



## **Fostering Academic Hospitality: Addressing the Needs of Muslim Postgraduate Students in Canadian Higher Education**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Muslim postgraduate students in Canada face unique challenges that intersect with their cultural, academic, and religious identities. This study examines survey responses from 525 students at a Canadian university, 19.5% of whom identified as Muslim, to explore their experiences and key obstacles. Findings reveal significant challenges, including adapting to Canadian academic norms, navigating cultural integration, financial stress, and balancing religious observances within a secular academic environment. This research highlights the critical role of academic hospitality in addressing these barriers. Strategies such as culturally sensitive faculty training, inclusive orientation programs, and institutional policies tailored to religious and cultural diversity enhance students' academic success and sense of belonging. This study contributes to the growing discourse on equity and inclusion in higher education, offering practical recommendations for fostering supportive environments for Muslim international students in Canadian post-secondary institutions.*

**Keywords:** academic hospitality, Muslim students, cultural integration, inclusivity, higher education, international student engagement

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The presence of international students in higher education is an ever-expanding phenomenon, with over six million students pursuing education outside their home countries annually (UNESCO, 2022). "International students" are defined as individuals who travel to another country for education (OECD, 2020). This global "mobility" reflects the interplay of educational opportunities and cultural

exchange, underscoring the need to understand how international students navigate academic and personal experiences in host institutions.

Muslim international students represent a unique subgroup, especially in faith-based institutions like Trinity Western University (TWU), where integrating spiritual identity into campus life presents distinctive challenges. While international students often face financial pressures, cultural adaptation, and academic expectations, Muslim students additionally encounter stereotypes, cultural insensitivity, and limited institutional accommodations for religious practices (Andrade, 2006; Zhou & Zhang, 2014). Academic hospitality, defined as creating inclusive and supportive environments, is vital in addressing these complexities (Berg & Seeber, 2016).

This research focuses on the experiences of Muslim international students within TWU's Master of Arts in Leadership (MA Leadership) program. With over 1,100 students representing more than 30 nations, this program highlights TWU's global diversity. Among the respondents to an online survey (nearly 50% response rate), 19.5% identified as Muslim, offering a significant dataset to explore their unique academic, social, and cultural experiences. The study aims to:

- Identify the challenges Muslim international students face in a faith-based academic environment.
- Analyze the support systems that contribute to their academic and social success.
- Provide actionable recommendations for fostering inclusive and supportive educational experiences.

By addressing these objectives, this study seeks to contribute to the broader discourse on inclusivity in Canadian higher education while offering practical strategies for creating equitable environments supporting underrepresented groups' success. These insights align with the Canadian Multiculturalism Act (Government of Canada, 1988) and the Canadian Human Rights Act (Government of Canada, 1977), emphasizing diversity and equity.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Student mobility is often framed as a mechanism for fostering international collaboration and regionalization in education. However, as Amutuhair (2024) notes, this has also led to unhealthy competition among countries seeking to maximize enrollment numbers, sometimes prioritizing financial gain over student well-being. This phenomenon directly impacts Muslim students navigating global education systems, as their mobility choices can be often influenced by a combination of personal, religious, and socio-political factors rather than institutional marketing alone.

The global mobility of international students is a well-documented phenomenon, with an increasing number seeking education in faith-based institutions. According to recent statistics (UNESCO, 2022), over six million students worldwide pursue higher education outside their home countries. This

growing trend underscores the importance of understanding how cultural and religious identities intersect with academic experiences.

International students have become an important demographic on university campuses globally, yet research shows they often face more adjustment challenges than their local peers (Duru & Poyrazli, 2011). These challenges can include academic, cultural, and social barriers, as well as feelings of homesickness and cultural isolation (Sandhu & Asrabadi, 1994; Akhtar, 2010).

Extensive research has explored the experiences of international students in higher education. However, studies focusing on Muslim international students, particularly within faith-based institutions like Trinity Western University (TWU), remain underexplored. Addressing this gap, this review synthesizes key findings from existing literature, emphasizing the socio-cultural and institutional dynamics influencing Muslim international students. For Muslim international students, the journey often involves navigating challenges related to cultural integration, academic expectations, and financial pressures, all while preserving their religious identities (Andrade, 2006; Zhou & Zhang, 2014). In addition to these common challenges, Muslim international students face a unique set of difficulties, such as stereotypes, cultural insensitivity, and a lack of institutional accommodations for religious practices (Nasir & Al-amin, 2006).

Muslim students face systemic discrimination, cultural insensitivity, and inadequate representation within the academic landscape. Discrimination manifests in overt and subtle ways, including microaggressions and institutional biases, creating a hostile academic environment (Ali & Bagheri, 2009). Studies indicate that this environment often results in reduced academic performance and engagement.

The Canadian Multiculturalism Act and Human Rights Act provide a policy framework that underscores the responsibility of post-secondary institutions to create equitable and inclusive environments. (Government of Canada, 1977, 1988). These legislative measures aim to combat systemic barriers, including discrimination and cultural insensitivity, by promoting diversity and inclusivity at all levels. Institutions are thus called to align their policies with these acts to better support underrepresented student groups, including Muslim international students.

Fairness and equity in educational experiences are vital for fostering inclusivity among diverse student populations. Erkan and Walker (2016) examined the fairness perceptions and experiences of Muslim university students in Canada, highlighting systemic challenges such as Islamophobia and a lack of cultural sensitivity in academic settings. These findings align with this study's aim to explore institutional practices that impact Muslim international students' experiences and the extent to which these practices promote inclusivity and equity.

Academic hospitality, defined as the intentional creation of welcoming, inclusive, and supportive environments, is pivotal in mitigating these challenges (Berg & Seeber, 2016). Such an environment improves the quality of teaching and learning and encourages all participants to take advantage of the unique experiences and opportunities offered at universities (Seggie & Sanford, 2010).

This concept also stimulates greater interfaith understanding and the development of cooperative attitudes toward religiously diverse peers (Rockenbach & Mayhew, 2014).

Recent research has begun to highlight the unique experiences of Muslim international students in Canadian universities. Khosrojerdi (2015) examines the intersection of gender, race, ethnicity, and religion in shaping the identity and experiences of Muslim female international students. Her findings emphasize the need for academic institutions to address stereotyping and create spaces that respect religious practices, such as wearing the hijab. This aligns with broader themes of academic hospitality, which advocate for culturally responsive practices.

Khosrojerdi's (2017) later work delves into the impact of Islamophobia on Muslim international students in Canadian higher education, focusing on their negotiation of identity and experiences of discrimination. The study underscores the importance of supportive academic environments in mitigating these challenges, a theme echoed in studies on inclusivity and equity in higher education (Sherry et al., 2010; Guo & Chase, 2011).

Similarly, Sev'er and Bayhan (2016) underscore the importance of cultural sensitivity in fostering a supportive academic environment for Muslim international students. They explored Muslim international students' perceptions of fairness within Canadian universities, addressing the systemic barriers that hinder their academic and social integration. Their findings highlight the need for intentional institutional policies to promote equity and reduce experiences of exclusion. These findings align with the emphasis on institutional efforts to address practical needs, such as designated prayer spaces and halal food options, as part of broader inclusivity efforts. Mahmud (2024) further expands on these challenges, examining the experiences of Muslim doctoral students in UK higher education and emphasizing the role of faith-based support systems in enhancing student belonging and academic success.

The broader literature on international students further underscores the significance of tailored academic and social support. For example, Khanal and Gaulee (2019) identify pre-departure orientation, mentorship programs, and ongoing academic support as critical interventions. These align with Lee et al.'s (2019) findings on the role of cultural adaptation in academic success, particularly for students from underrepresented backgrounds.

The acculturation process for international students involves significant sociocultural and psychological adaptation, often intersecting with religious and cultural identities. Thomson and Esses (2016) emphasized the importance of mentorship programs in supporting the transition of international students to Canadian universities. They found that structured mentorship facilitated academic success and provided emotional support, enhancing students' sense of belonging. This is particularly relevant for Muslim international students, whose cultural and religious practices may differ from mainstream norms, necessitating tailored support mechanisms.

Montgomery and McDowell (2009) emphasize the importance of social networks in fostering a sense of belonging, a key component of academic

hospitality. Their research supports the development of structured intercultural dialogue programs, an area highlighted in this study's findings on cultural integration challenges.

The concept of belonging is critical for international students' success and well-being, influencing their academic engagement and social integration. Research suggests that students who feel a strong sense of belonging are likelier to persist and thrive in their educational environments (Mohamad & Manning, 2024). For Muslim students in Canada, the process of integration is further shaped by religious identity, cultural adaptation, and institutional inclusivity, which collectively impact their sense of belonging.

In summary, the literature underscores the importance of academic hospitality in fostering inclusive environments for Muslim international students. By integrating insights from existing research with the lived experiences of Muslim postgraduate students at TWU, this study contributes to the broader discourse on fostering equity and belonging in Canadian higher education.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study employed a survey research approach, utilizing a quantitative design to examine the experiences of international students in the MA Leadership program at Trinity Western University (TWU). The survey instrument, 43 questions, consisted primarily of Likert-scale questions and categorical response options designed to assess faculty engagement, cultural integration, social adaptation, and inclusive educational practices.

### **Sampling & Data Collection**

The survey was administered via SurveyMonkey and disseminated through multiple channels, including weekly email announcements, academic advisors, and learning management system postings. Students were offered an incentive—a \$50 Starbucks gift card draw to encourage participation. While responses were collected anonymously, participants who completed the survey could voluntarily enter their email addresses for the draw.

This study employed a convenience sampling approach, targeting MA Leadership students who voluntarily participated. At the time of data collection, the program had over 1,000 students, represented over 30 nations, and 525 responses were received. Of these, 102 respondents self-identified as Muslim international students, forming the dataset for this analysis (see Table 1). Most students are enrolled in the Business program (51%) and are located on the Langley campus (60.8%). Most participants are female (80.4%), with the largest age group being 25-34 (53.9%). Most students come from Iran (59.8%), followed by India (24.5%). Regarding marital status, 35.3% are married with children, while 33.3% are single. Regarding educational background, 55.9% have completed a master's degree. Most students commute to campus for 30-60 minutes (35.3%) or 1-2 hours (44.1%). Regarding work status, 33.3% work more than 20 hours per week, while 32.4% work 10-20 hours per week.

### ***Justification for the MA Leadership Sample***

TWU's international student population has increased from 40% to 60% in recent years, making it a significant site for studying the experiences of international students in Canadian higher education. The increasing presence of Muslim students in Canadian graduate programs aligns with national trends in higher education. According to Justice For All (2025), 60% of Muslims over the age of 15 have completed post-secondary education, with 44% of working-age Muslim men and women holding degrees—significantly higher than the Canadian national average of 25.8%. This suggests that Muslim students at TWU's MA Leadership program are part of a broader demographic shift of highly educated Muslim professionals pursuing graduate studies in Canada.

The study explores whether institutional support structures effectively address the needs of Muslim international students, contributing to broader discussions on academic hospitality within Canadian faith-based institutions.

### ***Ethical Considerations***

Before participating, students were presented with an informed consent page explaining the study's purpose, voluntary nature, and confidentiality. They could only proceed after selecting "Yes, I want to begin the survey". Those who selected "No, I do not want to begin the survey" were prevented from entering the survey.

### ***Data Analysis & Role of AI***

The survey responses were analyzed using descriptive statistical methods, including frequency distributions and categorical analysis, to identify trends and patterns in student experiences. AI tools were used strictly for quantitative data analysis, specifically in automating calculations for descriptive statistics. No AI-generated content was included, and no thematic coding was conducted, as this study did not incorporate qualitative data.

### ***Limitations***

As a convenience sampling study, participation bias may have influenced the results, as students with stronger opinions or experiences might have been more likely to participate. The lack of randomization limits the generalizability of the findings beyond the surveyed population. However, given the size and diversity of the MA Leadership program, the data provides meaningful insights into Muslim international students' academic experiences at TWU.

### ***Faculty Engagement & Academic Support***

Faculty engagement was a significant factor in students' academic experiences, with 89% of respondents expressing satisfaction with their

interactions with professors. Faculty members were often described as "supportive and encouraging," fostering a welcoming academic environment. However, engagement with academic support services varied across different student demographics.

**Academic Background Differences:** Students with prior graduate degrees (Master's or Doctorate) demonstrated lower reliance on academic support services, as they were already accustomed to research-based learning. In contrast, students whose highest education was a bachelor's degree sought assistance more frequently, particularly in areas such as academic writing, APA formatting, and research skills.

Students from the Education and Business streams reported higher engagement with writing support services due to the heavy emphasis on essay-based assignments. In contrast, students in Healthcare Leadership were less likely to seek academic assistance, possibly due to a greater reliance on professional expertise and practical applications in their coursework.

A student from the Education stream noted, "Writing research papers at this level is completely different from my undergraduate experience. The writing coaches helped me understand academic expectations."

### ***Social Integration & Student Well-Being***

While most students reported positive interactions with their peers, around 11-12% of students found it challenging to build connections with non-international students or international peers outside their cultural background.

With nearly 45% of students commuting for over an hour, attending on-campus events, networking opportunities, and extracurricular activities became significantly more difficult. Additionally, many international students balance part-time jobs and home responsibilities, further restricting their availability of social interaction. The students attend classes on campus once per week for three hours. Trying to compact everything on one day per week on campus can become a hassle.

Although these challenges are not exclusive to Muslim students, they reflect broader barriers international students face at TWU. The university's efforts to promote social integration should consider alternative engagement strategies, such as hybrid or virtual social events, peer mentorship programs, and accessible evening/weekend activities that better accommodate students' schedules.

### ***Gender-Based Differences in Student Experiences***

The survey responses revealed notable differences in how male and female Muslim students engaged with TWU's academic, social, and financial environments. While the program enrolled significantly more female (82) than male (20) Muslim students, responses varied across multiple dimensions, highlighting distinct patterns in student engagement and support needs. Female Muslim students reported unique challenges in navigating social and academic expectations. Balancing family responsibilities was a significant stressor, as some

students had young children or family obligations while completing their degrees. One respondent shared, “As a mother of two, juggling coursework and childcare is overwhelming. I wish there were more flexible study options.”

While some differences emerged in how male and female students navigated social engagement, academic support, and financial pressures, the smaller male sample size (n=20) limits the ability to draw conclusive gender-based comparisons. Future research with a more balanced sample could provide deeper insights into how gender influences the experiences of Muslim international students

### ***Religious Accommodations & Institutional Support***

Several students appreciated TWU's inclusive environment but noted areas where broader cultural representation and recognition could be improved. One student suggested, “Extend various celebrations of all religions.” Although no direct comments referenced religious accommodations such as prayer spaces, halal food, or designated worship areas, the broader concern of cultural representation suggests that students value an environment where all backgrounds are acknowledged and celebrated. Ensuring the visibility of religious and cultural groups in leadership and student life could enhance a stronger sense of belonging.

### **Financial Stress & Work-Life Balance**

Financial concerns were a major stressor, particularly for female students more likely to be financially independent and support their families. Several students mentioned the high cost of living in British Columbia, particularly housing and transportation expenses. One respondent noted, “The cost of rent and food is overwhelming. It’s hard to focus on studies when financial stress is constant.”

**Employment and Financial Struggles:** 68 out of 102 surveyed students reported working part-time while studying, while 15 others were actively seeking employment. Female students faced challenges balancing academic demands with work obligations, making it difficult to engage fully in social and extracurricular activities. A student suggested that TWU could support international students through financial aid or transportation assistance, similar to what other Canadian universities offer. “Having access to discounted transit passes would really help, as commuting is expensive,” one student shared.

The recent Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) policy changes restricting off-campus work hours to a maximum of 24 hours per week have intensified financial strain for many students. With the rising cost of living in British Columbia, this limitation significantly impacts their ability to cover expenses such as tuition, rent, and groceries. Some students expressed concerns about the ethical dilemmas and risks associated with working beyond the legal limit, as exceeding the 24-hour cap could lead to immigration violations and potential deportation. Additionally, there is a growing concern that some employers exploit this restriction by offering students additional hours at lower



wages, knowing that their financial hardships may pressure them into accepting informal work arrangements.

### ***Summary of Findings***

Overall, students reported positive experiences with faculty engagement and found the university welcoming regarding religious accommodations. However, challenges persisted in financial stress, academic adaptation, and social integration, which affected students' ability to engage in campus life fully. While some gender-based trends were noted, the small sample size of male respondents limits the ability to draw definitive comparisons between male and female experiences. The findings suggest that while TWU has made significant efforts in fostering an inclusive environment for Muslim international students, continued enhancements in financial aid accessibility, social engagement opportunities, and institutional support services would further enrich their educational journey. Strengthening academic resources, increasing mentorship initiatives, and expanding culturally responsive programming could better support the diverse and evolving needs of TWU's international student population.

## **DISCUSSION**

The findings reveal the complex interplay of academic, social, and cultural dynamics that shape the experiences of Muslim postgraduate students at TWU. These results emphasize the importance of institutional commitment to fostering inclusivity, addressing systemic barriers, and supporting diverse student populations.

### ***Institutional Policies and Religious Accommodations***

The *Canadian Multiculturalism Act* (Government of Canada, 1988) and the *Canadian Human Rights Act* (Government of Canada, 1977) mandate that educational institutions accommodate cultural practices and prohibit discrimination. However, inconsistent implementation across universities can affect the extent to which students experience meaningful inclusion (Universities Canada, 2019). A key theme that emerged from the study is the need for institutional policies that actively support religious and cultural diversity.

Although the survey did not include direct questions about religious accommodations, open-ended responses and informal observations indicate that TWU has made gradual progress in its sensitivity to religious diversity. For example, early campus events did not fully account for dietary restrictions, as reflected in an early orientation event where pulled pork was served. Since then, greater awareness has led to more inclusive meal planning. Additionally, Muslim students, like all other groups on campus, participate in multicultural events such as Diwali, Nowruz, Black History Month, Indigenous Day of Learning, and

Chinese New Year, highlighting TWU's efforts to foster a globalized academic community.

Currently, TWU does not have a dedicated prayer space for students of any faith, though students have found alternative ways to accommodate their religious practices. Some students have used empty classrooms or private areas to pray, particularly on Fridays. While no formal survey responses explicitly requested prayer spaces, there were occasional comments suggesting that such accommodations could further strengthen TWU's commitment to inclusivity.

One faculty member shared an example of informal support for religious accommodations:

"During one of my classes, a Muslim student inquired about a space for prayer. Since no official room was available, I arranged for her to pray privately at the back of the classroom using a movable whiteboard for privacy. While this was a temporary solution, it reflects TWU's broader commitment to ensuring that students feel welcomed and supported academically and holistically as individuals."

These findings highlight the importance of institutional policies that actively support religious diversity through faculty efforts and formal policy development. While TWU has demonstrated a commitment to inclusion, structured accommodations such as designated multi-faith spaces and continued cultural sensitivity training could further enhance students' academic experiences.

### ***Social and Cultural Integration***

Muslim students' interactions with peers from different cultural backgrounds highlight both opportunities and challenges in fostering cross-cultural integration. While many students appreciated the diversity within the international student body, some reported difficulties in forming connections with domestic students. Structured intercultural engagement programs, such as peer mentorship initiatives, can bridge these gaps and promote mutual understanding (Alsafar, 2015). The findings of this study suggest that universities should invest in initiatives that facilitate meaningful interactions across diverse student groups.

Some students also expressed concerns about representation in leadership roles within student associations. One respondent noted, "Most leadership positions in student governance are filled by students from one or two national backgrounds, which makes it harder for others to participate." Addressing this concern requires institutional strategies to ensure inclusive representation and equal opportunities for student engagement.

Another factor influencing social integration is students' difficulty participating in extracurricular activities. The study found that commute time significantly affects engagement, with 45% of students traveling between one to two hours each way to campus. When combined with part-time jobs and academic responsibilities, long commutes further limit students' ability to participate in student organizations or informal social gatherings.

### ***Financial Challenges and Policy Responses***

Financial barriers, particularly for students from countries like Iran, emerged as a significant source of stress. Restrictions on fund transfers, currency instability, and limited work opportunities exacerbate financial pressures for many Muslim international students. Tajvar et al. (2024) and Amutuhair (2024) highlight how financial constraints and policy inconsistencies significantly impact student mobility and access to higher education, particularly for students from economically strained regions.

The recent policy changes from Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) further compound these financial difficulties. As of January 2025, graduate students are now required to obtain Provincial Attestation Letters (PALs)—a policy previously limited to undergraduate students. This additional bureaucratic step introduces further uncertainty for international students, as provincial limits on study permits could restrict access to Canadian institutions. For students already facing economic and visa-related barriers, PALs may introduce delays in study permit approvals, additional administrative burdens, and heightened financial strain. Moreover, the perception of Canada as an attractive destination for graduate studies may be affected if prospective students view these restrictions as deterrents to securing permanent residency (PR) post-graduation.

The 24-hour weekly work restriction imposed by IRCC remains a pressing challenge, significantly impacting students who rely on employment to support themselves. Many students expressed concerns about sustaining themselves financially while balancing academic workloads. Faculty and staff have noted that some international students face difficult decisions regarding work regulations, as exceeding the permitted work hours could jeopardize their student visa status.

The high cost of living in British Columbia, particularly housing and transportation expenses, compounds these financial challenges. Several students indicated that financial stress significantly affected their academic focus. One respondent noted, "The cost of rent and food is overwhelming. It's hard to focus on studies when financial stress is constant." These concerns highlight the need for universities to advocate for discounted transit passes, expand on-campus employment opportunities, and explore additional financial aid options to alleviate economic pressures on students.

### ***The Role of Faculty in Academic Hospitality***

Faculty engagement is central to shaping the academic experiences of Muslim students. Research highlights the importance of faculty modeling cultural competence and servant leadership to create inclusive learning environments (Norman et al., 2017). This study found that students who perceived faculty as approachable, professional, and culturally sensitive reported higher satisfaction levels.

One participant noted, "Having faculty who understand and respect my cultural background makes me feel valued and supported." This underscores the significance of professional development programs for faculty, particularly in

cultural competence and inclusive pedagogy. Establishing mentorship initiatives where students are paired with faculty members for academic and professional guidance can further support student engagement and integration into the academic environment.

Additionally, the study aligns with existing literature on academic hospitality, emphasizing the necessity of institutional support in addressing the challenges faced by international students (Berg & Seeber, 2016). Addressing identified gaps, such as financial constraints and religious accommodations, will strengthen TWU's inclusivity efforts.

### ***Recommendations***

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance the academic, social, and cultural experiences of Muslim postgraduate students at TWU and similar institutions.

### **Culturally Responsive Policies and Practices**

Higher education institutions should adopt policies that recognize the unique needs of Muslim students, such as halal meal options, designated prayer spaces, and acknowledgment of key Islamic holidays (Ali & Bagheri, 2009). Universities should establish diversity advisory boards with Muslim student representation to ensure their voices are included in institutional decision-making (Poyrazli & Grahame, 2018). Annual inclusivity audits and cultural sensitivity training for faculty and staff would ensure that policies align with the evolving needs of diverse student groups (Glass & Westmont, 2019).

### **Targeted Financial Support**

Financial stress remains a significant challenge for international students, particularly those from regions with currency instability and transfer restrictions (Sherry et al., 2010). Institutions should develop targeted financial aid programs, including scholarships for Muslim international students and emergency financial relief grants (Frawley et al., 2020). Dedicated workshops and resources should provide clear guidance on IRCC regulations (e.g., work-hour limits, post-graduate work permits) (IRCC, 2024).

### **Faculty Development and Training**

Faculty are pivotal in shaping Muslim students' academic experiences (Brown & Holloway, 2008). Professional development programs should include cultural competence training to ensure faculty understand and accommodate their students' religious and cultural identities (Ali & Bagheri, 2009). Mentorship programs that connect international students with faculty and

experienced peers have been shown to enhance academic performance, confidence, and long-term success (Sherry et al., 2010)

### **Intercultural Engagement Initiatives**

Universities should expand structured intercultural programming to enhance peer connections and break social barriers (Sawir et al., 2008). Initiatives such as peer mentorship programs, collaborative learning projects, and cultural awareness events can help students from different backgrounds build meaningful connections. Hosting Islamic cultural events and interfaith dialogues can also educate the broader campus community and reduce stereotypes (Ali & Bagheri, 2009).

### **Addressing the New IRCC Policy Changes**

The new Provincial Attestation Letter (PAL) requirement for graduate students, introduced in January 2024, adds administrative burden for prospective Muslim students. Institutions should advocate for clearer pathways to permanent residency and improved transparency in student visa processes (IRCC, 2024). Providing legal advisory resources to students navigating changing immigration policies would be a critical institutional support in ensuring students remain focused on their academic goals.

### **Strengthening Support for Religious and Cultural Identity**

Academic institutions should actively integrate religious identity into campus life by promoting interfaith dialogue programs, accessible prayer spaces, and culturally responsive policies (Brown & Holloway, 2008). Collaborations with local Muslim community organizations can provide students with support networks beyond the university and enhance their overall sense of community (Ali & Bagheri, 2009).

### **Long-Term Monitoring and Evaluation**

Higher education institutions should establish ongoing mechanisms to evaluate the success of inclusivity initiatives using quantitative and qualitative measures (Glass & Westmont, 2019). Conducting post-graduation assessments and longitudinal studies on the experiences of Muslim students can provide valuable insights into institutional effectiveness (Frawley et al., 2020). Regular student feedback mechanisms, such as focus groups, anonymous surveys, and advisory panels, would help ensure that policies and programs remain aligned with student needs (Sherry et al., 2010).

## CONCLUSION

This study highlights the academic, social, religious, and financial challenges Muslim international students face at TWU, underscoring the importance of academic hospitality in fostering an inclusive and culturally responsive learning environment. While many students reported positive interactions with faculty and appreciated the university's welcoming atmosphere, significant barriers remain, particularly in financial stress, religious accommodations, and social integration (Ali et al., 2009). These findings emphasize that institutional support must go beyond generalized international student services to incorporate faith-based, culturally tailored policies that acknowledge the distinct needs of Muslim students.

The changing policy landscape for international students in Canada introduces new uncertainties, particularly for Muslim students who often face greater financial constraints and employment restrictions. The introduction of Provincial Attestation Letters (PALs) for graduate students, alongside the IRCC's 24-hour weekly work limit, creates additional barriers for students who are already balancing financial responsibilities, family obligations, and academic demands (IRCC, Government of Canada, 2024). The inability to work beyond a set number of hours disproportionately affects students from financially strained countries like Iran, where currency instability and limited access to international banking exacerbate these challenges (Poyrazli & Grahame, 2018). For Muslim students supporting families or financing their education independently, these restrictions create heightened stress, making it more difficult to fully engage in their academic and social lives (Sherry et al., 2010).

Further challenges arise in religious accommodations, where students expressed a desire for more structured institutional support. While TWU fosters a welcoming campus environment, students noted the lack of designated prayer spaces, limited halal meal options, and occasional gaps in cultural awareness among faculty and staff (Frawley, Russell, & Sherwood, 2020). Addressing these concerns through policy changes, faculty training, and expanded student services will be essential in ensuring that Muslim students have access to equitable resources and support systems on campus.

Additionally, commute times, part-time work commitments, and cultural barriers further limit social engagement and peer interaction. Many Muslim students prioritize academic success and financial stability over social integration, which can contribute to feelings of isolation and reduced participation in extracurricular activities (Ali & Bagheri, 2009). This study reinforces the need for universities to create flexible engagement opportunities, including hybrid learning options, structured mentorship programs, and targeted initiatives that bridge the gap between domestic and international students (Sawir et al., 2008).

By implementing culturally responsive policies, structured financial aid programs, religious accommodations, and faculty mentorship initiatives, TWU can lead by example in establishing an academically and culturally inclusive environment. These institutional efforts will not only enhance student success but

also contribute to broader national discussions on equity, diversity, and inclusion in Canadian higher education (Universities Canada, 2019).

As Canada continues tightening international student regulations, future research should explore how these policies impact specific student demographics, particularly religious and cultural minorities. Understanding the long-term effects of government policies on Muslim student retention, graduation rates, and post-graduation employment will be critical for shaping institutional policies promoting sustainable and equitable education access in Canada.

Fostering academic hospitality for Muslim international students is both a moral obligation and a strategic imperative. Institutions that prioritize faith-sensitive, culturally inclusive policies will attract diverse student populations and position themselves as global leaders in higher education—where students of all backgrounds can thrive academically, socially, and spiritually (Glass & Westmont, 2019).

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Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Participants

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Categories</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>
Program Stream	Business	52	51.0%
	Healthcare	27	26.5%
	Education	21	20.6%
	General/Other	2	2.0%
Enrollment Status	Alumni	7	6.9%
	Spring 2022	2	2.0%
	Summer 2022	1	1.0%
	Fall 2022	27	26.5%
	Spring 2023	19	18.6%
	Summer 2023	24	23.5%
	Fall 2023	24	23.5%
Campus Location	Richmond	40	39.2%
	Langley	62	60.8%
Gender	Female	82	80.4%
	Male	20	19.6%
	Skipped	0	0.0%
Age Range	Under 25	2	2.0%
	25 - 34	55	53.9%
	35 - 45	41	40.2%
	More than 45	2	2.0%
	Skipped	2	2.0%
Country of Origin	India	25	24.5%
	Iran	61	59.8%

	Pakistan	4	3.9%
	Sri Lanka	5	4.9%
	Bangladesh	2	2.0%
	Egypt	2	2.0%
	England	1	1.0%
	China	1	1.0%
	Skipped	1	1.0%
Marital Status	Married – waiting for family reunification	8	7.8%
	Married with children	36	35.3%
	Married without children	23	22.5%
	Single	34	33.3%
	Skipped	1	1.0%
Highest Education	Undergraduate	35	34.3%
	Master's Degree	57	55.9%
	Doctoral Degree	10	9.8%
Commute Time	Less than 30 minutes	18	17.6%
	30 - 60 minutes	36	35.3%
	1 - 2 hours	45	44.1%
	More than 2 hours	2	2.0%
	Skipped	2	2.0%
Working Status	10 - 20 hours/week	33	32.4%
	More than 20 hours/week	34	33.3%
	Not working	16	15.7%
	Looking for a job	15	14.7%