

## **International Students at Canadian Colleges: Emerging Trends**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study uses Knight's (2004) framework of internationalization in higher education to examine emerging trends involving international students at Canadian public community colleges. The findings show that the provinces' socioeconomic and cultural differences and immigration policies have had a substantial effect on the number of international students on college campuses. The study identified seven important emerging trends within the sector. The findings suggest that an evolving approach to immigrant selection may be contributing to the reconfiguration of the colleges' international student body, which has gone from predominantly Chinese to primarily Indian. Furthermore, the study explores new approaches used to increase the market share of international students, such as campuses exclusively for international students and partnerships with private career colleges. It also provides an analysis of the latest development, namely the shift to online instruction in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The study highlights the importance of understanding these trends.

**Keywords:** community colleges; international students; emerging trends; internationalization of higher education.

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The number of international students seeking educational opportunities abroad

has risen steadily in recent decades. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 6.4 million postsecondary students will be studying outside their home countries in 2025 (Chakma et al., 2012). Several push and pull factors, such as a lack of educational options in sending countries and career opportunities in receiving countries, have contributed to international student mobility (Wilkins & Huisman, 2011).

Although the number of studies on the experience of international community college students is increasing (Bégin-Caouette, 2018; Jafar & Legusov, 2020; Malveaux & Bista, 2021), such studies are still few and far between compared with the research on international students attending universities – an understandable situation, given that universities have a long history of welcoming international students. Another possible contributing factor is that, as research-producing institutions, universities are better placed to shed light on vital issues than are other institutions of higher education. But, with the surging numbers of foreign students at community colleges in the United States (Baer, 2021), the United Kingdom (Fisher & Saunders, 2017), Australia (Robertson, 2011), Canada (Usher, 2019), and other countries, more research on this relatively new phenomenon is needed. Of particular interest is how recent geopolitical and socioeconomic changes, such as Donald Trump’s election and subsequent defeat in the United States, Brexit in the United Kingdom, and the COVID-19 pandemic globally, have affected and will continue to affect international college students’ experience.

Even though the Canadian higher education sector is much smaller than that of the United States, Canada has one of the world’s largest and fastest-growing populations of international college students. In 2018-2019, Canadian colleges had 128,334 international students (Statistics Canada, 2020a), compared with 86,351 such students in the United States (Institute of International Education, 2020). Furthermore, as will be discussed in the next section, the Canadian provinces have five distinctly different college systems, making Canada ideal for an examination of emerging trends in international college students’ experience, because such systems are also found in the United States and other countries.

### **CANADIAN COMMUNITY COLLEGES**

Most Canadian publicly funded community colleges were created in the 1960s in response to a fast-growing demand for postsecondary education (Sheffield, 1962) and the view that Canada’s well-being would increasingly depend on the technical education of its workforce (Gallagher & Dennison, 1995). From the outset, Canadian colleges have differed substantially from one province to another. As Gallagher and Dennison (1995), pointed out, “The sociopolitical

contexts and economic opportunities of the provinces were so different ... that a nationwide approach was soon seen as unrealistic” (p. 383). Consequently, several distinct college systems emerged in Canada between 1965 and 1975 (Dennison & Gallagher, 1986).

Ontario created colleges of applied arts and technology (CAATs), which are the analogue of further education colleges in the United Kingdom and technical and further education (TAFE) institutes in Australia, and offer a wide range of vocational certificate, diploma, and applied-degree programs; British Columbia and Alberta opted for locally governed comprehensive colleges with university transfer, which are similar to American junior colleges; Saskatchewan developed its so-called colleges without walls based on an open-admission policy; and Newfoundland, Manitoba, New Brunswick, the Yukon Territory, and the Northwest Territories established technical colleges with a strong focus on short-term work-entry training (Gallagher & Dennison, 1995). The French-speaking province of Quebec developed a system of general and vocational colleges (referred to as CEGEPs, their French acronym) to increase access to postsecondary education for its residents. CEGEPs are tuition-free for Quebecers and offer three-year job-ready diploma programs in technical fields, two-year pre-university diploma programs. Thus, CEGEPs’ three-year technical diploma programs are similar to those of Ontario’s CAATs and of Australia’s TAFEs, whereas their two-year diploma programs are similar to those of American junior colleges. The colleges’ ability to attract international students also differs substantially from one province to another. The colleges in the four Atlantic provinces (Newfoundland and Labrador, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island) and in Saskatchewan have very few international students, in sharp contrast to Ontario. As Legusov (2017) observed, Ontario’s community colleges, which were founded to train skilled workers and tradespeople for local communities, “have evolved into complex educational organizations that fulfill multiple functions, with the education and training of international students quickly becoming one of the most important” (p. 2). In Quebec, since the 1970s, when the Gérin-Lajoie Doctrine was adopted (Paquin, 2006), the government has been active in supporting the internationalization of its higher education institutions to promote its distinctive character internationally. These efforts, however, have focused mainly on outbound student mobility programs and bilateral agreements with various Francophone jurisdictions (Bégin-Caouette, 2012).

## **INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AT CANADIAN COLLEGES**

Canadian colleges were founded with a mandate to provide education to growing numbers of young people requiring postsecondary credentials and to serve the economic needs of local communities (Jones, 1997). Internationalization was not part of their original mandate, and only 10 percent of all Canadian higher education institutions had international students before the 1980s (Hurabielle, 1998). As Dennison and Gallagher (1986) stated, “From the very start, a few colleges had made it a practice to bring to Canada groups of foreign students during the summer months for language training” (p. 160). They argued that Canadian colleges started accepting international students for two main reasons. First, stemmed from the colleges’ mission to provide a diverse range of educational opportunities. And the second was that, as government funding became less generous, colleges welcomed international students, whose higher tuition fees covered all costs associated with their education and in some cases generated modest profits (Knight, 2008). By the mid-1980s, international education was a major growth area for a number of colleges and one of their new ways of generating revenues (Dennison & Gallagher, 1986). Some provinces, especially Ontario, developed programs and policies to support the growth of their international student body. As a result, all Ontario colleges had international students on campus by the late 1990s (Galway, 2000).

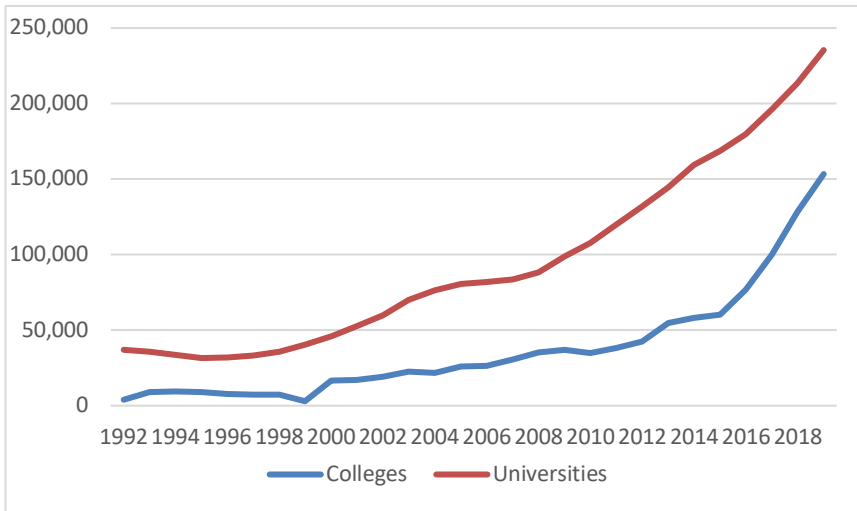
Quebec was an exception in that it enrolled international students not so much to increase revenues as to keep colleges alive in rural areas (Bégin-Caouette, 2018). Guided by a vision of Quebec as a distinct society, the Quebec government developed an international education strategy that promoted the province’s distinctiveness (Ministère de l’Éducation, 2002). The strategy emphasized Quebec-based international cooperation, bilateral agreements on tuition-fee exemptions with French-speaking countries, and scholarship programs for Quebec students and staff wishing to study and work abroad (Bégin-Caouette, 2012). The public character of CEGEPs and the no-tuition-fee policy substantially limit their ability to invest in international development. Tuition fees for international students enrolled in regular programs are set by the provincial government, and CEGEPs retain only 10 percent of the fees paid by such students (Bégin-Caouette, 2018). Thus, CEGEPs have had traditionally little financial incentive to increase their numbers of international students.

Because education in Canada falls exclusively under provincial jurisdiction, the federal government, which is responsible for international relations, long hesitated to become involved in the sector. In 2014, however, the Government of Canada (2014) adopted its first International Education Strategy with the specific goal of increasing the number of international students in Canada to 450,000 by 2022. The goal was easily achieved and even surpassed, with 494,525 international students attending Canadian secondary and postsecondary

educational institutions in 2017 (CBIE, 2018). Figure 1 shows the number of international students at Canadian public colleges and universities from 1992 to 2019.

As the graph shows, the increase in international college students was gradual at first, then started accelerating in 2009 and increased rapidly after 2015 as a result of several factors. The introduction of the Canadian Experience Class immigration stream in 2008 and the Express Entry system in 2015 made it easier for international students with Canadian work experience to qualify for permanent residency. It is likely that these changes to immigration policy had a more substantial impact on international college students than on university students because arguably colleges provide a more expedient way to immigrate.

**Figure 1:** *International Students at Canadian Public Colleges and Universities*



Source: Statistics Canada (2020a)

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Even though the literature on international students who attended community colleges is still relatively scant, several studies have explored trends that are likely to have a substantial impact on colleges and their international students.

### **Evolving Rationales for Recruiting International Students**

One such trend is the changing rationales for recruiting international students. According to Knight (2006), the top three reasons that institutions of higher education recruited international students in the early 2000s were to promote their brand and profile internationally, to enhance the quality of education by bringing diverse perspectives to the local student body, and to generate revenues. More recently, Usher (2018) opined that, although international students are valued because they add diversity to classrooms and because “their presence burnishes institutions’ standings in world rankings..., they are mainly prized because they pay much higher tuition fees than domestic students and are thus seen as a way of offsetting stagnant government funding” (p. 18). Demographic trends are another reason why colleges are under pressure to recruit international students. According to Statistics Canada (2018), the

number of potential students aged 20 to 24 in Canada will increase slightly until about 2030, only to plateau until 2039, and then begin to drop. Such a trend will most likely have a detrimental effect on the colleges' ability to sustain their operations, if it is not reversed or at least mitigated.

### **Educational Destinations**

Bohman (2014) studied international college students' choice of type of educational institution and country. He found that, for the United States, the main pull factors were the English language, the view of the country as an international culture center, and the positive reputation of its colleges and universities. Buckner et al. (2021) pointed out that more than 85 percent of all international college students in Canada study in only two provinces: Ontario and British Columbia. The authors argue that the reasons for this distribution are the international education policies that Ontario and British Columbia have adopted and the fact that they are the two largest English-speaking provinces, with sizable immigrant populations, especially in Toronto and Vancouver. In addition to these factors, Legusov and Jafar (2021) have also explored emerging approaches that Ontario colleges use to increase their market share of international students, such as campuses exclusively for international students and partnerships with private career colleges.

### **Enrollment Trends**

Other studies have examined the enrollment trends of international college students. Baer (2021) found that such students in the United States came from 205 places of origin in 2019-2020 with the top 10 being, in descending order, China (about 19 percent), Vietnam, Japan, South Korea, Brazil, Mexico, Venezuela, India, Taiwan, and Nepal. Even though the number of Chinese international students at American community colleges decreased over the past three years, aligning with the national trend, China has been in the lead since 2011-2012, when it overtook South Korea (Baer, 2021). Using Statistics Canada data, Buckner et al. (2021) identified an increasing proportion of international college students from India as a major trend in the demographic distribution of international college students.

### **Changing Recruitment Strategies and Shift to Distance Learning**

The pandemic has prompted many colleges to rethink their international student recruitment strategies. Canadian colleges have traditionally relied heavily on agents to recruit such students. According to Jafar and Legusov (2020), more than 80 percent of the international college students in the Greater Toronto Area

were recruited by agents in 2019. Over the past two years, however, as the COVID-19 pandemic made international travel and in-person attendance at education fairs difficult, colleges have been increasingly shifting to digital recruitment.

From March 2020, most international students have been studying from their home countries. This remote delivery has prevented many students from engaging meaningfully with their education. According to Day et al. (2021), some international students found the lack of body language and other nonverbal communication extremely stressful and, therefore, participated less in their classes. Literat (2021) observed that many students felt that their professors were less encouraging when teaching remotely. Online learning also took a toll on students' mental health, with students "crying during online class, feeling isolated and scared" (p. 6). Distance learning was difficult for all students but especially for international students, who may not have had a strong support system to help them cope.

### **Commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI)**

Many institutions of higher education have recently committed to the principles of EDI, however, international students were not always considered in the process, despite the structural barriers international students face. Tavares (2021) found that international students felt excluded and othered in the community. Their experiences pointed to a lack of intercultural awareness and sensitivity, a lack of institution-led initiatives to integrate them with peers, and the limited internationalization of the curriculum. The author concluded with a call for universities to recognise international students as a marginalized group in their EDI efforts and, potentially, address structural issues that internationalization frameworks have neglected. Similarly, Buckner, et al (2022) argued that international students are largely overlooked in existing organizational structure for EDI. The authors suggested that the definitions and initiatives related to EDI should better reflect clear definitions of inclusion and equity that take into account the needs and experiences of international students.

This section reviewed the literature relevant to the study's research question. The research on trends in international college students is limited and tends to be outdated. Furthermore, there is a lack of literature on Canadian community colleges. This article seeks to fill these knowledge gaps.

### **CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

Knight's framework of internationalization in higher education (2004) is used as the theoretical underpinning for this study. Knight's framework addresses



governmental and institutional internationalization objectives and provides rationales, approaches, and strategies used to achieve them. As such, it provides an effective tool for investigating trends in international student development. Knight posits that rationales for internationalization in higher education can be sociocultural, political, economic, academic, or reputational. The approaches that educational institutions adopt to achieve their internationalization objectives may be activity-based, outcome-based, rationale-based, or process-based. Finally, Knight differentiates between organizational and program-related internationalization strategies. Organizational strategies include institution-wide planning, budgeting, and coordinating, whereas program strategies may involve student mobility, internationalized curricula, joint degrees, and research and scholarly collaboration. Knight’s framework, therefore, provides a rich set of categories and definitions for an in-depth, comprehensive investigation of emerging developments in international college students’ education.

### METHODOLOGY

The study’s methodological approach is selection and content analysis of pertinent documents. The sources include literature published by provincial departments of education; press releases, manuals, and policy documents from Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) as well as Quebec’s department of immigration; college mission statements, strategies, newsletters, reports, and programs; and a selection of other records in the public domain. Table 1 provides a summary of the sources examined for the study.

**Table 1** *Sources Examined for the Study*

Type of source	<i>N0.</i>
Articles, books, and dissertations	42
Canadian Bureau for International Education	21
Government of Canada	31
Institutional websites	91
Professional associations and federations	33
Provincial governments	57
Research centers	7
Statistics Canada	25

The study examines emerging trends in the internationalization of college education and, thus, focuses mainly on publications from 2017 to 2022. To reflect the evolving, dynamic nature of such trends, some key older documents

were also examined. Combining these data provided a rich perspective on the evolution of international students at Canadian community colleges.

O’Leary’s document-analysis process (2014) was used to analyze the documents. Accordingly, we assessed the credibility of the gathered documents; scrutinized their intentional and unintentional evidence; reviewed and refined the process; and then analyzed the data.

O’Leary’s method is the interview technique, which treats the document as an informant that provides relevant information (O’Leary, 2014). As with an interview involving individuals, the researcher determines the information required and whether the documents yield pertinent data. The researcher asks questions and then identifies the answers in the text. Content and pattern coding were used to analyze the data to identify common trends. To ensure high-quality analysis, the three researchers examined the data separately and then compared their findings to build a consensus on the emerging themes. Even though a variety of topics emerged, the selection of the themes was informed by the research question and the study’s conceptual framework.

## **FINDINGS**

The study identified seven significant trends in Canadian college education as they pertain to international students: evolving rationales for recruiting international students; educational destinations; changing demographics of international college students; partnerships with private colleges; campuses exclusively for international students; the shift to distance learning, and EDI strategies. Some of these trends are likely to have a sustainable impact on the internationalization of the Canadian college system and college systems in other countries.

### **Evolving Rationales for Recruiting International Students**

From the end of World War II until the end of the Cold War, international education in Canada followed mainly political rationales, such as promoting Canadian culture and building international cooperation, and was partly supported by the **Canadian International Development Agency** (Pestieau & Tait, 2004). With the economic recession in the early 1990s and the advent of the General Agreement on Trade in Services in 1995, many international cooperation programs were cut, federal transfers to the provinces were reduced and grants to colleges were frozen. Therefore, institutions in several provinces turned to recruiting international students to alleviate this loss of funding (Knight, 2008). On the basis of this economic rationale, English-speaking provinces, primarily

Ontario, have developed various instruments and policies to attract international students.

In the French-speaking province of Quebec, the situation was different. As mentioned, influenced by the separatist movement, the government focused its international education strategy on promoting Quebec’s distinctiveness. To achieve its objectives, it pursued Quebec-based international cooperation, bilateral agreements with French-speaking countries for tuition-fee exemptions and scholarship programs for Quebec students and faculty members studying and working abroad (Bégin-Caouette, 2012). Since 2007, however, the Government of Quebec has been acting more like its counterparts in the other Canadian provinces, preferring fee-paying international students from all over the world to fee-exempted students from Francophone countries (Bégin-Caouette, 2018). This new approach took some time to affect CEGEPs’ international activities in a significant way, but by 2019 the recruitment of international students had become the most important international activity for CEGEPs (Fédération des CEGEPs, 2020). Accordingly, for the first time in their history, in 2019-2020 the international students that CEGEPs welcomed (4,897) exceeded the number of students they sent abroad (4,093). It can be stated that, under the impetus of a similar rationale, the federal government, the provinces, and the community colleges are pursuing a common goal.

### **Educational Destinations**

The number of international students attending Canadian colleges rose from 2,862 in 1999-2000 to 153,360 in 2019–2020 (Statistics Canada, 2021). However, this increase did not affect all Canadian provinces and territories equally. Table 2 shows the distribution of international college students in the 10 Canadian provinces in the 2009-2010 and 2019-2020 academic years.

**Table 2:** *International College Students by Province*

	2009-2010		2019-2020		10-year trend
	Students	%	Students	%	%
Ontario	24,696	67.8	102,150	66.6	414
British Columbia	5,508	15.1	24,585	16.1	486
Quebec	2,601	7.1	10,752	7.0	413
Alberta	3,192	8.8	8,564	5.6	103
Manitoba	120	0.3	2,637	1.7	2,197
New Brunswick	105	0.3	1,737	1.1	1,654
Saskatchewan	87	0.2	1,266	0.8	1,455
Nova Scotia	39	0.1	831	0.6	2,130
Prince Edward Island	27	0.1	690	0.4	511

Newfoundland & Labrador	54	0.2	138	0.1	255
Canada	36,429	100.0	153,360	100.0	418

Source: Statistics Canada (2021)

As Table 2 shows, in 2019-2020, two-thirds of Canada's international college students were in Ontario (66.6 percent), followed by British Columbia (16.1 percent), Quebec (7.0 percent), and Alberta (5.6 percent). Together, these four provinces accounted for 95.3 percent of the international college students in Canada, a figure down slightly from 98.8 percent in 2009-2010. Manitoba, New Brunswick, Saskatchewan, and Nova Scotia recorded large increases in the number of their international college students over the past decade, although the actual number of international college students in these provinces has remained relatively low. This increase may be due to the provinces' adoption of programs facilitating international students' transition from temporary to permanent residency (Government of Manitoba, n.d.; Government of New Brunswick, 2020; Government of Saskatchewan, n.d.a.). The provinces have also offered financial incentives, such as a tuition-fee rebate of up to \$20,000 for international students who stay on and work in Saskatchewan after graduation (Government of Saskatchewan, n.d.b.). During the decade, the share of international college students in Alberta decreased from 8.8 percent to 5.6 percent, possibly because in 2018 two colleges, Red Deer College and Grande Prairie Regional College, became degree-granting universities (Bartko, 2018).

Even though Ontario saw its share of international students fall somewhat, it is still by far the most attractive destination for international students, with a vibrant economy perceived as offering excellent opportunities for career employment. As Scott et al. (2015) highlighted, because of its appeal for international students, Ontario shapes and defines international education across Canada to a large extent.

Nevertheless, the distribution of international students among Ontario's 24 publicly funded colleges is anything but equal. International college students tend to gravitate to major cities with multicultural populations and abundant job opportunities. For example, international college students in Ontario numbered more than 85,000 in 2019-2020; but, according to the Ontario government (2021), 55.5% of them attended the five large colleges in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). As will be discussed in the section on public-private college partnerships, a substantial number of international students who are nominally enrolled in CAATs outside the GTA actually attend private career colleges (PCCs) in the GTA. The exact number of such students is unknown, but 25,000 CAAT students attended PCCs in 2021 according to Coote (2021). One may assume that the

majority of such students are international. This trend is likely to continue; the GTA is the most populous area in Canada, it has a strong economy, and it is one of the most multicultural jurisdictions in the world (Duncan & Popp, 2017) – all strong pull factors for international students.

Even though the majority of international students in Quebec attend CEGEPs in large cities, a substantial number study in rural CEGEPs (Bégin-Caouette, 2013). Although CEGEPs cannot retain all the tuition fees paid by international students, those in rural areas try to compensate for the local demographic decline by recruiting international students for programs threatened with closure (Bégin-Caouette, 2013). The cost of living in Quebec’s rural areas is substantially lower than in its large cities, which may be attractive to some international students.

### **Changing Demographics of International College Students**

Most international students at Canada’s colleges have traditionally come from China, India, South Korea, Nigeria, Russia, Vietnam, and Pakistan (Popovic, 2013). Even though most of these countries remain among the top providers, there have been some significant changes in their relative contributions. Table 3 shows the top 10 suppliers of international students in Ontario in the 2012-2013 and 2019-2020 academic years, as well as the percentage increase during that period. The countries are ranked by number of students within each year.

**Table 3:** *International Students at Ontario CAATs (Top 10 Countries)*

Country	2012-2013	Country	2019-2020	Seven-year trend (%)
India	4,628	India	34,088	736.6
China	3,057	Philippines	6,363	252
Philippines	2,525	China	5,942	194.4
Pakistan	1,786	Vietnam	3,504	973.3
Jamaica	1,320	United States	1,941	223.1
Sri Lanka	977	South Korea	2,903	391.2
United States	870	Pakistan	2,464	138
South Korea	742	Jamaica	1,840	139.4
Colombia	740	Nigeria	1,726	250.5
Iran	732	Iran	1,686	230.3

Source: Ontario government (2021)

From 2012 to 2019, India recorded an increase of 736.6 percent in international students, second only to Vietnam's 973.3 percent. Several factors may have contributed to such development. As the middle class expands amid recognition that an educated, intercultural population drives economic development and social progress, many families in fast-developing countries are eager to provide their children with a high-quality western education (Ortiz et al., 2015).

Another contributing factor is Canada's two-step immigration strategy as it pertains to international college graduates. The first step for a potential immigrant is to gain at least 12 months of full-time, skilled work experience in Canada as a temporary resident, or an equal amount of such work on a part-time basis. After fulfilling this requirement, an international college graduate may apply for permanent residency under the Canadian Experience Class stream. Most graduates of Canadian colleges are allowed to work in Canada for up to three years. Studies show that most international students in Canada plan to apply for permanent residency (CBIE, 2018a). To qualify, an applicant needs to obtain a certain number of points under a highly competitive system. Applicants are assigned points for their English- and French-language skills, education, work experience, and age, and they are ranked against the other individuals in the pool under the Comprehensive Ranking System.

Arguably, under such a system, international students from India, the Philippines, Pakistan, and other countries where English is widely spoken enjoy two advantages over students from elsewhere. First, they are likely to get higher points for their English-language skills. Second, it can be argued that because they are under no pressure to move to Canada at an earlier age to learn English, they

often obtain their first educational credential and work experience in their home countries, which gives them additional points toward immigration. As shown in Table 3, India has supplanted China as the colleges' top supplier of international students. Moreover, factors such as the rise in racist attacks against Asians and the growing distrust of Chinese students owing to deteriorating relations between the West and China, may have reduced the number of Chinese students attending Western colleges and universities.

The data show that, even during the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of Indians wishing to study in Canada increased. According to official statistics from the Canadian High Commission in India, in the first four months of 2020 Canada issued almost 100,000 study permits, or about 4.2 percent more than the 96,000 in the comparable four-month period of 2019 (Immigration Canada, 2021).

Another important development is the robust increase in the numbers of international students from the Philippines and Vietnam. Students from the Philippines benefit from growing up in a country where English is widely spoken, and in Vietnam the middle class is growing fast, allowing more families to send their children abroad. Furthermore, these two countries, along with China and India, were included in Student Direct Stream program launched by the IRCC in 2018 to facilitate the application process (Government of Canada, 2021).

The demographics of international college students in predominantly Francophone Quebec are strikingly different from those of the other Canadian provinces. Even though the overall diversity of international students in the province has increased since 2005, Bégin-Caouette (2018) points out that the number of students from France has increased more rapidly than those from other Francophone countries, citing the termination of agreements waiving tuition fees for students from Reunion Island, Cameroon, and New Caledonia.

### **Partnerships with Private Colleges**

As discussed, the overwhelming majority of international students in English-speaking Canada opt for colleges in large cities, generating a large portion of such colleges' revenues. As a result, colleges outside urban areas tend to be financially disadvantaged. To address this problem, many Ontario CAATs sign partnership agreements with the province's private career colleges. Many PCCs are in large urban centers and, like public colleges, offer vocational programs to domestic and international students. But many international graduates of private colleges are not allowed to work in Canada and have to leave the country after their studies. The partnership agreements allow international students admitted to colleges in remote areas to attend private colleges in large urban centers and to receive a public-college credential that allows them to work in Canada after graduation

(Ministry of Colleges and Universities, 2019). Currently, 11 public Ontario colleges had such agreements – a trend that is likely to continue (ApplyBoard, 2021).

As for Quebec, in addition to 48 public CEGEPs with an enrollment of 194,862, it has 24 subsidized private colleges offering the same programs as CEGEPs to 18,285 students, and 49 nonsubsidized private colleges that mostly offer attestations of college studies to 8,421 students (Quebec, 2021). It is not clear how many international students private Quebec colleges have, but according to Gervais and Fortier (2020), one such college was recruiting more than 900 students. Partnerships between the different types of colleges are rare; although, some CEGEPs have partnerships whereby nonsubsidized private colleges operate their buildings, recruit international students and charge tuition fees that are much higher than CEGEP fees. As nonsubsidized private colleges offer short-duration programs leading to the attestation of college studies, all the tuition fees are kept by the institutions and shared between the partners (Schué, 2020).

### **Campuses Exclusively for International Students**

Colleges in major urban centers are setting up campuses exclusively for international students. In the GTA, Canada's two largest public colleges recently created campuses for international students only (Humber College, 2020; Seneca College, 2020). The manifest reason was to address the specific needs of international students more effectively. However, a critical observer might conclude that such campuses are simply a means of capitalizing on the international student bonanza. The campuses are also controversial because they isolate their students from Canadian counterparts, causing them to miss out on vital opportunities for acculturation.

Simon Fraser University (SFU) in British Columbia took a slightly different approach when it established Fraser International College (FIC), a standalone institution run by a private company. For premium tuition fees, FIC offers international students smaller classes and more attention in their first year, to help them transition to full SFU life (Simon Fraser University, n.d.). Several other institutions such as University of Manitoba and International College of Manitoba (ICM), Toronto Metropolitan University and Toronto Metropolitan International College (TMIC), and Wilfrid Laurier University and Wilfrid Laurier International College also use this model.

### **The Shift to Distance Learning**



Even though the trend toward distance education began several years ago, the COVID-19 pandemic caused it to accelerate rapidly. International students in Canada may take up to 50 percent of their programs online (Government of Canada, n.d.). A Hanover Research survey (2020) on COVID-19's impact on the program-delivery preferences of international students showed that 66 percent favored online classes. Students who preferred the in-class format cited greater exposure to the new culture and language as their main reasons.

The time that international students spend studying online in their home countries is not normally counted in their PGWP application. At the time of writing, IRCC lifted this restriction until December 31, 2020 (Government of Canada, n.d.). Thus, thousands of international students, many for the first time, have found themselves studying online in Canada or from home. Even though such measures are temporary, one may assume that many more courses and programs will be offered through distance education than before the pandemic. Such a development will affect international students significantly as some of them may be from cultures where distance education is not as prevalent as in Canada. Adjusting to a new learning context with different academic expectations can be challenging. Many studies reported that international students faced various challenges with distance learning. Most of these challenges were related to their educational experiences, mental health and wellbeing issues, financial concerns, struggle of working across time zones, lack of motivation and focus and impact on future plans (Houlden & Veletsiannos, 2022; Gillis & Krull, 2020).

As the traditional college education-to-citizenship pathway disrupted because of COVID, many international students will complete their programs without setting foot on Canadian soil. Many of them will qualify for PGWP, however, lacking Canadian experience means they will encounter severe challenges in the Canadian labor market. Thus, CAATs need to develop creative ways of supporting such students, such as workshops and webinars introducing students to the Canadian context and labor market, support services for international alumni, and mentorship services. Moreover, distance education will necessitate changes to immigration regulations governing international students.

### **Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Strategies**

Canada's public colleges have long been committed to open access and equal opportunities for all qualified students. However, such an approach does not automatically yield desirable outcomes for all. Visible-minority, female, racialized, Indigenous, differently-abled, and international students, often experience precarious employment and poverty at higher rates than their traditional mainstream counterparts (Tamtik & Guenter, 2019). Many colleges

across Canada have, therefore, started to implement comprehensive EDI strategies to help marginalized and underrepresented groups succeed. Despite this trend is not exclusive to international students, the intersectionality of their multiple minority-status characteristics makes their experience particularly complex.

International college students face challenges with respect to all three EDI concepts. For instance, even though they present a high degree of cultural diversity, international students may be victims of stereotyping. Thus, they tend to gravitate to the safe space of their own ethnic and racial groups (Will, 2016). Studies show that international students are often unaware of college resources and services available to them (Fadulu, 2018). Therefore, they have difficulty adjusting to college life and, more generally, to life in Canada. International students also think they have greater difficulty getting a job (Arthur, 2003). Furthermore, most international students belong to a visible minority, and a substantial number of them are mature students (Legusove, 2021), groups historically underrepresented in postsecondary education.

Perhaps the factor that contributes the most to inequity between domestic and international students is the difference between the tuition fees paid by the two groups. In fact, international students are often described as the “cash cows” of tertiary education (Sanchez-Serra & Marconi, 2018). Furthermore, colleges typically do not offer any financial support to international students. Domestic students’ tuition fees are heavily subsidized by Canadian taxpayers, but international students must finance their education themselves. The governments want to see international students become Canadian citizens to address the country’s impending demographic and labor-market crisis, yet seem to regard them merely as cash cows. Understandably, many international students consider this system inequitable.

## **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

This study contributes to the literature on international college students by exploring emerging trends involving international students at Canadian community colleges. Canada has several distinctly different systems of higher education and is one of the top destinations for international students. Thus, the study’s findings are relevant to other countries that welcome international students.

This study enriches the discussion by examining how federal, provincial, and institutional policies and other forces have set in motion major trends in the internationalization of community college education. The study suggests that these trends are mediated by multiple factors, such as the motivations, strategies,

and jurisdictional policies of governments, and the geographic locations and private or public nature of colleges.

The study also identifies new approaches that colleges use to attract international students, such as campuses exclusively for international students and partnerships with private career colleges. It briefly analyzes the newest development, namely the shift to online instruction in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Geopolitical and socioeconomic changes are having a profound impact on the way colleges function, accelerating established trends and setting in motion major new trends. Canada, with its wide variety of educational systems and long tradition of welcoming international college students, offers fertile ground for an exploration of such phenomena. The findings of this study can be generalized to colleges and technical and vocational institutions in their countries, such as junior colleges in the United States, further-education colleges in the United Kingdom, and technical and further-education institutes in Australia.

The objective of this research was not to provide a comprehensive, in-depth analysis of the latest developments in the internationalization of college education but rather to draw attention to important trends affecting Canadian community colleges. Studies examining these trends in more detail are needed. Moreover, with the speed and scope of the changes affecting educational systems around the world, more trends are certain to emerge and must be studied if colleges and other institutions of higher education are to address such challenges effectively.

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