statistics Canada 2022).
- Colleges increasingly rely on international student fees for funding. Student fees constituted 53% of all college revenues by 2019/2020.

• Service Quality Oversight:

- According to Provincial regulations, PSIs are required to provide quality education and essential services to international students.
- But limited provincial monitoring/inspection of education and services quality in public colleges.

Roles of Colleges

❑ Financial Dependency:

- International students, constituting 30% of Ontario's public college population, contributed 68% of tuition revenue.
- International student fees totaled \$1.7 billion in 2020/2021, surpassing provincial grants to colleges.

❑ Focus on Growth:

- Colleges prioritize continuous international enrollment growth over assessing their capacity to sustain increased student numbers.
- The emphasis on international student expansion raises concerns about long-term sustainability.

❑ Limited Services:

- Colleges have limited funds and staff to provide services to the growing number of international students.

❑ Issues with Marketing Strategies:

- Colleges emphasize immigration pathways for international students in marketing efforts.
- Recruitment agencies play a significant role in attracting students, often through false documents and promises about programs, employment, and immigration opportunities.
- Ontario's public colleges paid over \$114 million in commissions to recruiters in 2020-21.
- **Lack of Monitoring:**
- There is no specific measures put in place yet to assess, monitor and make recruitment agencies accountable for their actions.
- The use of unauthorized agents is another issue. Despite willingness, Colleges are often not clear about their strategies to address this issue.

Roles of Settlement Sector & Employers

❑ **Fragmented Services:**

In absence of federally funded services and limited PSI provided services, Ontario government invests in services for international students through settlement and community organizations.

Services offered by various organizations are fragmented, inconsistent, and lack adequate training.

❑ **Promising Pilot Program:**

International Student Connect (ISC) pilot program, launched in 2013, shows potential.

Managed by COSTI Immigrant Services.

❑ **Challenges Faced:**

Conflicting interests between PSIs and settlement organizations hinder ISC program's outreach.

Limited funding, provided on a five-year cycle, restricts ISC program's expansion.

❑ **Lack of Employer Awareness:**

Employers lack awareness about the benefits of work placements, apprenticeships, and co-op programs for international students.

Misconceptions exist, with some employers viewing international students as sources of inexpensive labor for lower-skilled positions, not aligning with their qualifications.

❑ **Barriers and Concerns:**

Employers are deterred by complexities and costs associated with the Labour Market Impact Assessment (LMIA) process.

Some hesitate to invest in training due to the temporary nature of international students' work permits.

International Students

Gaps between policy objectives and outcomes

❑ Primary Motivation:

- International students are often motivated by immigration and work prospects in Canada rather than education.

❑ Face Multiple Challenges:

- Misinformation, reliance on recruiters, and financial constraints lead to enrollment in short courses with limited job prospects.
- The absence of essential services, financial assistance, the necessity to work, social isolation, subpar education quality, insufficient mental health support, unaffordable housing, and restricted pathways to permanent residency contribute to widespread disappointment and discouragement among international students.

❑ Employment Challenges:

- 43% of international students struggle to secure paid employment (CBIE 2021; ICEF Monitor 2018).
- Lacking professional networks, they cannot secure jobs in the 'hidden' job market where 80% of jobs are filled without public posting.
- Temporary status affect their employment prospect.

❑ Income Disparities:

- Former international students earned 20% less than domestic counterparts in the first year after graduation and 9% less after five years (Choi, Hao, and Chan 2021).

❑ Transition Intentions vs. Reality:

- 70% of international students planned to work in Canada after graduation, with 60% aiming for permanent residency (CBIE 2018).
- Contrarily, only 3 in 10 international students arriving in Canada since 2000 achieved landed immigrant status within 10 years (Crossman et al. 2022).

Recommendations

Bridging Gaps between Policy and Governance

□ Mending Federal Policy Gaps

- 1. Recognizing the Education-Immigration Connection:** Federal and provincial governments, along with colleges, should acknowledge the link between education and immigration. Realistic policies addressing this connection will smooth the transition and retention of international college students.
- 2. Employer Engagement for Transition:** Governments and colleges should actively engage with employers, showcasing the skills of international students. Encourage employers to hire from this talent pool to address labor shortages and facilitate a smooth study-to-work transition.
- 3. Renewable Post-Graduate Work Permits:** Allow renewal of post-graduate work permits. Current permit timelines are insufficient for international graduates to secure relevant jobs for permanent residency.
- 4. Reassessing Access to Services:** Re-evaluate the division between temporary and permanent migrants regarding access to services, especially in the context of the two-step immigration process. All migrants, including international students, need social services for successful living and working in Canada.

□ Addressing Provincial Policy Gaps

1. Ensuring Sustainable Funding for Public Colleges: The provincial government must increase funding for colleges and halt further cuts to prevent overreliance on international students for revenue. Public colleges should genuinely remain publicly funded institutions to maintain educational quality and accessibility.

2. Establishing Accountability Measures: Provincial authorities should develop comprehensive guidelines and measures to ensure colleges are accountable for international student recruitment, admission, and the provision of essential services for their well-being. This step is crucial for maintaining the quality of education and support services.

3. Annual Audits for Quality Assurance: The Office of the Auditor General of Ontario should conduct yearly audits to assess colleges' adherence to recruitment guidelines and the adequacy of services provided to meet the diverse needs of international students. Regular audits are essential for quality assurance and maintaining high standards in education and student support.

□ Reforming PSIs Policies

- *Changing Recruitment Strategies*

1. Strengthening Accountability and Training: Before partnering with any recruitment agencies, colleges should provide training to their staff and develop strict guidelines regarding their code of conduct. Colleges should also take immediate action to investigate if there are complaints against the staff of the recruitment agencies.

2. Embracing Transparency and Autonomy: Public colleges should eliminate/phase out agreements with recruitment agencies and seek opportunities to independently recruit and admit international students. Transparent practices must be implemented to ensure that potential students have access to current and accurate information regarding language, program, and application requirements.

3. Fostering Multicultural Diversity: It is also necessary for public colleges to diversify the source countries of international students to enhance a multicultural perspective. Actively seeking students from a variety of nations will enrich the college environment and promote a more diverse cultural exchange.

- *Replacing Business Model with an Equity Model*

1. **Prioritizing Student Wellbeing:** Public colleges need to revise their internationalization policy to prioritize the wellbeing of international students. This includes acknowledging their challenges in Canada and highlighting the available services at the colleges.

2. **Ensuring Financial Accessibility:** Colleges should make tuition fees more affordable for international students and create need and merit-based financial aid options, such as bursaries and scholarships, specifically designed for international students.

3. **Expanding Support for Vulnerable Students:** More financial assistance for refugee students is required. The government should provide financial support to help the expansion of the Student Refugee Program to include more college-level sponsorships, ensuring equitable opportunities for all.

□ Addressing Information Gaps

- **Enhanced Student Information Hub:** Public colleges should create a comprehensive 'Information Platform' for international students, offering accurate details on admissions, academics, employment, housing, immigration, and support services, fostering informed decision-making.
- **Holistic Student Engagement:** Within the platform, include dedicated sections for pre-arrival and post-graduation interactions. Pre-arrival guidance dispels misinformation and protects students, while post-graduation information nurtures professional networks, ensuring a smooth transition into the workforce.

□ Mending Service Gaps

- **Collaboration with Settlement Providers:** Colleges should partner with settlement organizations, dedicating a portion of tuition fees for direct access to vital services, such as employment support and healthcare, enhancing the student experience.
- **Increased Funding for Settlement Organizations:** Government funding for settlement organizations must substantially increase, empowering them to enhance staffing and resources, ensuring they can cater effectively to the diverse needs of international students.
- **Scaling Collaborative Initiatives:** Expand successful programs like International Student Connect through increased funding and strategic partnerships, facilitating seamless integration and comprehensive support for international students in Ontario.
- **Needs-Based Services for Diversity:** Public colleges should assess and adjust services regularly to meet the unique challenges of international students from diverse backgrounds, promoting inclusivity and effectiveness.
- **Continued Support for Graduates:** Extend enhanced language training, employment support, and networking opportunities to international graduates. Postgraduate work permit holders should have access to PSI provided services and settlement services, aiding their successful integration into the labor market.

A WAY FORWARD.....

☐ **Comprehensive Support System:**

- International students need substantial support from colleges, service providers, employers, and all levels of government.
- Seamless integration is crucial, aligning with Canada's immigration policies addressing labor shortages and recognizing international students' contributions to the nation's talent pool.

☐ **Harmonizing Policy and Governance:**

- Alignment of immigration policies and support practices is essential.
- This synergy not only serves Canada's national interests but also upholds its global reputation as a leading destination for higher education.

**QUESTION, COMMENTS &
SUGGESTIONS??**