OUSA
Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance

POLICY PAPER

International Students

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Acknowledgement: The authors of this paper are not themselves international students. During the research of this paper, the following consultation was undertaken:

- *Interviews with staff at the following International Student Centres:*
    - *Queen's University, Queen's University International Centre*
    - *Wilfrid Laurier University, Laurier International*
    - *University of Waterloo, Waterloo International*
    - *Trent – Oshawa University, Trent International Program*
    - *Western University, Western International*

In addition, student interviews/ focus groups were held at Wilfrid Laurier University and Western University.

OUSA would like to thank all those staff, students, and stakeholders who helped inform and guide the development of this policy paper.

Executive Summary

This paper seeks to address the challenges faced by international students pursuing a post-secondary education in Ontario, and to consider more broadly the growing internationalization agenda within education. OUSA recognizes the benefits both of international students coming to Ontario, both in economic and socio-cultural terms, and for Canadian students undertaking a period of study abroad. However, it is evident that increasing internationalization requires institutions, governments and students to address various concerns that impact the ability of international students to succeed, and to ensure we are building strong intercultural university communities. To this end, we offer recommendations in the following areas, aimed at improving the international student experience:

Affirming the value of international students, and recognizing the diversity represented within this group:

- The government, institutions and students must ensure that Ontario remains a welcoming place to study for all types of international students.

Addressing concerns regarding high, de-regulated international tuition:

- International student tuition should be regulated within the Ontario tuition framework to ensure fairness for students;
- International student tuition should be equal to the government and tuition revenue generated for a comparable domestic student, plus additional costs associated with educating these students;
- International student tuition should be regulated in cohorts to maintain predictability for students;
- Institutions should implement processes to prevent the incorrect billing of students with refugee status;
- Institutions should commit to greater accountability regarding how they spend international tuition.

Exploring opportunities for needs-based financial assistance for international students, which is currently scarce within Ontario's system:

- The provincial government must mandate that institutions adopt a set-aside of international tuition reserved for needs-based financial aid for international students;
- The provincial government and post-secondary institutions should offer more needs-based scholarships aimed at attracting high achieving international students to Ontario;
- The provincial government and/or institutions should commit to establishing financial assistance programs targeted at students with refugee status;
- The provincial government should establish a tuition rebate for international students who gain permanent residency in Ontario through the Provincial Nominee Program.

Tackling issues relating to immigration and visas, particularly relating to regulation, processing delays, and advising:

- The provincial government must establish a transparent criterion for institutions able to admit international students, and maintain a public list of all designated institutions;
- If a student is unable to attend a university in Ontario due to visa processing delays, any visa or university application fees should be reimbursed to the students;
- The provincial government, working with the federal government, should work to ensure the processing of study visas is kept to a minimum, and commit to better communication with prospective students in the case of any delays to their visas;
- The provincial government should encourage the federal government to amend legislation in order to allow international student advisors to take a fast-track certification for student advising;
- The provincial government should encourage the federal government to allow international students to gain citizenship without undue hardship.

Addressing concerns regarding the provision of health care to international students, who are currently barred from enrolling in the Ontario Health Insurance Plan, and must purchase private coverage through the University Health Insurance Plan:

- The provincial government should allow international students to enroll in the Ontario Health Insurance Plan;
- International students should contribute a fair and proportional cost towards the Ontario Health Insurance Plan that is equivalent to the amount paid by domestic students;
- In the short-term, the provincial government should allow international students to pay insurance premiums directly to OHIP in return for the same comprehensive coverage given to domestic students;
- As long as UHIP exists, the UHIP steering committee must have significant international student representation;
- Expanded cultural sensitivity or international awareness training should be offered for on-campus healthcare providers. Greater efforts should be made to retain healthcare professionals with experience working with students.

Considering how to best prepare and support international students in obtaining employment, both in-study and after graduation:

- The barriers facing international students in gaining meaningful employment should be removed through a streamlining of government policy and greater availability of employment skills training;
- The provincial government must take a more active role in ensuring employers have accurate information regarding the hiring of international students;
- Institutions should invest in international student focused careers services, including – where possible – providing career clinics through the international student support service.

Calling for robust and comprehensive international student supports in order to foster international student success and well-being:

- Organizational structures for international student services should meet a minimum provincial standard. In order to achieve an equitable level of funding, OUSA advocates that the provincial government mandate that a proportion of international student tuition be used towards the funding of these services;
- The provincial government must ensure, through incentive or mandate, that senior administrators commit to providing a robust suite of international student support services that are adequately staffed to meet service demands;
- Institutions should provide comprehensive international student orientation programming, as well as transition, academic supports, and English language supports throughout a student's program;
- Institutions must provide access to culturally appropriate and sensitive mental health supports for international students;
- Cultural awareness training should be made available for all students, staff, faculty members and student groups to ensure the full diversity of international students is recognized and considered in the development of international students supports;
- In the instance of unforeseen changes to the academic year, institutions should provide alternative assessment or reasonable accommodations for affected international students.

Considering issues surrounding recruitment and admissions:

- The provincial government must work to ensure that universities do not partner with private, for-profit international colleges that allow international students to bypass academic standards;
- The Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities must promote the creation of an international branch campus quality assurance;
- The provincial government should focus on admitting the most qualified students regardless of home country.

Exploring strategies to increase the numbers of Canadian students able to pursue a study abroad opportunity:

- The provincial government should encourage more students in Ontario to study abroad through a range of opportunities;
- Institutions should invest in providing comprehensive study abroad support for outbound and prospective outbound students;

- Institutions should provide clear assessment for the transferability of courses prior to a student's study abroad departure;
- Institutions should commit to the full recognition of credits gained by Canadian student while undertaking studying abroad at exchange institutions.

Introduction

Successive provincial and federal governments have signaled their commitment to raising the profile of international education in Canada. *Canada's International Education Strategy*[1] acknowledges the benefits of international education for Canadians both in improving learning opportunities but also in generating economic growth, creating jobs, and addressing demographic pressures. Given these benefits, the federal government has set the target of doubling international student enrolments: from 239,131 in 2011 to more than 450,000 by 2022.

Canada currently ranks as the world's 7th most popular destination for international students, and Ontario is currently home to 42 per cent of the nation's international students.[2] These students contribute significantly to the economy of the province generating approximately $2.9bn, and creating just under 30,000 jobs.[3] International students further enrich the learning environment of Ontario's universities, contributing diverse perspectives and experiences.

However, OUSA believes that strategies that aim to "internationalize" Ontario's campuses must focus on more than the economic benefits to be derived from increasing numbers of international students. Rather, it is crucial that the academic success and welfare of incoming international students be considered, as well as the supports and cultural changes that are required to make our campuses more diverse and safer spaces.

In addition, OUSA's vision for increased internationalization acknowledges that Canadian students also have much to gain by gaining experience abroad. Studies have demonstrated the value of studying abroad, including: increased employability; greater international awareness; gains in skills, knowledge and connections.[4] To this end, we call on the government to invest in supporting Canadian students wishing to study abroad.

Moreover, this paper seeks to acknowledge that there is no one type of "international student," nor one single "international student experience." International students arrive in Canada from 173 countries,[5] bringing with them a diverse range of skills, knowledge, interests, motivations, beliefs, and experiences. It is important that services recognize the diversity of international student populations, and promote culturally sensitive approaches to addressing international students' needs.

We recognize that Ontario's world-class universities have much to offer international students, and that many international students are overwhelmingly positive about their experience of studying in Canada. However, it cannot be denied that international

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[1] Government of Canada (2014) *Canada's International Education Strategy: Harnessing our knowledge advantage to drive innovation and prosperity*. Ottawa: Government of Canada.
[2] CBIE (2014) *Facts and Figures* Available online: http://www.cbie.ca/about-ie/facts-and-figures/
[3] Roslyn Kunnin & Associates (2012) *Economic Impact of International Education in Canada – An Update*. Presented to the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade.
[4] CBIE (2013) *Pre-Budget Consultations 2013 Submission to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance*. Ottawa: Canadian Bureau for International Education.
[5] CBIE (2014) *Facts and Figures* Available online: http://www.cbie.ca/about-ie/facts-and-figures/

students in Ontario face a myriad of barriers: from tuition that is on average 265 per cent higher than that of domestic students;[6] limited options for needs based financial assistance; the exclusion from the provincial healthcare insurance program, OHIP; limited employment opportunities; and of course, having to navigate living and integrating into a new environment, often at great distance from their support networks. It is vital that action be taken to mitigate the impacts of these barriers, to ensure Ontario remains an attractive and welcoming destination for future international students.

Principle One: International students are a positive contribution to campus environments and broader communities.

International students bring a variety of positive benefits to Ontario - both concrete and less tangible. In terms of economic impact, a 2009 report found that Canada's nearly 200,000 international students spent over $8 billion dollars on tuition, living and other discretionary needs, created 86,570 jobs and generated $455 million dollars in government revenue.[7] Ontario can lay claim to a large portion of this benefit, with more than 60,000 of these students choosing to study in the province contributing $2.9 billion to the provincial economy and creating just under 30,000 jobs.[8]

There is more to the presence of international students than the significant economic impact however. A Citizenship and Immigration Canada survey of campus and community members found that international students are overwhelmingly considered to have contributed to the diversity of the learning environment at Canadian institutions, as well as enhancing their reputation. These benefits carried over to broader communities, with diversity again listed as a strong addition to a community alongside resultant population growth due to immigration and positive labour market benefits.[9] Students specifically report generally positive experiences from exposure to international peers, including shared perspectives in class, introductions to global thinking, language and cultural education and cultural sensitivity.

Principle Two: International students are a diverse group of students, with a range of experiences and needs.

OUSA recognizes that the term "international students" can encompass a wide range of students, with diverse lived experiences and needs that are influenced by a student's culture and socioeconomic background. For the purposes of this paper, international students are broadly defined as students who travel from a country other than Canada to study at an Ontario institution. Examples of the types of international students covered by this paper include:

1) Non-Canadian citizens undertaking full-time or part-time studies;
2) Non-Canadian citizens undertaking semester or year long study abroad programs;
3) Formal exchange students in an undergraduate program at an Ontario institution.

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[6] Compiled and calculated from the Common University Data Ontario, Council of Ontario Universities, Association of Universities and Colleges Canada, and institutional websites.
[7] Roslyn Kuninn & Associates (2012) *Economic Impact of Internation Education in Canada – An Update. Presented to the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade.*
[8] ibid
[9] Citizenship and Immigration Canada. (2009) *Evaluation of the International Student Program*. Ottawa: Government of Canada.

In addition to international students studying in Ontario, this paper considers the experience of Ontario students undertaking a study abroad program at an institution outside Canada, with plans to obtain a degree from an Ontario institution.

In addition to the categories of international students as outlined above, OUSA considers the experiences and needs of students who, while they may not be defined as international students for the purposes of tuition, may face similar barriers to those of international students. For example, protected persons (those with refugee status) and recent immigrants may be considered as "domestic students" for the purposes of tuition billing, but may require many similar supports as traditionally defined international students.

The diverse group of students listed above engage in a full-range of experiences and needs independent and corresponding with domestic students. It is important that students from all backgrounds experience the same high-quality education as domestic students.

Concern One: Different types of international students may experience unique barriers in participating and succeeding during their studies in Ontario.

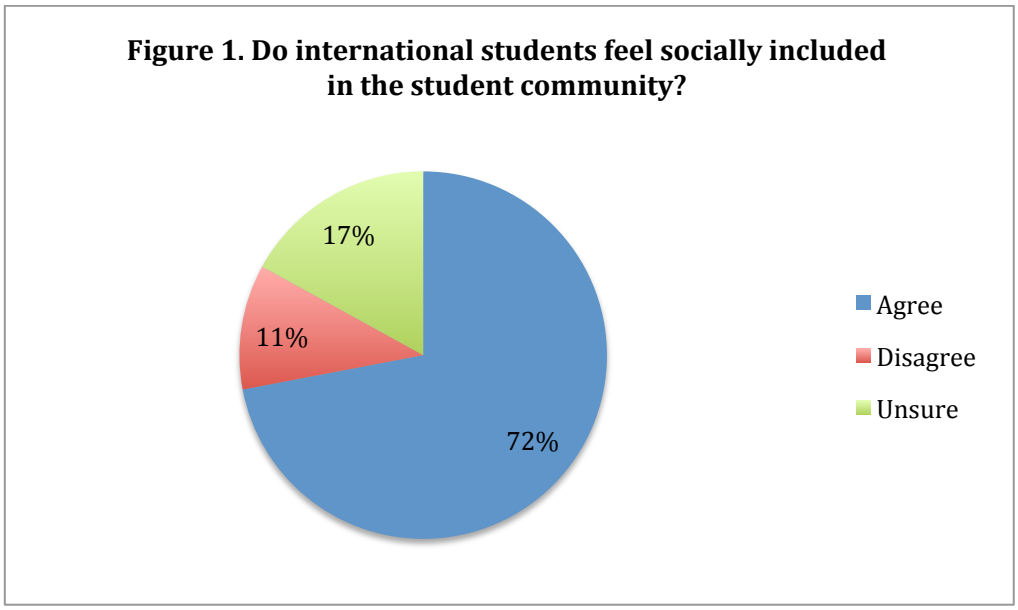
Far from being a homogenous group, international students arrive at Ontario's universities with a vast variety of prior educational and life experiences, and may require varying levels of support in order to succeed. For example, the needs of native English or French speakers will be different from those of students requiring additional language supports.

The unique barriers faced by international students from all backgrounds have the potential to significantly impact their educational experience. Without investment in providing support to the diverse populations of Ontario's increasingly internationalized campuses, institutions risk potentially harming learning and future employment opportunities for international students. Furthermore, international students may not be completely accustomed to the Canadian education system or expectations, and without support may be limited their ability to participate and succeed during their university experience.

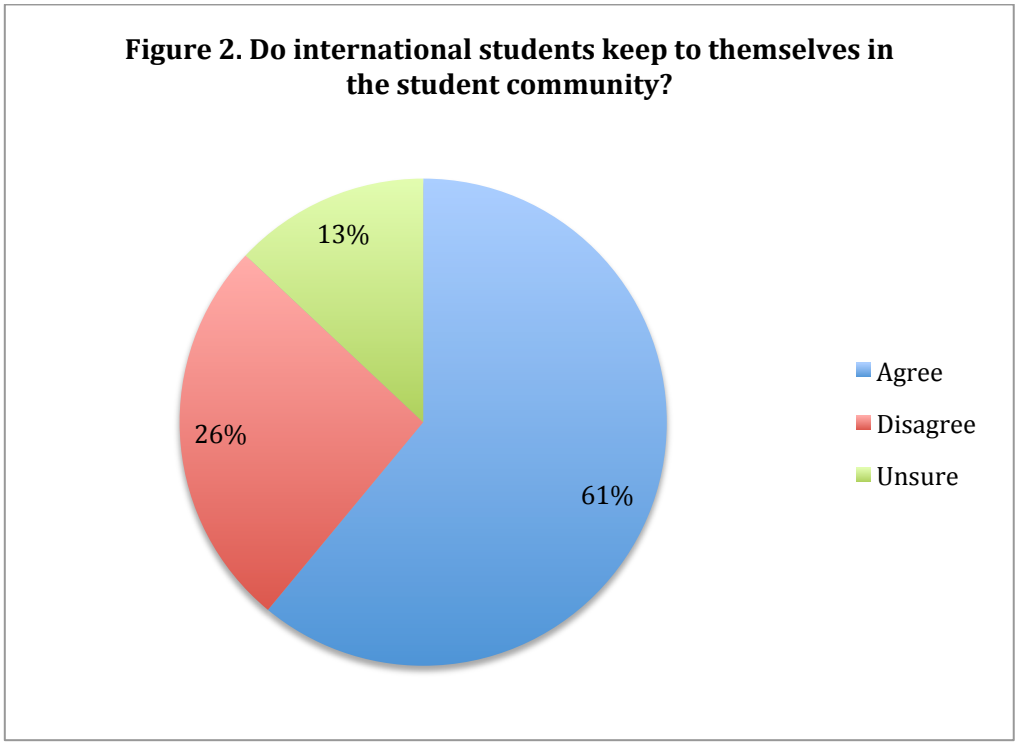
In addition to academic success, international students may face social barriers that impact their experience in Canada.

In a 2013 survey of domestic students by the Higher Education Strategy Associates (HESA),[10] when asked if international students felt socially included in the student community:

[10] Lambert, J & Usher, A (2013) *Internationalization and the Domestic Student Experience*. Toronto: Higher Education Strategy Associates



When asked if international students kept to themselves in the student community:



This mixed response from domestic students (that international students are perceived as being welcomed in the student community but simultaneously tend to keep to themselves) indicates that perhaps more can be done to assist international students in building connections with domestic students.

As a result of the combination of educational and social barriers, international students could ultimately experience reduced quality compared to domestic students.

Recommendation One: The government, institutions, and students must ensure that Ontario remains a welcoming place to study for all types of international students.

Students, institutions, and the provincial government of Ontario must ensure a high standard of exceptional educational conditions are met for current and prospective international students wishing to pursue future studies in Ontario. All stakeholders should work to provide an accepting and encouraging environment for all students wishing to study at our outstanding institutions in Ontario. International students should be provided with the same quality of education as domestic students, and action should be taken to ensure that as many barriers are removed as possible.

It is important that all students from all backgrounds are provided with the same opportunities as domestic students and that efforts be made to include international students in the full range of experiences universities in Ontario have to offer. While international students may naturally experience discomfort when commencing their studies in Ontario, institutions should aim to provide an intercultural welcoming atmosphere, in order to alleviate this discomfort.

Tuition

Principle Three: International students in Ontario should not be financially subsidized by the government, but should pay the real cost of their education.

While domestic undergraduate students have approximately half of their post-secondary education funded by the provincial and federal governments,[11] the Ontario government declared all "non-exempt"[12] international students ineligible for funding in 1996.[13] OUSA does not believe the government should subsidize the cost of education for international students; however, it is unfair to expect international students to pay more than the real cost of their education.

OUSA recognizes that the cost of educating international students is likely higher than that of domestic students as it can be expensive to provide special support services to international students. However, the Ministry of Training, College and Universities currently funds these costs to some extent.

While international students utilize government services and resources during their time in Ontario, they also contribute to funding these services during this same period of time, through payment of sales taxes on goods and services, municipal taxes through rent, and, often, income tax on employment income. However, international students are less likely than domestic students to stay in the province after graduation and contribute to the tax system over the long term. Therefore, OUSA believes it is not unreasonable for international students to pay the real cost of post-secondary education without government subsidy.

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[11] Snowdon & Associates. 2009. *Revisiting Ontario College and University Revenue Data*. Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario.

[12] Some international students are exempt from the policy and are considered eligible for subsidy due to sponsorship agreements with different agencies and countries. Details about "eligible" international students can be found in the Ontario Operating Fund Distribution Manual.

[13] Snowdon Report, "Revisiting Ontario College and University Revenue Data", 2009

Principle Four: International student tuition should not be used to generate additional revenue to make up for government underfunding at Ontario institutions.

One of the most frequently discussed areas of concern for international students is tuition. On average, international students pay approximately 265 per cent more in tuition than domestic students. The average international tuition for an Ontario student in first-year arts and science in 2013/14 was $21,314.44, compared with $7,259.00 for domestic students. These tuition fees are summarized in Table 1. The primary reason international student tuition has risen to such levels is because it is not regulated by the government and universities receive no operating funds for these students.

There is significant concern that international students are beginning to pay more than the full cost of their education. In 2012 the average revenue for each domestic first-year arts and science students was $ 8,926.92.[14] Comparing this to $21,314.44, the 2013-14 average international tuition fee for arts and science, shows that our universities received an average of $5128.52 more in revenue for each of these international students.

It is important to note that statistics of average revenue per domestic full-time equivalent student (FTE) do not take into account the significant capital and research funds that institutions receive from the provincial and federal governments, which benefit international students. Additionally, it has been suggested that the costs associated with recruitment, transition, and additional support services for international students are cost burdens beyond that of domestic students, and post-secondary institutions should receive higher revenue per international student to compensate for these additional costs. On the other hand, international students in Ontario generate $2.9bn in the economy, and create just under 30,000 jobs.[15] The complexities of comparing the per-FTE funding and revenue of domestic and international students make it difficult to come to a definitive conclusion on the debate surrounding the 'fair share' of international students. Nevertheless, attention should be paid to the level of international tuition as compared to domestic students to ensure that these students do not subsidize university costs not met by domestic tuition and government revenue.

[14] Canadian Association of Business Officers (2012) *Financial Information of Universities*. Ottawa: CAUBO.
[15] Roslyn Kunnin & Associates (2012) *Economic Impact of International Education in Canada – An Update*. Presented to the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade.

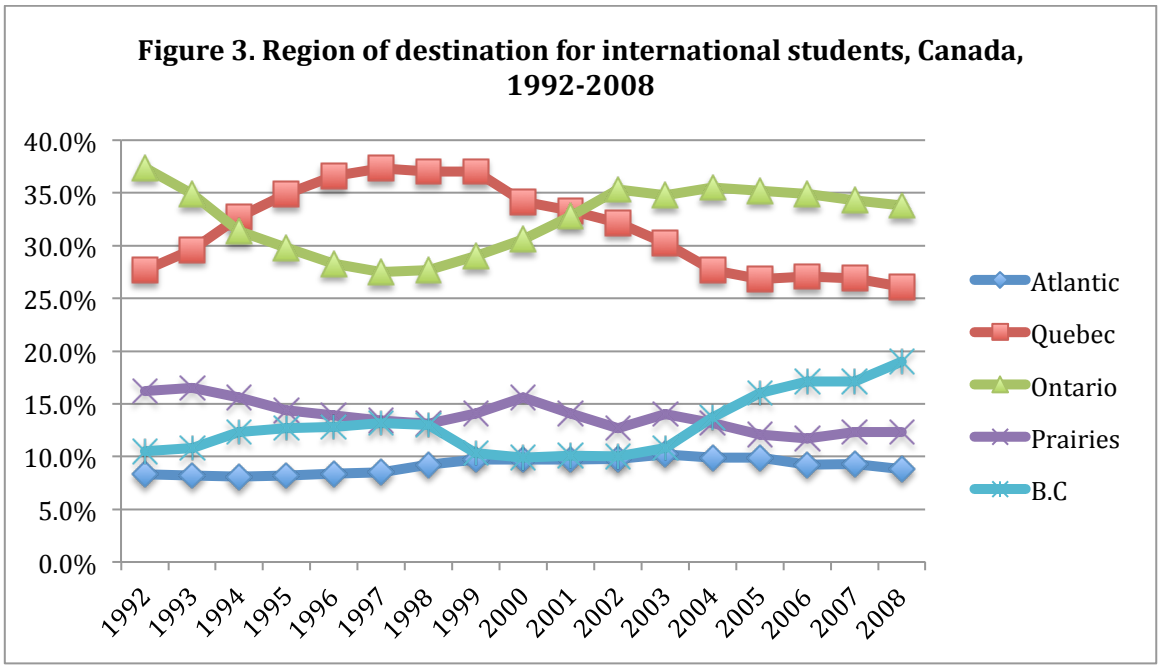
Table 1: International Student Tuition at Ontario Universities, 2013-14[16]

University	% Intl. of total students (2012)	Domestic First Year Arts/ Science Tuition	International First Year Arts/ Science Tuition	% Difference intl. vs. domestic
Algoma	12%	$5621.50	$14,398.34	156.13%
Brock	5.1%	$5,836.59	$17,712.00	203.46%
Carelton	9.3%	$5,818.00	$20,195.36	247.12%
Guelph	2.3%	$5,857.22	$9127.33	55.83%
Lakehead	1.4%	$5,735.87	$17,750.00	209.46%
Laurentian	5.4%	$5,751.50	$17,603.50	206.07%
McMaster	5.7%	$5,792.70	$16,154.00	178.87%
Nipissing	0.6%	$5,541.00	$16,325.00	194.62%
OCAD	6.8%	$5,815.00	$17,530.00	201.46%
Ottawa	4.6%	$5,835.22	$18,446.00	216.11%
UOIT	4.9%	$5,864.34	$17,592.00	199.98%
Queen's	2.6%	$5,877.00	$24,696.00	320.21%
Ryerson	2.4%	$5,856.52	$20,270.00	246.11%
Toronto	13.3%	$5,865.00	$25,944.00	342.35%
Trent	7.5%	$5,864.28	$19,590.70	234.07%
Waterloo	10.1%	$5,878.00	$20,020.00	240.59%
Western	5.6%	$5,801.00	$21,522.96	271.02%
Wilfrid Laurier	2.6%	$5,835.54	$21,844.00	274.33%
Windsor	6.8%	$5,724.41	$20,183.68	252.59%
York	7.6%	$5,863.80	$19,575.90	233.84%
Weighted Average	**8.9%**	**$5,808.16**	**$21,314.44**	**264.59%**

It is also dangerous for institutions rely on international students as tools to generate revenue because international enrolment is often not a stable source of revenue. As the below chart[17] demonstrates, international enrolments in Canada's regions have fluctuated over time:

[16] Compiled and calculated from the Common University Data Ontario, Council of Ontario Universities, Association of Universities and Colleges Canada, and institutional websites.

[17] Statistics Canada (2011) *Description for Chart 5. Region of destination, international students, Canada, 1992 to 2008.* Ottawa: Statistics Canada. Available Online: http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/81-004-x/2010006/chrt-graph/desc/desc-5-eng.htm



As Figure 3 demonstrates, Ontario experienced a significant trough in its share of international students between 1995 and 2002, and other provinces (for example, British Columbia) may be increasingly competitive in terms of attracting international students.

This picture holds true in other jurisdictions. For example, the United States witnessed declines in the international enrolment growth rate in the mid-2000s. From 2006-07, to 2008-09, the growth in international enrolment declined from 4.3 to 3.0 per cent, posing a problem for institutions that had planned on a sustained level of growth.[18] Australia also had many universities build budget models on international student revenue growth. When the 2009 recession and immigration changes caused enrolment to drop, many institutions faced severe reductions in revenue and were force to make budget cuts.[19]

Exorbitant international tuition rates cannot therefore be relied upon to compensate for chronic underfunding of Ontario's post-secondary institutions, and could create an unsustainable funding model that would negatively affect Ontario's institutions over the long term.

Principle Five: The provincial government has a responsibility to ensure that international students are levied fairly.

While studying at one of our institutions, Ontario acts as a temporary home for students and citizens of other countries. The positive development of this relationship is of the utmost importance to Ontario's future in international education. This future relies on growth in our international reputation, which is undoubtedly shaped by the student experience of those currently in the system. As newcomers to the country, international students have little social support and no representation in government, leaving them

[18] Burelli, Joan (2010). *Foreign Science and Engineering Students in the United States*. National Science Foundation, Directorate for Social, Behavioral and Economic Sciences. http://www.nsf.gov/statistics/infbrief/nsf10324/nsf10324.pdf
[19] Philip G. Altbach, (2010) *Australia's Decline*, Washington: Inside Higher Ed.

vulnerable. As hosts, it is the responsibility of all Ontarians to ensure that visiting students are treated fairly, and it is the responsibility of the provincial government to lead by example. The status quo of deregulated tuition clearly provides room for institutions to take advantage of international students. The provincial government must ensure that international students do not leave Ontario feeling taken advantage of by unfair fees. This is particularly important considering the enormous beneficial economic impact international students have in Ontario.

Concern Two: When international student tuition increases at a higher rate than the growth in revenue for domestic students, international students move further away from contributing the real cost of their education.

Since 1996, international student tuition has been completely deregulated. Consequently, in Ontario, international tuition fees rose (on average) by 10.1 per cent from 2012/13 to 2013/14 – the highest average increase in the country, and significantly higher than the provincial 3 per cent tuition increase cap for domestic students.[20] Considering that international tuition fees are already much higher than domestic tuition fees, it is concerning that the financial contribution of international students is growing at a faster rate than that of domestic students.

It is recognized that institutions do not receive operating capital or research funding from the government for international students. However, through the comparison of per full-time equivalent (FTE) revenue data and international tuition fees, it can be seen that at some institutions, international tuition is well above the cost of educating these students. The University of Toronto, Western University and Queen's University are examples where tuition charged is far above the average revenue per domestic student. Whereas the average revenue per full-time equivalent domestic first-year arts and science students in 2012 was $8,926,[21]in 2013/14 these universities charged $25,944, $21,522, and $24,696, respectively to first-year arts and science students.[22] This discrepancy – amounting to an incredible $17,018 at the University of Toronto – raises serious concerns that international students are being used to compensate for funding gaps in other areas. International tuition must not be used as a revenue stream to support institutions in the absence of strong provincial and federal support.

Concern Three: International student tuition is currently completely deregulated, meaning there is a lack of government regulation of these fees.

Unlike domestic tuition, which is regulated by the Ontario government, international tuition has no regulation whatsoever. This allows universities to essentially charge international students as they see fit, without the protection afforded to domestic students by government oversight. As a result, universities are able to increase international tuition every year, without having to provide any justification for doing so. This makes it difficult to assess if fees are being levied fairly.

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[20] Statistics Canada (2013) *University Tuition Fees 2013/14* Ottawa: Statistics Canada.
[21] Canadian Association of University Business Officers (2012) *Financial Information for Universities and Colleges*. Ottawa: CAUBO
[22] Snowdon & Associate (2009) Revisiting Ontario College and University Revenue Data. Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario.

Recommendation Two: International student tuition should be regulated within the Ontario tuition framework to ensure fairness for students.

Since international student tuition was deregulated in Ontario in 1996, tuition rates for international students have skyrocketed at alarming rates, resulting in international student tuition rates that are on average 265 per cent higher than domestic rates in 2013-2014. High, deregulated international tuition rates represent a significant financial barrier to prospective international students at a time when the federal government is looking to almost double international student enrolment in Canada by 2022.

The regulation of international tuition to the real cost of education will not only protect international students from dramatic tuition changes, but will also help keep Ontario competitive as a destination of choice. Though not all international students remain in Ontario after graduation, while attending post-secondary institutions they contribute substantially to government revenue and they should not be expected to further subsidize the cost of educating domestic students.

The presence of international students in Ontario's post-secondary institutions is beneficial both to the institutions and to society as a whole. Fair, consistent, and predicable tuition rates will allow institutions to cover the costs of admitting international students, while helping to make Ontario a key destination for international education.

Recommendation Three: International student tuition should be equal to the government and tuition revenue generated for a comparable domestic student plus additional costs associated with educating these students.

OUSA recognizes that the costs of an international student's education are not equitable to those of domestic students. Contributing to this are the costs associated with overseas recruitment practices, as well as the provision of international-student specific campus support services. Although the cost of an international student's education is higher than that of a domestic student's, current international student tuition rates greatly exceed these higher costs.

OUSA recognizes that the task of identifying what exactly constitutes the real higher cost of education for international students is a daunting one. Therefore, we must make a concerted effort to identify all relevant variables and come to a reasonable estimation of this cost. The Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities already has the data required to make this estimate.

Principle Six: Any increases in international student tuition should be predictable for students, as well as reasonable, year-to-year.

Dramatic and unpredictable increases in tuition make it very difficult for international students to plan adequately for upcoming years of education. Not only do sudden increases in tuition put undue financial stress on international students, but some students may be forced to abandon their studies. In addition to the negative consequences for the student in these cases, this scenario represents a loss of potential revenue for the system. International students deserve to know the total cost of their current and future tuition fees from the moment they first enrol. Universities have the ability to provide this predictability but many have not yet acted on it.

Concern Four: Due to tuition de-regulation, international students are vulnerable to dramatic and unpredictable fee increases.

In a recent survey of Ontario's post-secondary students, more than two-thirds of international students (68 per cent) found tuition increases to be unpredictable.[23] This is for good reason – for example, at McMaster University, international tuition increased by 32.2 per cent in 2012-13 from the previous year, and then increased by 11.6 per cent for 2013-14.[24] At Lakehead University, a 6.6 per cent increase in 2011-12 was followed by a 10.3 per cent increase in 2012-13.[25] These are just some examples of the unpredictable and substantial fee increases that international students face from year-to-year. Table 2, below, summarizes rises in international tuition across Canada as a whole, which further demonstrates the unpredictability of tuition increases for international students.

Table 2: Average International Student Tuition, Canada 2009/10 – 2013/14[26]

2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	% increase 2009/10 – 2013/14
$20,420.06	$21,221.47	$22,264.06	$22,542.53	$23,749.29	16.30%
Year on year % rise	*3.92%*	*4.91%*	*1.25%*	*5.35%*	

While the Canada wide figures may appear lower than the more extreme examples cited above, it should be noted that Ontario had the highest average increase in international undergraduate tuition in the country in 2013/14, at 10.1 per cent.[27]

Across Ontario, international tuition increases have been on average consistently higher than the 3.0 per cent cap on domestic tuition increases; however, the actual increases range from being slightly higher than the domestic cap to reaching into double digits. Since educational costs for institutions should be relatively consistent from year to year, unpredictable fee increases raise the concern that the money is being used to fund other expenditures. More important is the impact on students - these unpredictable increases make it impossible for international students to accurately budget in advance how much funding they will require to finance their education. Indeed, out of students that found tuition increases unpredictable, approximately 67 per cent agreed that unpredictable tuition increases impacted their ability to pay for their education[28].

Recommendation Four: International student tuition should be regulated in cohorts to maintain predictability for students.

OUSA believes that ensuring some degree of predictability of international student tuition is needed for Ontario to remain a competitive destination for international students and ensure fairness to students. This regulation would require that increases

[23] Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance (2013) *Ontario Post-Secondary Student Survey* Toronto: OUSA
[24] Calculated from Council of Ontario Universities, Common University Data Ontario (Toronto, 2011, 2012 and 2013.).
[25] Ibid.
[26] Statistics Canada Table 447-0023 Weighted Average tuition fee for full-time foreign undergraduate students, by field of study, annual (dollars)
[27] Statistics Canada (2013) *University tuition fees, 2013/14*. Ottawa: Statistics Canada. Available online: http://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/130912/dq130912b-eng.htm?HPA
[28] Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance (2013) *Ontario Post-Secondary Student Survey* Toronto: OUSA

beyond the first year be capped at the domestic student growth rates. The capacity for institutions to track students and charge tuition increases accordingly is already in place, as this cohort system is used in the current domestic tuition framework. This is vital to providing international students with the ability to plan for future tuition increases.

Principle Seven: Refugees' right to be charged tuition at the domestic tuition level should be protected.

Under the Ontario Operating Funds Distribution Manual, Convention refugees and protected persons (as defined by the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act) are eligible to be charged tuition at domestic rates. This is in line with Canada's commitment to the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child, which regards education as a right, and requires education to be made available to all children regardless of status. This commitment is part of the reason Canada has long been regarded as a safe haven for refugees fleeing persecution and violence elsewhere in the world.

Refugees are amongst some of the most vulnerable members of the population in general, and when welcoming refugees to Canada and Ontario, measures must be taken to ensure that these individuals have equal access to the opportunities our own citizens have, especially in education. Refugees' right to be charged domestic tuition is an important part of this process, and must be preserved.

Concern Five: Some students with refugee status have been incorrectly billed international student fees.

Although refugees' right to be charged domestic tuition is a policy that should be commended, implementation has had its wrinkles. At some universities, students with protected person status have been treated as international students by accounting departments, receiving tuition bills up to 265 per cent more than what they should be paying.[29] It has been suggested that this could be a result of clerical error, as both international students and protected persons have social insurance numbers beginning with the number 9.[30] This simple error can create substantial unwarranted confusion and stress for students who may already be struggling with other aspects of university, and in the worst case, it can wrongly deter protected persons from pursuing post-secondary education. Whether due to simple misunderstanding or other error, incorrect billing is a significant barrier to protected persons wanting to attend university and it is in the best interests of students and institutions that these problems be rectified and prevented.

Recommendation Five: Institutions should implement processes to prevent the incorrect billing of students with refugee status.

Institutions, by and large, respect and accept the billing of protected persons as domestic students. The problem, as mentioned above, is in the implementation; universities must ensure that their commitment to protected persons is reflected in their administrative and accounting processes. Administrative staff training should include checking for student nationality status, using means other than social insurance numbers. As well, universities must ensure there are protocols in place that allow for a straightforward and

[29] Maytree (2011) *Charting Prosperity: Practical Ideas For A Stronger Canada*. Toronto: Maytree.
[30] Ibid.

simple rectification process when incorrect billing is reported, so as to minimize burden for students.

Principle Eight: Institutions' expenditure of revenue generated from international tuition should be spent in a transparent manner.

Universities should strive to be as transparent as possible when spending student money. This is especially applicable to international students who pay much higher fees than domestic students with no information on how their money is being spent. In order to continue to attract international students, Ontario universities must maintain a positive image that can only be attained by honesty, transparency and accountability with regards to spending student fees.

Concern Six: It is often unclear how international student fees are spent on support services for international students.

It is difficult to find information on where revenue from international student tuition fees goes once it enters a university's operating budget. This inaccessibility of information negatively impacts a student's relationship with their university and should be discouraged. Some reasons for higher international tuition are understood; universities do not receive operating funds for these students, and the additional costs of recruitment, transitioning and support services have been mentioned previously. However, it must be made clear that international student fees are being used to provide the best education, services and experience possible to students, and not to generate revenue to make up for government underfunding.

Recommendation Six: Institutions should commit to greater accountability regarding how they spend international tuition.

Providing more information on how international tuition is spent shows that universities not only care about students, but also are not using students unfairly as revenue generators. While greater overall accountability should be strived for in general, international tuition's large discrepancy with domestic tuition and the general lack of information regarding how this money is spent makes international tuition a particular area where accountability and accessibility to information is required.

Student Financial Assistance

Principle Nine: Ontario should be attracting the most academically qualified international students, regardless of financial means or the various non-financial barriers international students face.

Attracting the best and brightest students from across the world is an important investment in Ontario's future. Bright international students contribute to the overall quality of Ontario's post-secondary institutions by introducing new perspectives in the classroom and enhancing the diversity of the learning environment. Moreover, many international students remain in Canada following their education, and represent a skilled labour pool vital to success in the knowledge economy. This is particularly

important at a time when Canada is facing several pressing labour shortages.[31] A talented international student from a low-income background should not be prevented from attending post-secondary education in Ontario due to financial or non-financial barriers.

Concern Seven: The vast majority of international students come from upper-middle and high-income backgrounds, indicating that studying in Canada is not an option for most international students from low-income backgrounds.

The results of the 2009 International Student Survey from the Canadian Bureau for International Education show that only one in ten international students comes from a low-income background, while 85 per cent of international students described themselves as from a middle- or upper-income background.[32] Worryingly, over the past decade, the number of international students from low-income families has declined. In 2009, only 8 per cent of international students described their family's wealth as below average. This figure declined from 12 per cent in 1988 and 10 per cent in 1999 and 2004.[33] All of this points towards the fact that studying in Canada is not an option for many international students from low-income backgrounds. More disturbingly, it points out that Canada is trending towards becoming a less accessible international study destination.

Ontario must do more to assure that financial circumstances for bright international students are not a barrier to entering a post secondary education in the province. Efforts should be made to attract all qualified, high-calibre students to study in Ontario, regardless of socioeconomic background.

Recommendation Seven: The provincial government must mandate that institutions adopt a set-aside of international tuition reserved for needs-based financial aid for international students.

Currently, 10 per cent of domestic student tuition fee increases are set aside to fund financial assistance for students with need. The same practice should be applied to international student fees to improve international student access to Ontario's post-secondary education system and to attract students of all socioeconomic backgrounds. The advantage of using a tuition set-aside to fund these programs is that public funding is not required. Rather, the loan and bursary program would be self-funded through the tuition of all international students enabling those who can least afford to pay to access financial assistance.

A portion of the international tuition set-asides should also be funnelled towards the creation of an emergency financial assistance bursary, as is done with tuition set-asides for domestic students. In the event an international student experiences a significant negative change in their personal finances due to a substantial unexpected cost or the devaluing of their home country's currency, they would be eligible to apply for, and promptly receive, emergency funding aimed at assisting with the costs associated with their education and living expenses.

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[31] Roslyn Kunin & Associates, Inc. (2009). *Economic Impact of International Education in Canada*. Presented to Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada. Vancouver

[32] Canadian Bureau for International Education (2009). *Canada First: The 2009 Survey of International Students*. Ottawa: CBIE.

[33] Ibid.

Principle Ten: When governments and institutions commit to international education strategies, or to increasing international enrolment, need-based financial assistance should be part of the planning process.

Over the past few years, federal and provincial governments have both committed to increasing the number of international students enrolled in Canadian institutions. In 2010, the Ontario government announced a plan to increase international enrolment by 50 per cent through aggressive promotion of Ontario's institutions and opportunities, and increasing universities' operating grants.[34] In 2014, the federal government committed to doubling the number of international students in Canada to 450,000, primarily through promotion of the "brand" of Canada in countries deemed growth areas.[35] While these plans to increase international enrolment continually speak of the need to attract the "best and brightest" students to Canada, there is no mention of providing need-based financial assistance to international students.

If provincial and federal governments are truly committed to bringing the most talented students to Canada, it must be realized that the most talented students are not always able to afford education abroad. Increasing the amount of need-based financial assistance available to international students will make Canada and Ontario more competitive in attracting students, and the students who will be able to attend Canadian universities as a result will further enrich the academic and cultural life of these institutions.

Concern Eight: While a number of merit-based scholarships for international students exist, there is currently limited need-based financial aid available to international students.

Currently, there exists a lack of any substantial need-based financial aid for Ontario international students. While 12 of 20 universities in Ontario offer emergency loans and bursaries to international students, these tend to be reserved for exceptional circumstances, and little systemic financial assistance is available. This is especially true for undergraduate students, as a majority of international-specific financial assistance addresses only post-graduate and research students. In OUSA's 2013 survey, 78 per cent of international students reported that they received no government assistance from their home country,[36] indicating that international students may fall through the gaps of financial assistance programs. The absence of need-based financial aid may deter middle- and low-income students who are highly qualified from pursuing post-secondary studies in Ontario.

Recommendation Eight: The provincial government and post-secondary institutions should offer more needs-based scholarships aimed at attracting high achieving international students to Ontario.

Ontario should be focused on attracting the best and brightest individuals to study in our post secondary institutions. In a recent survey, Canada's reputation and institutional prestige were the most important deciding factors for international students' decision to

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[34] Government of Ontario (2010), *Open Ontario: Ontario's Plan for Jobs and Growth, 2010 Ontario Budget* Toronto: Queen's Printer for Ontario

[35] Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada (2014) *Canada's International Education Strategy: Harnessing Our Knowledge Advantage to Drive Innovation and Prosperity* Ottawa: Government of Canada

[36] OUSA (2013) *Ontario Post-secondary Student Survey* Toronto: OUSA

study in Canada, whereas cost of education and the availability of scholarships were not selected by a majority of respondents, demonstrating that there is room for improvement in these areas.[37]

In 2009, a third of all international students studying at Ontario universities reported receiving some institutional support.[38] While this number appears impressive, the greater availability of international scholarships in the United States frequently results in students opting to pursue studies at American institutions, rather than Canadian ones. If Ontario wishes to remain competitive in seeking the best international students, it must continue to offer financial support to strong international candidates.

It is important that financial assistance targeting international students does not only address tuition related costs, but other expenses often associated with pursuing a degree including accommodation, food, public transit, etc.

Principle Eleven: Financial need should not act as a barrier for students with refugee status who wish to attend post-secondary education in Ontario.

Students with refugee status are eligible to be charged tuition at domestic rates and have access to OSAP funding, but even domestic tuition can be prohibitively expensive. Student loans are another enormous financial burden to consider, with undergraduate student debt in Ontario averaging around $26,877.[39] Refugees are a particularly vulnerable segment of the Ontario population, at high risk of experiencing poverty, low education, poor healthcare and homelessness.[40] Without other financial assistance, which is often difficult to find, students with refugee status may find post-secondary education inaccessible.

OUSA has long stood for the right of all Ontario students to have access to post-secondary education without being deterred by financial need, and refugee students are no exception. Appropriate financial assistance must be available to students who seek it in order to make post-secondary education available to everyone.

Concern Nine: Financial assistance specific to students with refugee status is rare in Ontario's institutions.

Although students with refugee status are eligible for financial assistance through OSAP, the unique socioeconomic status of many such students means that OSAP funding alone is not enough. Additional non-repayable financial assistance may not be as available to refugees as it is to domestic students; refugees often have limited documentation regarding their academic or extra-curricular work prior to migration, and are thus ineligible for many merit-based scholarships and grants. A search of Ontario universities shows a very limited number of financial aid programs aimed specifically at students with refugee-status, and external providers are few and far between. One foundation, Maytree, discontinued its refugee-specific financial aid program just this year.[41] Clearly

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[37] Humphries, Knight-Grofe, Klabunde (2009) *Canada First: The 2009 Survey of International Students* Ottawa: CBIE
[38] Ibid.
[39] OUSA (2013) *Ontario Post-Secondary Student Survey* Toronto: OUSA
[40] The Colour of Poverty Campaign (2007) *Understanding the Racialization of Poverty in Ontario: An Introduction in 2007*. Toronto: The Colour of Poverty.
[41] Maytree (2014) *Maytree Scholarship Program* Toronto: Maytree. Available online: http://maytree.com/grants/maytree-scholarship-program

more refugee-specific financial assistance is required to ensure Ontario institutions are accessible to refugee youth.

Recommendation Nine: The provincial government and/or institutions should commit to establishing financial assistance programs targeted at students with refugee status.

Students with refugee status have a specific need for non-repayable financial assistance, and this need is not currently being met. Additional effort is required on the part of both the provincial government and the institutions of Ontario to recognize the financial problems that students with refugee status face, and to address these issues with appropriate financial aid programs. Students with refugee status can contribute just as much to universities' academic, social and cultural life as domestic students, and perhaps more; it is only right that they be provided the means to do so.

Principle Twelve: In order to benefit from the skills, knowledge and expertise of international students it is in the best interests of Ontario to retain the talent needed to meet labour market demands.

Canada's changing demographics are creating vacuums in the workforce as our working population ages, particularly in highly qualified professional and skilled trades. According to the new International Education Strategy released by the federal government this year, immigration is expected to account for 100 per cent of net workforce growth within the next decade.[42] In order to maintain a globally competitive, knowledge-based economy, it is important that Canada and Ontario not only attract immigrants, but attract immigrants who have the necessary skills and qualifications to make a positive contribution. It thus makes logical sense for the Province to look to international students who are already enrolled in Ontario institutions and gaining locally-recognized academic credentials and work experience that will make them valuable to the province's economic growth. This is especially true as Ontario is uniquely poised to gain the most from international students, as the province attracts a larger share (40 per cent) of international students than any other province or territory.[43] Ontario must capitalize on this opportunity to keep international students' talent and expertise in the province, in order to secure long-term prosperity and economic success for both the Province and the country.

Concern Ten: Ontario may in the future find it difficult to retain international students in Canada post-graduation.

Commendable steps have been taken to make it easier for international students to work and live in Ontario after graduation, such as changes to the Provincial Nominee Program that make it easier for students to gain permanent resident status and changes to work permit access on the federal level that make it easier for students to be employed.[44] On the whole, Canada has in the past had positive immigration policies that have allowed it to have one of the highest retention rates amongst countries that have high numbers of

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[42] Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada (2014) *Canada's International Education Strategy: Harnessing Our Knowledge Advantage to Drive Innovation and Prosperity* Ottawa: Government of Canada
[43] Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada (2012) *Economic Impact of International Education in Canada - An Update* Ottawa: Government of Canada
[44] London Chamber of Commerce (2013) *Attraction and Retention of International Student Graduates*

international students – in 2009, the stay rate was 23 per cent.[45] However, recent legislative changes may soon change this and make it far harder for students to get permanent residency status, and perhaps make it less attractive for students to stay in Ontario.

International students face a host of other challenges when choosing to stay in Canada after graduation as well. These include difficulties with the necessary cultural, language and soft skills necessary to be successful in the labour market, and lack of local social and professional networks[46]. More important may be the pressure to move back to a student's country of origin to contribute to that country's economy. Indeed, OUSA's recent survey found that roughly 1 in 5 international students were required by their government, family, or other authority to return to their home country after completing their education.[47] Trends suggest that larger numbers of students may be moving back home after completion of their degrees in a shift to what is being called a "brain-train" model, where students use skills and knowledge gained abroad to have access to competitive job opportunities in their home country[48]. It is important that all these issues be addressed by making it more attractive for students to stay and work in Ontario.

Recommendation Ten: The provincial government should establish a tuition rebate for international students who gain permanent residency in Ontario through the Provincial Nominee Program.

One way governments have made it more attractive for graduates, domestic and international alike, to stay in their provinces is to offer income tax incentives based on tuition. Currently, 5 Canadian provinces are offering such incentives, all of which are provided as a credit or rebate against income tax and therefore require graduates to live and work in that particular province[49]. New Brunswick offers a tuition rebate, which is "a rebate of provincial income taxes paid, equal to 50 per cent of the tuition costs paid since January 1, 2005 to an eligible post-secondary institution, with a maximum lifetime rebate of $20,000."[50] Saskatchewan was the first to create such a program, and its Saskatchewan Graduate Retention Program currently offers a rebate equal to the actual amount of tuition paid, provided a graduate remains in the province for seven years after graduation.[51] This aggressive attempt to retain graduates has been partly credited for Saskatchewan's unprecedented growth in population and migration in recent years.[52]

Clearly tuition rebate programs are effective in encouraging graduates to stay in a province. Ontario has been aggressive in trying to attract international students to the province – it must also be aggressive in retaining its graduates to benefit from their talent. While this may not be necessary for domestic students, international students must, as shown above, be provided additional incentive to stay and work in the province. A tuition rebate program modeled after those currently in effect in other provinces may help achieve this, especially when combined with the Provincial Nominee Program. The

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[45] OECD (2011) *Education at a Glance 2011: Highlights*
[46] London Chamber of Commerce (2013) *Attraction and Retention of International Student Graduates*
[47] Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance (2013) *Ontario Post-Secondary Student Survey* Toronto: OUSA
[48] Meeting with Peter Donahue, Associate Director of International Student Support at Wilfrid Laurier University, October 1 2013
[49] M. Lori Adams (2011)*Tax Incentives for Post-Secondary Graduates*, CCH Tax & Accounting Monthly
[50] New Brunswick Department of Finance (2013) *New Brunswick Tuition Rebate: Frequently Asked Questions*
[51] M. Lori Adams (2011) *Tax Incentives for Post-Secondary Graduates*, CCH Tax & Accounting Monthly
[52] Kelly Running, *Why are young people choosing to stay in Saskatchewan?,* The Carlyle Observer (January 18, 2013)

combination will encourage international graduates to stay in the province by both easing ability to gain permanent residency status, and providing a financial incentive to do so.

Immigration and Visas

Principle Thirteen: International students studying in Ontario should receive a high-quality educational experience.

Ontario's ability to recruit and retain international students rests on our institutions' reputation for delivering high quality educational experiences. It is important that international students coming to study in Canada are enrolled in genuine educational establishments, where their expectation of a high quality education can be met. This is crucial not only for ensuring the individual's academic success, but also to ensure the integrity of Canada's educational "brand" across the world.

Concern Eleven: International students can be targets for illegitimate or poorly regulated institutions.

Private career colleges (PCCs) are regulated by MTCU, and it is illegal to operate a PCC that is not registered with the Ministry.[53] Despite this fact, illegal institutions continue to exist in Ontario and, according to the Ombudsman of Ontario, the Ministry "does not vigorously pursue information about or enforcement against rogue operators."[54] Further, reports from the United States have raised concerns about fraudulent schools which actively target international students.[55],,[56] Students enrolling in fraudulent institutions may be victims of misrepresentation, or in some cases, seeking to enter a country under false pretenses.

Even in PCCs that are registered with the Ministry, concerns about quality have been raised. In 2010/11, 47 complaints were received by the Ministry[57] on issues such as instructor harassment, inadequate instruction and lack of equipment.

Private career colleges are often particularly attractive to international students and recent immigrants, as they offer a "fast track" to training, with continuous enrollment and shorter program lengths.[58]

International students, due to geographical distance and lack of familiarity with Ontario's post-secondary education sector, may be particularly susceptible targets for colleges operating for-profit and not in the student's best interest.

Recommendation Eleven: The provincial government must establish a transparent criterion for institutions able to admit international students, and maintain a public list of all designated institutions.

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[53] Andre Marin (2009) *Too Cool for School: Investigation into the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities' Oversight of Bestech Academy Inc. and Enforcement of the Private Career Colleges Act*. Toronto: Ombudsman of Ontario
[54] ibid
[55] Elise Young (2012) "Watch out for fake colleges" in *Inside Higher Ed* Washington DC: Inside Higher Ed
[56] Tom Barlett, Karen Fischer and Josh Keller (2011) "Little known colleges exploit visa loopholes to make millions off foreign students" in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* Washington DC: The Chronicle of Higher Education
[57] Alexandra Posadzki (2012) "Complaints about career colleges emerge." Toronto: Maclean's. Available online: http://oncampus.macleans.ca/education/2012/09/03/complaints-about-career-colleges-emerge/
[58] Andre Marin (2009) *Too Cool for School: Investigation into the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities' Oversight of Bestech Academy Inc. and Enforcement of the Private Career Colleges Act*. Toronto: Ombudsman of Ontario

Revised regulations from Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) will come into effect for June 2014.[59] From this date, only students enrolled at designated institutions will be able to apply for a study permit, and the provinces will have the responsibility for designating eligible institutions.[60]

Currently, British Columbia is the only province to have formally announced its finalized criteria for designated institutions.[61] In the B.C system, institutions will need to achieve the Education Quality Assurance (EQA) designation in order to ensure institutions meet the 'highest standards of education quality, and offer students tuition protection'[62] The EQA is unique to British Columbia.

OUSA recommends that the Ontario government establish a clear set of transparent criteria for institutions to admit international students. While many PCCs operate in good faith and offer valuable training to international students, the provincial government must take extra precautions to protect vulnerable students from rogue operators in this sector.

In addition, the Province should maintain an easily accessible list on the provincial government's website of all institutions (whether privately or publicly funded) that have the ability to accept international students, so that international students are readily able to assess whether institutions are genuine educational establishments, and if they have met the provincial standard for designation.

Principle Fourteen: Wherever possible, international students should be protected from delays in visa processing that may affect their ability to commence studying in Canada.

The foreign service officers' strike of 2013 resulted in widespread visa processing delays and affected students disproportionately. Although such strikes are not the norm, this only adds to the fact of Canada's visa processing times are longer than a number of other countries that have similarly high volumes of international students.[63] Visa processing delays are particularly damaging to international students because an inability to join classes at the start of the semester not only has detrimental academic and social impact, but may also effect a student's decision to study in Canada at all. International students should be protected from such delays in visa processing – for the students themselves, for the losses sustained by the economy as a result of students turning elsewhere, and for the reputation of Ontario and Canada as an attractive destination for post-secondary education.

Concern Twelve: International students have been subjected to visa processing delays.

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[59] Government of Canada (2014) *Notice: New Regulations for International Students Finalized* Available online: http://www.cic.gc.ca/EnGLIsh/department/media/notices/2014-02-12.asp
[60] ICEF Monitor (2014) *Canada Confirms New Student Visa Regulations*
[61] ibid
[62] Ministry of Advanced Education (2014) *New Requirements for Post-Secondary Institutions Hosting International Students* Victoria: Government of British Columbia. Available online: http://www.aved.gov.bc.ca/isp/
[63] P. Johnston, *Opening the Door to International Students: An International Comparison of Immigration Policies and Practices*. (Ottawa: Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, 2000)

In 2013, members of the Professional Association of Foreign Service Officers (PAFSO) went on the longest-running public service workers' strike in the history of Canada. Foreign service officers walked off the job in Canada's 15 largest visa processing centres, in cities such as Beijing, Sao Paulo, Abu Dhabi and Mexico City. The strike resulted in a 60 to 65 per cent drop in visa issuance in targeted missions and a 25 per cent drop system wide, drops that were felt by international students disproportionately.[64] Indeed, many students affected by last year's strike ultimately decided to go elsewhere to pursue their education.[65] In addition, students who were already in Canada and applying for extensions to study permits suffered as well, not knowing if they would be able to continue their studies.[66] Universities struggled to accommodate, by allowing for late registration and holding spots in classes and residences, as well as encouraging students to join in second semester rather than try and catch up after joining late in September.[67] Such occurrences may be isolated events, but there must be measures put into place to ensure that in the future international students do not suffer unnecessarily from visa processing delays.

Recommendation Twelve: If a student is unable to attend a university in Ontario due to visa processing delays, any visa or university application fees should be reimbursed to the student.

It is unfair to expect students to pay visa and university application fees if they, by no fault of their own, are unable to attend a Canadian university. A study permit alone currently costs $150 CDN.[68] This does not include an extra $85 biometric fee (for fingerprints and photograph) for applicants from certain countries, and any fees the university may charge.[69] It is a significant amount of money, especially for students in countries with comparatively devalued currency or generally lower incomes. It is the responsibility of both Citizenship and Immigration Canada and the university in question to reimburse both the visa fee and any university application fee, as it would be unethical to charge students for services not rendered.

Recommendation Thirteen: The provincial government, working with the federal government, should work to ensure the processing of study visas is kept to a minimum, and commit to better communication with prospective students in the case of any delays to their visas.

In recent years, Citizenship and Immigration Canada has taken commendable steps to improve the visa application process, such as a global electronic application service and a new online Help Centre.[70] However continued efforts are required to minimize Canada's notably long visa processing times, both in order to minimize stress for international students and to improve Canada's (and Ontario's) reputation as an excellent destination to study abroad. Students have also indicated they would also like greater predictability in visa processing times.[71] CIC does an admirable job of keeping regularly updated

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[64] Michelle Zilio, "Experts divided over foreign service strike's impact on Canada's brand", iPOLITICS (July 2013)
[65] James Bradshaw, "Many international students still waiting for visas to study in Canada", Globe and Mail (August 2013).
[66] CBC News (2013)"Foreign service strike stressful for students awaiting visas", CBC News
[67] James Bradshaw, (2013) "Many international students still waiting for visas to study in Canada", Toronto: Globe and Mail.
[68] Citizenship and Immigration Canada's application fee list, February 2, 2014
[69] Ibid.
[70] ICEF Monitor (2013) "End to Canadian foreign workers' strike should see visa processing times improve"
[71] OUSA Focus group at Wilfrid Laurier International Centre, January 16 2014.

processing times posted on their website, and this should be continued and improved however possible.[72]

During the strike last year, students were only informed that delays should be expected and work stoppages were not taken into account when posting estimated processing times.[73] In case of any future situations where delays occur, the provincial and federal government should commit to providing better communication to students.

Principle Fifteen: International students should be able to access high quality advice regarding visas and immigration.

Navigating study permits, visas and immigration legislation can be confusing and challenging. This is especially true for students, who have to balance academics and cultural transition with the task of keeping track of their legal status and obligations to maintain that status within their host country. International student offices at post-secondary institutions should therefore be equipped to offer advice and assistance in this area, so students are able to access immigration and visa advice in a familiar and supportive environment, from advisors who know the issues and procedures associated specifically with student visas. Providing these resources on-campus will save students undue stress, as well as the potential expenses resulting from seeking advice from external immigration consultants or lawyers. However, this is easier said than done, with recent legislation limiting the help that international student advisors are allowed to provide.

Concern Thirteen: Changes to immigration law have restricted the ability of international student advisors working within institutions to provide immigration advice to students.

In 2011, the federal government passed Bill C-35, amending the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act. The bill declares that in order to provide immigration advice, a person must be a member of a provincial law society, or registered with the Immigration Consultants of Canada Regulatory Council (ICCRC) and accredited as a Regulated Canadian Immigration Consultant (RCIC).[74] Although the law was intended to crack down on illegitimate operators defrauding immigrants, it also makes it illegal for international student advisors to provide immigration advice to students unless they meet the above requirements. Advisors are instead limited to directing students to the Citizenship and Immigration Canada website to find information.

Institutions have been adapting to the legislation in a variety of ways. Some are hiring external immigration consultants on a part-time basis to provide help for students.[75] Others are paying for staff to qualify as RCIC's through a certification program that takes eight months, and covers aspects of immigration law such as family and business class immigration, which are irrelevant to students.[76] To remain certified costs $1700 a year, which diverts resources from already cash-strapped international student offices.[77]

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[72] Citizenship and Immigration Canada application processing times, February 12, 2014.
[73] ICEF Monitor, "Oh Canada! Job action by Canadian visa officers expands to 15 biggest markets" (July 2013)
[74] Elgersma & Gay (2011) *Legislative Summary Bill C-35: An Act to amend the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act*. Ottawa: Library of Parliament.
[75] Interview with Darlene Ryan of International Student Services at University of Waterloo, October 2 2013.
[76] Christopher Balcom, (2013)"Bill impacts international students." Mount Allison University: The Argosy
[77] Ibid.

Universities are compromised in their ability to provide immigration advice to students, which directly impacts international students' ability to make informed decisions. Legislation that makes it unnecessarily cumbersome to access information can have a sizable negative effect on both the international student experience and Ontario's ability to attract and keep international students.

Recommendation Fourteen: The provincial government should encourage the federal government to amend legislation in order to allow international student advisors to take a fast-track certification for student advising.

International student advisors are not the intended target of Bill C-35, and the legislation must be amended to reflect this. Current certification programs in order to become an RCIC are expensive, lengthy and inefficient for international student advisors and the offices that must pay for the certification. The provincial government should advocate for the creation of a fast-track, convenient certification program that will allow advisors to be specialized and accredited in only those aspects of immigration law pertaining to students.

A model already exists in the free, online Canada Course for Education Agents (CCEA), developed by Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada in partnership with the Canadian Consortium for International Education and ICEF (International Consultants for Education and Fairs).[78] CCEA provides education agents with a foundation in Canadian education systems and processes as they apply to international students, but makes it clear that registration with the ICCRC is still needed to provide immigration advice. By following such a model, a fast-track certification program specialized for international student advisors can be created which will allow for advisors to be accredited quickly and once again be able to provide students with the help they need and deserve.

Principle Sixteen: International students who show commitment to living and working in Canada should not be subjected to undue hardship in applying for Canadian citizenship.

Canadian citizenship is a privilege of great value, and international students are in a unique position to appreciate this. Every year more and more international students are coming to Canada and choosing to make it their home after graduation, attracted by the diversity, inclusion and acceptance Canada offers – as well as the jobs. Over the next decade, Canada will rely increasingly on international students to stay in Canada and fill the gaps in the labour market left by an aging workforce. Since these students who stay are an invaluable asset to Canada and demonstrate a commitment to contributing to Canada's long-term success, there is no reason they should have to face unnecessary barriers in gaining Canadian citizenship. The current procedure for acquiring citizenship is a multi-year process that tests just this commitment, and it should be adequate to prove a person is worthy of being gaining citizenship. Unfortunately, federal legislation changes may soon make it significantly more difficult for international students to become Canadian citizens. The nature of these changes may particularly impact upon

[78] Council of Ministers of Education, Canada. *Canada Course for Education Agents*. Accessed at http://educationau-incanada.ca/educationau-incanada/course-cours/index.aspx

international students who want to stay in Canada, and may ultimately have a negative impact on international student retention.

Concern Fourteen: Recent changes in federal legislation make it more difficult for students to gain citizenship status after graduation.

Early in 2014, the federal government introduced Bill C-24, proposing a number of substantial changes to the processes of acquiring Canadian citizenship. Under current rules, each day spent in Canada before becoming a permanent resident counts as half a day of residence towards fulfilling the citizenship requirement of spending three out of four years in residence in Canada[79]. This is beneficial for international students, as the time they spend studying in Canada before applying for permanent residency speeds up the process of gaining the full privileges of citizenship. Bill C-24 would eliminate this, not allowing time spent in Canada before becoming a permanent resident to count towards citizenship requirements. In addition, the residency requirement for citizenship would be increased from three out of four years to four out of six years[80].

These changes make it disproportionately more difficult for international students to gain citizenship, despite the fact that many have already spent multiple years living and studying in Canada before applying for permanent residency, paying taxes and contributing to the Canadian economy. The increased difficulty of access to full citizenship may discourage students from staying in Canada, and is unfair to students who find themselves denied citizenship rights they should be able to have after spending years integrating into Canadian social and economic life and demonstrating commitment to living here and contributing to the country.

Recommendation Fifteen: The provincial government should encourage the federal government to allow international students to gain citizenship without undue hardship.

As indicated above, Canada has previously enjoyed relatively high retention rates for international students, showing that students want to stay and work in Canada. A recent study of Ontario post-secondary international students found similar results, with 42 per cent of students stating they would apply for permanent residency status immediately after completing their academic program – this was the most common option selected.[81] If Ontario, and Canada, truly wants its international talent to stay here, it is important that the years these graduates have already spent studying and working in the province be recognized when applying for citizenship. It is only fair that the full privileges of citizenship be granted to students who have already proven themselves worthy and committed to contribute to the workforce and the economy – once the necessary requirements have been fulfilled, and without excessive waiting times. Bill C-24 does the opposite of this, by making it exceedingly difficult for worthy, deserving students to gain citizenship. In the interests of fairness and retaining the top-quality talent required to maintain workforce growth, it is important that Bill C-24 be amended to make it easier for international students staying in Canada to get the privileges their time here has entitled them to.

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[79] Government of Canada, (2014) *Strengthening Canadian Citizenship Act: Reinforcing the value of Canadian citizenship*, accessed at http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/department/media/backgrounders/2014/2014-02-06a.asp
[80] Ibid.
[81] Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance (2013) *Ontario Post-Secondary Student Survey* Toronto: OUSA

Health Coverage

Principle Seventeen: International students in Ontario must have access to affordable health insurance during their studies.

In 1994, international students were removed from the eligibility requirements of the Ontario Health Insurance Plan (OHIP). The Council of Ontario Universities (COU) then formed the University Health Insurance Plan (UHIP), a private plan provided through Sun Life Financial, which was meant to act as a substitute for OHIP for international students, faculty and their dependants.[82] Unfortunately, the cost to the student for coverage under UHIP is considerable. Single students pay $684 annually, and this amount balloons to over $2000 a year for students with dependants (see Table 3).

Table 3: Cost of UHIP Coverage for Various Groups, 2013/14[83]

Type of Student	Cost of UHIP coverage
Single Student	$684
Student plus one dependent	$1368
Student plus two or more dependents	$2052.

High health insurance premiums are a disincentive for international students seeking education in Ontario, especially when other jurisdictions within Canada provide more affordable health care. In Saskatchewan, international students are automatically covered under the provincial health plan free of charge. In other provinces, such as Alberta, British Columbia, Nova Scotia, and Newfoundland and Labrador, international students are covered under the provincial health plan after a six- or twelve-month waiting period. On a global scale, three of the top four international host countries – the United Kingdom, France, and Germany – offer public health care to international students. The fourth country, the United States, does not have a comparable public health care system, so is unable to offer this service to international students. The absence of public health care for international students puts Ontario at a competitive disadvantage with other jurisdictions in attracting the best and brightest students to study at its post-secondary institutions.

Concern Fifteen: Due to the private nature of the University Health Insurance Plan, premium increases are subject to market demand and thus can fluctuate significantly.

There are significant year-to-year fluctuations in UHIP premiums that make financial planning significantly more difficult for international students. For example, in 2005-2006 there was a rate of reduction of 1 per cent, followed by a 30 per cent increase the next year. Moreover, growth rates in UHIP premiums are substantially higher for students with dependants. In the same year that single students saw a 30 per cent increase, an international student with one dependent faced a 58 per cent jump in insurance premiums. Students with two or more dependents experienced the largest increase in rates, with the cost of UHIP increasing by 69 per cent in 2005-2006. While

[82] The University of Windsor is unique in that it offers its international students its own private health insurance plan separate from UHIP.
[83] UHIP (2014) *UHIP Premium Rates*. Available online: http://www.uhip.ca/_uploads/en_PremiumTable.htm

UHIP premiums have since declined, to $2,592 for a family with two or more dependents in 2010 and further to $$2,052 in 2013, it is still concerning to OUSA that long-term predictability is difficult.

The excessive variability in UHIP rates makes it impossible for international students to budget accurately from year-to-year and also could deter middle and low-income students from studying in Ontario. Moreover, the unpredictability of UHIP premiums puts Ontario at a competitive disadvantage in attracting international students when compared to the more stable public health care system offered by other Canadian provinces and countries.

Recommendation Sixteen: The provincial government should allow international students to enroll in the Ontario Health Insurance Plan.

As has been recognized by five other Canadian provinces, the Ontario government can improve the quality and breadth of health coverage for international students by providing them with coverage under OHIP. Opening Ontario's health care system to international students would not only bring Ontario up to speed nationally, but would allow us to compete with top international host countries like the United Kingdom, France and Germany. Moreover, permanent residents, foreign workers with a work permit for at least six months, and their children are already eligible for OHIP.[84] International students who make Ontario their primary place of residence deserve the same consideration.

Given Ontario's difficult fiscal situation, students understand that it may be difficult for the government to immediately find the estimated $50 million required to extend OHIP coverage to international students. Nevertheless, adding international students to the eligibility list is vital to ensuring that these students, who pay taxes while in Ontario, are treated fairly and given the comprehensive health care coverage they deserve.

Recommendation Seventeen: International students should contribute a fair and proportional cost towards the Ontario Health Insurance Plan that is equivalent to the amount paid by domestic students.

The Ontario Health Insurance Plan has the potential to provide international students with flexibility and affordability in the provision of healthcare while studying in Ontario. Preferred networks of care with UHIP can be potentially limiting, and add stresses to the already difficult health situation. Further, service fee premiums compound that stress and add upfront costs that a student may not be able to easily manage.

OHIP offers the advantage of care regardless of where a student may need to access the system. Additionally, the system as a whole offers more efficiency due to economies of scale and larger pools of mitigated risk. For these reasons, international students should have access to OHIP. International students already contribute to OHIP through general taxation and employer premiums, However, should additional premiums be required, international students should contribute an amount that is fair and proportional to that expected from domestic students, recognizing the costs of being a student with coupled with a relatively low capacity to earn sufficient taxable income.

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[84] Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, *OHIP Eligibility* (Toronto: 2013).

Principle Eighteen: International students must have access to any doctor or hospital in Ontario at an affordable rate.

Though UHIP covers the same health services as OHIP, any doctor in Ontario is allowed to charge international students well above what UHIP will provide. UHIP will cover up to 125 per cent of the OHIP rate, but doctors may charge up to 250 per cent of this same rate, forcing international students to pay out-of-pocket.[85]

For hospital visits, UHIP will cover all expenses only if the student visits a hospital on the preferred hospital network. These are hospitals that have agreements with Sun Life Finance to offer a lower price for service. Hospitals that are not on this list can again charge up to 250 per cent of the OHIP rate.[86]

Given the benefits international students provide to Ontario's post-secondary institutions, it is unfair to expect them to settle for second-tier health care service, particularly when they are paying very high premiums for the service in the first place.

Concern Sixteen: In some cases, students are forced to pay out-of-pocket for health care services that cost above what UHIP will offer.

When an international student visits a hospital in Ontario, UHIP will only guarantee it can cover the student's expenses if the hospital is on the Preferred Hospital Network. These are hospitals that have agreements with Sun Life Financial to offer services at the inter-provincial rate, which is the rate charged to other Canadian provinces for their residents. Hospitals that are not on this list can charge up to the maximum 250 per cent of the OHIP rate.[87] There is supposed to be at least one preferred hospital in every university community; however, students who commute to campus may face difficulty in accessing one of these hospitals. In addition, students who need emergency attention do not always have the luxury of travelling to the nearest preferred hospital, and it is unfair to expect them to. The UHIP website states, "if you choose to be treated at or are admitted to a hospital that is not on this list [of preferred hospitals], it is possible that you will have to pay expenses in addition to what UHIP pays."[88] Restricting the pool of hospitals at which UHIP recipients can receive treatment unfairly compromises the breadth of health care coverage for international students.

In addition to hospitals, any doctor in Ontario is allowed to charge international students well above what UHIP will reimburse. For a normal visit to the doctor, UHIP will cover up to 125 per cent of the OHIP rate for health services, but doctors may charge up to 250 per cent of this same rate, forcing international students to pay the remainder out-of-pocket.[89] Unlike hospitals, there is no preferred list of doctors.

Concern Seventeen: The UHIP reimbursement system forces students to find the funds to pay up-front for basic health services.

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[85] The University Health Insurance Plan. *Student/Employee Information*. 2013. Accessed at http://www.uhip.ca/covered.aspx

[86] Ibid.

[87] Special Committee on International Graduate and Professional Students, *Addressing the Cost of UHIP (University Health Insurance Plan) for International Graduate & Professional Students*, (Kingston: Queen's University, Feb. 2007).

[88] The University Health Insurance Plan, *Does it matter where I go to receive medical care?*, (2013), accessed at http://www.uhip.ca/medicalcare.aspx

[89] Interview with Jane O'Brien, Chair of the UHIP Steering Committee, October 21, 2010.

Because UHIP is a private insurance plan, international students are required to pay for services up-front and then later seek reimbursement from the insurance company.[90] Consequently, international students can end up responsible for fronting hundreds of dollars in fees for treatment, which can be a stressful process for students when they are sick or injured. This can be difficult or even impossible for students who might be relying on funds that are out of the country or are flowing from their families or home governments. Unfortunately, when it comes to private health insurance, this is simply how it has to be.

Recommendation Eighteen: In the short-term, the provincial government should allow international students to pay insurance premiums directly to OHIP in return for the same comprehensive coverage given to domestic students.

Currently, international students pay health premiums to a private insurance provider in exchange for coverage. If, instead of paying a private company, these funds were collected by the student's institution and paid directly to OHIP, the cost to government of covering these students under the public plan would be eliminated.

While students would still be paying for health insurance, this arrangement would eliminate some of students' main concerns around the exorbitant fees that are sometimes charged to by doctors and hospitals for even the most basic care. If international student were covered under OHIP, they would never need to pay above the OHIP rates.

Students are adamant that this be considered a short-term solution until such time that international student can be included under OHIP at no additional cost.

Principle Nineteen: While UHIP is in place, international students should be represented on the governing bodies that makes decisions about their health plans.

All Ontario international students are mandated to buy into the UHIP plan if they wish to study in Ontario.[91] Consequently, the decisions made by those that govern the plan have significant repercussions for all international students in the province. These students need to have adequate representation on the UHIP governing body to ensure that they have a voice that can represent their needs and concerns.

Concern Eighteen: There is currently no student representation on the UHIP Steering Committee, and the governance of this committee is not readily available to the public.

In addition to there being no student representation on the Steering Committee of UHIP, there is limited clarity around who actually does sit on the committee. There is also no readily available information concerning minutes of meetings or even the number of members on the Steering Committee. While students have no reason to doubt the

[90] Council of Ontario Universities, *The "Open Ontario" Strategy for Internationalizing Postsecondary Education,* (Toronto: Council of Ontario Universities, 2010).

[91] All students excepting those international students studying at the University of Windsor, which has an alternate health insurance plan.

qualifications or intentions of the members of the Steering Committee, it is concerning that the governance of a mandatory health plan for publically funded institutions, and that is intended to meet the needs of a particularly vulnerable population, is so difficult to access.

Students are concerned that without a student presence on these governing bodies, or even a readily apparent means to access the Steering Committee, the student voice and immediate needs may not be heard in the UHIP decision making process.

Recommendation Nineteen: As long as UHIP exists, the UHIP steering committee must have significant international student representation.

Currently, the UHIP Steering Committee has no student representation. Yet a key role and responsibility of the committee is to "govern the UHIP programme and resources on behalf of international students."[92] In order to truly govern UHIP on behalf of international students, the Steering Committee must have representation from students, to ensure student concerns are adequately considered and addressed. Without including the voices of international students on the governing body that directs UHIP's operations, it is impossible to make sure student interests are safeguarded.

Principle Twenty: On-campus health services should be accessible to all students, and students using them should feel comfortable and welcome.

Students, particularly international students, are inclined to seek out help or information at their campuses first. In the event of a medical issue, students may experience even greater stress or confusion, and may be very hesitant to go into the broader community to find treatment. Campus health services are important in allowing students to not only find help nearby, but to do so in an environment where they may feel welcome, understood and comfortable.

For international students, this becomes doubly important, as they need support that can understand their unique situation and that can help them more easily navigate whatever barriers they may be subject to in receiving treatment. Campus health services are, in theory, best positioned to provide that level of service and experience to all students. As such, they should strive to provide broad and consistent access, and attempt to retain the expertise required to not only treat students but also in associated documentation or regulations, and in providing a supportive environment for this group.

Concern Nineteen: Some international students feel that on-campus health services may not understand their unique cultural, language or religious needs.

It comes as no surprise that students from different parts of the world may experience language barriers, come from different cultural backgrounds or may have very different expectations within personal interactions. This can be most challenging when matters of health or other sensitive issues are at play. Students are often at their most vulnerable or stressed when in the care of a health professional; even when there is a shared set of cultural expectations.

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[92] The University Health Insurance Plan, *Roles and Responsibilities*, (2013), accessed at http://www.uhip.ca/roles.aspx.

International students have indicated that they may feel uncomfortable in such an intimate situation when unsure that a practitioner understands, or is sensitive to, cultural or religious practices.[93] Students indicated that they may be hesitant to engage with healthcare professionals around important, but not immediate, questions and concerns such as mental health, sexual health or healthy living practices. This concern even extended to hesitancy around immediate or critical care, and their ability to communicate any cultural needs or to have those needs understood.

Recommendation Twenty: Expanded cultural sensitivity or international awareness training should be offered for on-campus healthcare providers. Greater efforts should be made to retain healthcare professionals with experience working with students.

More could be done to create a safe and comfortable space for the provision of healthcare on campuses. While cultural sensitivity training is becoming a component of training for select healthcare providers, the groups who are highlighted are often narrow and the training itself is not yet widespread. Further compounding the problem is the fact that healthcare professionals with deep experience in treating students and student issues are difficult to retain.

Students recommend that incoming healthcare professionals on university campuses are offered cultural awareness training, and that efforts be made to hire and retain those who have undertaken such training. Creating a standard of culturally sensitive service will in turn influence the campus culture, enhancing the perception of health services as a safe space, and allowing for greater impact in care provision; in both immediate care and in larger healthy living information.

Employment

Principle Twenty-One: Qualified international students in Ontario should be able to access meaningful employment on and off campus during the course of their studies, including institutional work-study programs.

The 2009 Survey of International Students found that 26 per cent of university students and 15 per cent of college students reported working while attending a Canadian post-secondary institution.[94] Meaningful employment allows students to learn specific job skills required to enter into the Canadian workforce after they graduate. In addition, access to employment is important to international students both for experiential learning and to help finance their education and living expenses while residing in Ontario. International student employment also contributes to the overall economy of Ontario and provides the provincial government with additional tax revenues. OUSA is optimistic about the commitment of the government in improving the ability of international students to gain meaningful work experience: in recent years, restrictions for international students seeking work off campus were relaxed, and in 2014 Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) announced plans to allow all study permit holders to work off-campus for up to 20 hours a week without applying for a separate work

[93] Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance. *International Students Focus Groups*. 2014.
[94] Canadian Bureau for International Education, *Canada First: The 2009 Survey of International Students,* (Ottawa, 2009).

permit.[95] Nevertheless, barriers remain and the international student employment rate lags far behind that of Canadian students.[96]

Concern Twenty: International students often have difficulty obtaining meaningful employment during the course of their studies and face barriers to employment that domestic students do not experience.

In Ontario, roughly 45 per cent of all domestic students are employed part-time during the academic year.[97] In contrast, employment levels for international students are half this level. Since the 1990s full-time international students have been able to obtain on-campus employment without applying for a separate work permit, and students are encouraged by recently announced plans for study permit holders to automatically be eligible to seek employment off-campus employment, for up to 20 hours a week, eliminating the need for a separate off-campus work permit.

However, international students still experience many barriers to employment, both on- and off-campus. The following international students are among those who are ineligible for off-campus work permits:

- Students participating in a Canadian Commonwealth Scholarship Program funded by the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada;
- Students participating in a Government of Canada Awards Program;
- Students receiving funding from the Canadian International Development Agency;
- Students attending an institution and participating in either an English or French as a Second Language Program;
- Students in Canada on a visitor or exchange program.[98]

This is particular troubling given that many of these sponsorships are need-based, so these students may have the greatest impetus for seeking paid employment during their studies. In addition, students participating in exchange programs, visiting students or students enrolled in non-certificate or degree-granting programs (for example in short term language courses) cannot work off-campus while holding only a study permit.[99] While virtually all international students can legally obtain on-campus employment, there are often limited on-campus jobs available, and the competition for these tends to be very strong.[100]

Recommendation Twenty-One: The barriers facing international students in gaining meaningful employment should be removed through a streamlining of government policy and greater availability of employment skills training.

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[95] CIC (2014) *Notice – New regulations for international students finalized* Ottawa: Government of Canada. Available online: http://www.cic.gc.ca/EnGLIsh/department/media/notices/2014-02-12.asp

[96] Joseph Berger, Anne Motte, and Andrew Parkin, (2009) *The Price of Knowledge, Access and Student Finance in Canada,* Montreal: Canadian Millennium Scholarship Foundation.

[97] Statistics Canada, *Perspectives on Labour and Income* (Ottawa: 2010, Vol. 11, No. 9).

[98] Government Canada (2013) Determine your eligibility – work off campus. Available online: http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/study/work-offcampus-who.asp

[99] Ibid.

[100] Canadian Bureau for International Education, *Northern Lights: International Graduates of Canadian Institutions and the National Workforce*, (Ottawa, 2007).

To enable international students to obtain meaningful work experience in Ontario, both during and following their studies, steps must be taken to make policy guidelines clearer. While many aspects of immigration policy fall under federal jurisdiction, steps can be taken by the Ontario government to clarify some processes as well. For example, the Ontario Universities International program, which facilitates exchanges between Ontario universities and a number of other institutions across the world, could be expanded to include summer research initiatives or research internships during the academic year, so students are provided with Canadian work experience.[101] This would also help address the shortage of on-campus jobs available for international students. In addition, the provision of international student employment support seminars on campus could help familiarize international students with the Canadian labour market, provide them with the skills necessary to successfully apply for off-campus jobs, and link students with potential employers.

Principle Twenty-Two: If they choose, qualified international students who seek employment in Canada should have an equal opportunity to find work post-graduation.

In OUSA's 2013 survey of undergraduate students, international students were asked about their plans post-graduation:

- 42 per cent intended to apply for Permanent Resident Status in Canada;
- 31 per cent intended to work for up to three years in Canada before returning to their home country; and
- 26 per cent intended to work permanently in Canada. [102]

(NB: respondents were able to check all choices that applied)

The Province's international strategy, as articulated in the 2005 *Reaching Higher* plan, is to contribute to economic growth and address a skilled labour shortfall in certain fields by retaining qualified international students after they complete their post-secondary studies[103] This necessity was reiterated in the recent federal government's International Education Strategy which stated: "International students… help address the shortages of skilled labour that diminish Canada's long-term capacity for research and innovation, and contribute to the "innovation gap" identified… as a critical threat to our future prosperity."[104] Despite this government policy, international students are faced with barriers to post-graduation employment that a typical domestic graduate does not face. These include delays in receiving work permits and widespread confusion among employers about the feasibility of hiring international students.[105] These barriers make it difficult for Ontario to compete with other jurisdictions, where international students are treated more favourably in the job market.

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[101] Council of Ontario Universities, *The "Open Ontario" Strategy for Internationalizing Postsecondary Education*, (Toronto: Council of Ontario Universities. July 2010).
[102] Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance (2013) *Ontario Post-Secondary Student Survey* Toronto: OUSA
[103] Bonnie Patterson, and Jennifer Grass, *The "Open Ontario" Strategy for Internationalizing Postsecondary Education*, (Toronto: Council of Ontario Universities. July 2010).
[104] Government of Canada (2014) *Canada's International Education Strategy: Harnessing our knowledge advantage to drive innovation and prosperity*. Ottawa: Govt. of Canada.
[105] Canadian Bureau for International Education, *Northern Lights: International Graduates of Canadian Institutions and the National Workforce* (Ottawa, 2007).

Concern Twenty-One: International students are discouraged about employment prospects post-graduation, and complicated government policies often make it difficult to obtain employment.

In a Canadian Bureau of International Education Study, 80 per cent of international students were pessimistic about employment prospects, and 85 per cent reported having some or great difficulty in finding a job.[106] One international student participating in a focus group expressed the pessimistic view of many international students when it comes to employment, stating, "I want to get a job which suits my credentials and career aims. I don't want to be driving a taxi after getting a PhD or doing a clerical job, in which I can't use my expertise or knowledge."[107]

In addition, even when international students do find work, several reported being unable to capitalize on job offers because employers were unwilling to hold the position until their work permits arrived.[108]

Concern Twenty-Two: Employers often view hiring international students as more complicated than domestic students due to confusion with government policies.

Many employers do not know that they are allowed to hire international students and are unwilling to start until the government provides better information on the rules and regulations.[109] This confusion is due in part to contradictions in government policy surrounding international students. For example, while official policy has stated the importance of retaining international students post-graduation as skilled-labourers who can contribute to Canada's economic and social welfare, Citizenship and Immigration Canada's website for employers still emphasizes that students with study permits must leave once they conclude their studies.[110] The recent announcement by CIC, that 'eligible international graduates will be authorized to work full-time after their studies are completed until a decision is made on their application for a Post-Graduation Work Permit'[111] will hopefully alleviate some of this burden, although it may take some time for the informational barrier for employers to be overcome.

Some of the concerns about post-graduation work that were raised by international students during a focus group were: confusing and inconsistent government policies; communication silos; lack of up-to-date information available to employers; the perceived need at some companies to hire a lawyer to protect the company from risk associated with hiring an international graduate; the inability of a job candidate to start work when a job offer is made; the possible delay of months before a work permit is issued; and inconsistent information or misinformation circulating about the rules and regulations for hiring an international graduate.[112]

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[106] Ibid.
[107] Ibid.
[108] Ibid.
[109] Ibid.
[110] Ibid.
[111] Citizenship and Immigration Canada (2014) *Notice – New regulations for international students finalized* Ottawa: Government of Canada. Available online: http://www.cic.gc.ca/EnGLIsh/department/media/notices/2014-02-12.asp
[112] Canadian Bureau for International Education, *Northern Lights: International Graduates of Canadian Institutions and the National Workforce*, (Ottawa, 2007).

Recommendation Twenty-Two: The provincial government must take a more active role in ensuring employers have accurate information regarding the hiring of international students.

Employers have expressed that unclear information about hiring international students has led them to believe that hiring an international student is an unnecessary risk. The Ontario government should take a more active role in disseminating information about employing international students that clearly and concisely outlines the procedures necessary to hire an international student. Additionally, the government should work to make common knowledge of the fact that most international students are eligible to work during the school term and full-time during summers and school breaks. Through these steps, the Ontario government can help remove the stigma surrounding the hiring of international students by off-campus employers.

Principle Twenty-Three: International students in Ontario should be equipped with the skills they need to succeed in the Canadian workforce during the course of their education.

Good communication skills, adaptability, and cultural awareness are a few skills that international students may struggle with compared to their domestic counterparts. Without adequately addressing some of these issues while students are in school, many international students experience difficulty in the workforce prior to and after graduation. If students are better equipped with the essential job skills, it will increase their chances of success in the Canadian workforce.

Concern Twenty-Three: International students often require greater supports in accessing employment in-study.

International students may lack the necessary knowledge and skills required to obtain employment in Canada. Students may experience barriers to employment as a result of lacking specific skillsets that are available to domestic students. Examples of the kind of skills that may be required in order to gain employment may include but are not limited to: awareness of specific cultural barriers; adequate financial advice; Canadian employment expectations; and language proficiency. Most international student support services have not provided all aspects of training that are necessary for accessing employment opportunities.

General careers services may not always address the specific needs of international students seeking employment in Canada. For instance, cultural barriers can prevent international students from accessing employment. Knowledge that may be taken for granted by domestic students can constitute significant cultural barriers for international students, who may require assistance with cultural adaptation. Depending on the host country, international students may be unaware of employer expectations. These students may not understand that Canadian employers value punctuality, courteousness, responsibility, efficiency, and/or flexibility. Furthermore, expectations of communication style and interaction vary considerably throughout the world. Lack of awareness of these expectations could result in further barriers to employment for international students.

Additionally, it is important that international students are able to communicate effectively in English (or French) in order to succeed in the Canadian workplace.

Employers increasingly stress the importance of communication skills when hiring entry-level employees. Language supports (in particular discipline or employment specific language support) may be required by some students in order to fully succeed in the Canadian workplace.

International students may also face barriers once employed through unfamiliarity with Canadian financial systems. International students are likely to require support in acquiring banking services (including use of debit/credit cards and chequing, and the associated fees), completing tax returns, etc. It is important that financial literacy is addressed through orientation programs and continued financial supports are offered throughout a student's time at university.

Without the practical skillsets that are necessary for employment opportunities, international students may experience preventable barriers that could impede an their success. Incentivizing increased supports for international students wishing to pursue employment opportunities should be of high priority for the provincial government, not only because of the diversity of international students, but also due to the skills they can bring to Ontario's labour market, and the increased tax revenue (through income tax) for the Province.

Recommendation Twenty-Three: Institutions should invest in international student focused careers services, including – where possible – providing career clinics through the international student support centre.

It is important that international students are equipped with the appropriate skillsets in order to obtain meaningful employment opportunities. Institutions across Ontario should offer a range of services that can benefit international students' access to jobs. OUSA recommends that institutions create a long-term investment in providing international student- focused career services and/ or programming. Where appropriate, providing career clinics or career workshops through the international student centre is preferable, due to the increased familiarity and comfort many international students feel in visiting their centre. Such opportunities should also be provided through the traditional career services offered to domestic students, thus ensuring that international students are not segregated from domestic students and have multiple opportunities to access careers advice.

Student Support

Principle Twenty-Four: Every international student in Ontario must be adequately supported during their studies through well-equipped student offices that provide access to training and resources.

Like all students, international students require strong institutional support networks throughout their studies to ensure that they have the tools they need to succeed in Ontario's post-secondary education system and beyond. International students in particular have specific needs beyond domestic students, and require specialized support services. Students coming from abroad are new to Canada and may require assistance adjusting to an unfamiliar place and culture. In addition, some students may lack

proficiency in English or French. Those students who have difficulty with the English language should have access to language training programs to ensure international students have the language skills to feel comfortable in the campus community. International students also benefit from education-to-career programming to ensure that they not only have the skills to compete for jobs, but are also well informed and aware of the specific hurdles they face. Finally, many international students require counselling and in-person support to navigate the often complex and unfamiliar regulations surrounding health insurance, taxes, visa and immigration, work permits, on- and off-campus housing, and needs- and merit-based financial aid. Institutions must also recognize that refugees and protected persons represent a particularly vulnerable segment of our student population with distinct needs from other international students. Refugee and protected persons are more likely to have come to Canada quickly and with limited finances and resources. Removed from familiar, cultural and religious support structures, on-campus and community student services can be critical to a refugee's academic success at Ontario's universities.

Without adequate student support, international students may find their education in Ontario less satisfactory than they had hoped, and experience undue hardship in integrating into the university or college environment.

Concern Twenty-Four: Though all Ontario institutions offer services to international students, the quality of programming varies at each institution, and some services are not offered at all institutions.

In addition to regular support services, all campuses offer international student resource centres. When comparing across post-secondary institutions, many of these resource centres have commonalities, but they are structured very differently at each institution, and the quality of the programming varies. All Ontario universities offer some degree of orientation and UHIP administration. As noted previously, many international student services teams have struggled to find solutions to tightening controls on immigration and visa advising, and the provision of these services now varies more from institution to institution than they may have done in the past. Most institutions offer counselling, but the nature and extent of the counselling services offered varies extensively between universities. Peer networking, assistance with housing issues and programming on acclimatization are also offered at many, but not all, institutions. Fewer institutions offer English as a second language programs, financial assistance, and links to employment opportunities.

Concern Twenty-Five: Funding models and organizational structures for international student services vary widely between institutions.

The funding structures and budgets for international student services vary widely between institutions in Ontario, meaning that potential students may struggle to assess which institution will best match their needs, and causing a lack in transparency regarding how international student services are funded and operated.

Furthermore, through interviews with international student services professionals at OUSA member schools, the view was expressed that institutional "buy-in" had strong impacts on the success of international student services, and constituted a strong indication of the school's commitment to internationalization and inter-cultural goals more broadly. Evidence of stronger institutional buy-in may be indicated through direct

reports to Vice-Provosts or Provosts, or through the adoption of an internationalization strategy by senior administration, for example.

Examples of the varying organizational and funding models at some OUSA member schools were as follows:

- Western University: International Services reports to a Vice-Provost for Internationalization;
- The University of Waterloo: International student services are located within the Student Success Team, and are funded through the operating budget;
- Wilfrid Laurier University: Services are funded through a international student tuition fee levy of $2,500 per FTE. The services fall under Academic Services;
- Queen's University: Funding is allocated through the operating budget, but covers only staffing costs. All other programming is funded through a mixture of charitable foundations, intercultural training (provided at a fee), and cost recovery.

The lack of standardization in international student services funding raises concerns that international students at some institutions may experience lower levels of support or service than their counterparts elsewhere in the province.

Without a minimum standard for funding models and organizational structure across all campuses vastly reduces transparency, and ultimately, affects the quality of international student support services. This differentiation between universities in Ontario leads to imbalances in the quality of international student support services.

Recommendation Twenty-Four: Organizational structures for international student services should meet a minimum provincial standard. In order to achieve an equitable level of funding, OUSA advocates that the provincial government mandate that a proportion of international student tuition be used towards the funding of these services.

OUSA recognizes that some diversity of funding models and organizational structure may be justified: institutions should be able to determine service delivery methods that reflect their size, international student population, budget and staffing concerns. However, OUSA believes that introducing a minimum set of standards for international student services would help equalize provision across the province. At a minimum, students believe that the following services should be considered essential to international students:

- Academic counselling;
- Career counselling;
- Cultural adjustment assistance and cultural programming;
- Financial advice;
- Immigration and visa advising;
- Mental health services;
- English (or French) language supports; and
- Student support services that specifically target the unique needs of refugees and protected persons.

With regards to funding, OUSA advocates for the provincial government to mandate institutions to use a set proportion of revenue from international student tuition in order to fund international student services. Given that enhanced student supports are the frequently cited rationale for higher international tuition, it seems logical that a portion of the funding above and beyond academic program costs be dedicated precisely for services for international students to be provided, and that students should be able to see how their funds are being used by the university. However, OUSA wishes to make it clear that any requirement to dedicate funding should not be used in order for institutions' to arbitrarily hike already high tuition.

Concern Twenty-Six: Rising international enrollment has not always been met by increased investment in international student supports, leading to pressures on service delivery.

It is expected that as universities generate more revenue through increases in international student enrollment and high international student tuition, that the quality and capacity of support services should improve. However, this is not the current situation for all institutions.

Although, as noted above, OUSA does not advocate for government subsidies of international tuition, one of the common justifications for higher international student tuition is the increased cost of providing additional support services for international students. However, during the course of OUSA's consultations with international student services providers, staff reported that increased investment in support services does not always follow increasing enrollment. This can lead to increasing pressures on departments struggling to meet demand for their services. For example, staff at Western University reported rocketing participation rates in their regular programming for international students, with between 80 – 120 people arriving for events. Furthermore, their "Porchlight" program, aimed at female international students, recently received over 100 applications for just 30 spaces.

OUSA is therefore concerned that institutions may be seeking increased international student enrollment without concurrently investing in the supports to ensure international student success.

Recommendation Twenty-Five: The provincial government must ensure, through incentive or mandate, that senior administrations commit to providing a robust suite of international student support services that are adequately staffed to meet service demands.

University administrations must assume responsibility for providing a range of sound international student support services. Such student support services must meet service demands in order to ensure international student satisfaction. In order to meet service demands, adequate staffing for international student support services is needed. Proper staffing requirements must be implemented in order to improve the overall quality of international student support services.

Principle Twenty-Five: International students should be able to access support services that are culturally appropriate in order to recognize the unique barriers these students may face.

All students should be able to access services without fear of discrimination based on their background, race or ethnicity, or religious belief. Given that international students arrive in Ontario from a vast range of cultures and background, it is important that culturally appropriate student services are available to help international students overcome for the unique barriers they may face. Access to appropriate cultural support services can help students overcome issues of acclimatization and culture shock, and ease the transition into Canadian culture. In turn, this can help promote success for international students, allowing international students to access the supports they need (for example, health and mental wellness services), gain support to navigate the pedagogical differences and academic expectations at Canadian institutions, and to access additional student supports such language training. All of which can foster an international student's success, access to employment opportunities, and improve the student's overall experience.

Concern Twenty-Seven: International students face unique challenges when transitioning into, through, and out of post-secondary education.

Students in university face a range of issues, whether they are domestic or international. International students may face many of the same issues as domestic students but also experience additional unique challenges. The most substantial issues international students are faced with centre on adjustment and inadequate supports.

Incoming international students are challenged with acclimatization issues and culture shock. Adjustment to a new culture can result in an additional burden to an international student. Problems with adjustment to Canadian culture can lead to disorganization and a lack of preparation for academic life, potentially rendering the students' academic success. Some examples of the challenges incoming international students may be face include:

- ignorance of cultural norms;
- unfamiliarity with socioeconomical/political systems;
- problems organizing living arrangements;
- concerns regarding transportation;
- failure to understand the pedagogical differences and academic expectations;
- and, insufficient language supports.

Unfamiliarity with cultural norms can consist of not knowing what is considered common courtesy, understanding basic cultural body language, and just generally knowing how members should behave in a given context.

Failing to understand the current political/economical system can lead to barriers to success for an international student. It is important every individual knows their rights and understands the law, in order to prevent avoidable mishaps. Failing to understand the current situation can lead to potential interactions with the Canadian judicial system, due to ignorance of the law.

All international students require living arrangements in order to study at an Ontario institution; however they may face difficulty in organizing housing arrangements. In a 2009 CBIE survey of international students, 12 per cent of students reported some

difficulty in finding suitable living arrangements[113], although this figure may be higher for students living in areas of high demand for off-campus housing. International students may also require additional supports with regards to understanding their rights as tenants, and in seeking remediation for any issues arising with their landlord. In addition the same survey found that 28 per cent of university students who reported using housing services expressed some level of dissatisfaction with these services.[114]

International students may also face transportation challenges that can ultimately hinder their participation in various academic and nonacademic activities. Unfamiliarity with transit systems may lead to feelings of isolation for international students, and limit their ability to acclimatize to their new home in Canada. In addition, housing, transport and other costs of living can constitute and additional financial burden for international students. The monthly average cost of living reported by international students in 2009 was $1,932, and 1 in 4 international students reported difficulty in meeting their basic cost of living needs.[115]

Students from some cultures or backgrounds may have differing experiences and expectations of pedagogy than is the normal practice in Ontario. Teaching and learning styles in Canada generally emphasize active participation from students, with participation often comprising a formal portion of the grading metric. At a focus group with international students at Wilfrid Laurier University, international students raised this as a particular area of concern, particular for students in cultures where their previous assessments had been entirely based on their written work or examinations. Students expressed that they felt marks were given for simply "making noise"; in addition, students expressed that they might be at a disadvantage in the classroom due to language or accent barriers, and that in some cases, their contributions were unwelcome.[116] The pedagogical variances may cause an international student to be overwhelmed, potentially harming their academic success. In the same focus group, students noted that while professors were generally well intentioned, but not necessarily willing to make changes (for example in presentation style, assessment and testing, or in classroom participation requirements) in order to accommodate the needs of international students. Unfamiliarity or discomfort with Canadian styles of teaching and learning may lead to academic difficulties for international students, which are unrepresentative of their ability. It is important that incoming international students understand the expectations of the Canadian classroom, the way Canadian grading systems work etc. It is further vital that, where necessary, students have access to ongoing academic supports that help them succeed to their fullest potential.

Similarly, insufficient language skills can create many barriers for an international student. Language is the fundamental communication required for successful knowledge transfer. Without proper language supports international students are severely disadvantaged, both educationally and socially.

The need for comprehensive support services for international students should be at the heart of any internationalization strategies. If governments and institutions are committed to increasing the number of international students studying at Ontario's institutions, it is import that they commit resources to ensuring that international

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[113] Humphries, Knight-Grofe, Klabunde (2009) *Canada First: The 2009 Survey of International Students* Ottawa: CBIE
[114] ibid
[115] ibid
[116] OUSA Focus Group at Wilfrid Laurier University International Centre, January 16, 2014

students achieve academic and personal success. If the government wishes to retain international students in post-secondary education, it is important efforts are put towards eliminating such challenges.

Recommendation Twenty-Six: Institutions should provide comprehensive international student orientation programming, as well as transition, academic supports, and English language supports throughout a student's program.

International students should have access to robust, high-quality student orientation programming. In the 2013 Ontario Post-Secondary Student Survey, international students were generally positive about orientation experiences: 56 per cent of respondents reported attending an orientation program, and of these 80 per cent found it useful. However, A significant minority did not access orientation programming:

- 3 per cent were not offered an orientation program;
- 15 per cent were unaware if an orientation program was offered;
- 26 per cent knew a program was offered, but decided not to attend.[117]

Where gaps in orientation programming, or information about the benefits of attending orientation, exist, institutions should work to ensure increased uptake of this service.

High-quality comprehensive international student orientation programming provides proper welcome for international students. Such greeting eases the transition into the institution, Canadian culture, and academic life in Canada. Orientation programming directed towards international students should provide them with useful knowledge that is applicable to their success as a student, as well as relevant information about living arrangements and transit issues. The information included in orientation programs should give them a sense of comfort and equilibrium, ultimately fostering the overall experience.

The international student orientation programming should include high-quality transitional student supports, academic supports, career counseling, and language supports. Such services should continue to be available throughout the entirety of a student's program. Access to such comprehensive international student orientation programming should be provided to international students in addition to, not in replacement of, the same type of programming provided to domestic students.

English (or French) language supports should be made widely available and advertised to both international students and instructors. Providing language supports can alleviate potential disadvantages for international students and instructors. Instructors should also have equal access to the same high-quality language supports as international students. In a study of domestic students attitudes towards internationalization, 32 per cent of students reported that a "difficult-to comprehend" instructor had significantly and negatively impacted their ability to perform or successfully complete a course.[118] Allowing instructors to utilize the same language supports as international students can reduce costs for such programs, and help alleviate tensions between domestic students and their international peers and instructors.

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[117] OUSA (2013) *Ontario Post-Secondary Student Survey* Toronto: OUSA
[118] Lambert & Usher (2013) *The Pros and Cons of Internationalization: How Domestic Students Experience the Globalizing Campus* Toronto: HESA

Concern Twenty-Eight: International students may face a range of pressures that can lead to mental health issues.

There is a growing concern about the rise in mental health issues on campus for all students, and particularly for international students. Due to struggles with integration and adjustment, international students can become victims of a mental health issues. International students may face additional pressures, which can result in the onset of mental health issues. For example, social communication is important in maintaining a healthy lifestyle. An interview with international student advisors at Western University[119] revealed that mental health issues amongst to international students were common, particularly due to struggles with adjustment and making friends.

Recommendation Twenty-Seven: Institutions must provide access to culturally appropriate and sensitive mental health supports for international students.

Institutions across Ontario must provide access to high-quality mental health supports that are culturally appropriate and sensitive towards international students. It is important that international student services provide highly trained professionals able to assist international students with mental health issues. It is of high importance that such individuals possess cultural sensitivity knowledge, in order to increase the effectiveness of the counseling. It is crucial that counselors possess the ability to understand the cultural perspectives of the international students. For example, at Western University, counselling is offered by trained counselor within the international student support services who can offer support to students within a familiar environment. As international students face unique challenges that can result to mental health concerns, the need for highly trained professionals who are empathetic towards international students has never been higher.

Concern Twenty-Nine: International students who are also from equity groups (ie: female students; LGBTQ students; racialized students etc.) may face specific cultural barriers when studying in Canada.

International students are far from a homogenous group and can face many unique challenges throughout their post-secondary experience. If an international student is a part of an equity group, further challenges may exist. Such students include, but are not limited to, female students, LGTBQ students, and racialized students. Deprivation of robust student supports that can address all classifications of international students, can negatively impact the success of such students.

Recommendation Twenty-Eight: Cultural awareness training should be made available for all students, staff, faculty members, and student groups to ensure the full diversity of international students is recognized and considered in the development of international student supports.

[119] OUSA interview with Rose Aquino and Sandra Pehil of International and Exchange Student Centre, Western University. October 23, 2013.

Accessible cultural awareness training should be present for all students, student groups, faculty members, and administration in order to provide a hospitable environment for international students. Cultural awareness training can provide all members of a Canadian post-secondary institution with functional knowledge to recognize the full diversity of international students. The consideration of diversity will ensure all members of a Canadian post-secondary institution are equipped with up-to-date comprehension, to align with the current politically correct conditions. Cultural awareness training should include information on equity groups present within the international student population.

Principle Twenty-Six: Institutions should recognize the difficulties for international students posed by unexpected changes to their academic year.

Given the limitations placed on international students by study permits and visas, any unexpected changes in the length of the academic year may have particular implications for these students, who may find they are unable to legally remain in Ontario. If institutions find themselves in a situation where they need to extend the academic year, they must ensure that the barriers faced by international students are considered as part of the implementation process.

Concern Thirty: Changes to the academic year, such as in the event of a faculty strike, may disproportionately affect an international student's ability to complete their credits or program.

The effects of an extended year may disproportionately impact international students compared to other student groups. This is primarily a concern for students who may be unable to legally remain in Canada beyond a certain date, given study permit and visa limitations: even where options to extend or restore student status are available, this may be impractical for international students to obtain at short notice. Additionally, students may be negatively impacted if they are required to stay for an extended academic year, due to family or employment commitments in their home country, or the financial burden of cancelling or rescheduling flights, for example.

A situation in which this could occur might be in the case of faculty strikes. For example, at York University, labour disputes caused the university to extend classes into the summer three times in the period between 1997 and 2009. [120]In the winter 2008/09 York experienced the longest-running strike at an English language institution, lasting three months.[121]

If the extension of the academic year into the summer months means that students are unable to complete final exams this may negatively impact their ability to complete credits, which in turn may impact their ability to graduate from their program.

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[120] Toronto Star (2009) "York University Strike Ends Today." Available online: http://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2009/01/29/york_university_strike_ends_today.html
[121] IBID.

Recommendation Twenty-Nine: In the instance of unforeseen changes to the academic year, institutions should provide alternative assessment or reasonable accommodations for affected international students.

If an institution has to extend the academic year into the summer months, they should take steps to ensure that international students are still able to complete the credits they need to graduate. Given the barriers for international students to remain in the country, this should include the provision of alternative assessment methods (for example, completing a final project in place of an examination) or reasonable accommodations.

Recruitment and Admissions

Principle Twenty-Seven: International students must meet the equivalent academic standards as domestic students to gain admissions to programs at Ontario's post-secondary institutions.

Some universities have partnered with other institutions that are known to accept students with lower academic standards with a guarantee of future admission to a post-secondary institution they would otherwise have been unable to attend. While some of these international programs may produce some students of a high enough calibre to attend university in Ontario, there is no overarching regulatory body that ensures that this is the case for all international students entering the post-secondary education system. In order to maintain the integrity and quality of Ontario's universities, it is essential that comparable academic admissions standards be applied to all students. It is unfair to domestic students, as well as international students that have been held to higher admission standards, if some students are able to obtain entrance with lower qualifications because they have attended a particular international campus. Maintaining consistent admissions standards ensures that all students entering Ontario's PSE system can handle the rigors of post-secondary study.

Concern Thirty-One: Some private, for-profit international colleges and programs allow international students to bypass academic requirements for university programs.

Some private, for-profit international study programs allow international students to bypass academic requirements for university programs by facilitating admission into university for all students who complete the program. This is concerning because there is no regulatory body ensuring that all students completing these programs are qualified to attend university and meet the Ontario post-secondary institution's entrance standards. Rather, agreements between private international colleges and universities are on a bilateral, ad-hoc basis, leaving assurances of competency to be self-regulated by the participating institutions. Further, it appears the primary motivation for these arrangements is not to provide a bridging program for international students, but to earn additional revenue for the universities.[122]

For example, the Simon Fraser International College is run by a private corporation called Navitas. The corporation handles recruitment and administration of the college and accepts most students, even if they do not have high school diplomas. Once

[122] Mark Mackinnon and Rod Mickleburgh (2010) "Chinese students pay dearly for Canadian education", Toronto: Globe and Mail

completing the program, most students are granted admission to Simon Fraser University. There are concerns that these corporations are utilizing dishonest recruitment practices, the quality of instruction is extremely poor, and that more qualified international students who have not attended affiliate private preparation programs are shut out.[123]

Recommendation Thirty: The provincial government must work to ensure that universities do not partner with private, for-profit international colleges that allow international students to bypass academic standards.

Partnerships between universities and private, for-profit international colleges which guarantee students automatic admission to the partner institution upon completion of the college program are problematic for several reasons. Students admitted to the international colleges may have few academic qualifications, creating the perception that Ontario's post-secondary system is accessible to those who can afford to pay, rather than the best and brightest students. Moreover, there is a direct conflict of interest in evaluating student performance if the university is deriving revenue from the college. It is impossible to ensure academic standards are being upheld if the institution that runs the college program is closely affiliated with the university that automatically accepts all graduating students. International college preparatory programs are not a problem in and of themselves, rather the practice of allowing students participating to bypass academic standards is the cause of concern. The Ontario government should create a regulatory framework to ensure that all international students, regardless of preparatory program, are subject to the same admission standards for Ontario's post-secondary institutions.

Principle Twenty-Eight: International campus expansion efforts must only be pursued if quality can be assured, and if there are clear benefits to both the host country and expanding institution.

In recent years, the number of Ontario institutions planning to establish one or more international branch campus has grown substantially. More universities are considering establishing international campuses as a means of attracting international students, generating university revenue, and enhancing the international brand of their institution. For example:

- the University of Calgary Qatar has established a nursing programs at an international branch campus;
- the University of Waterloo operated a branch campus in Dubai between 2009-2013;
- York University's Schulich School of Business offers its MBA program at a campus in Hyderabad, India.

Many post-secondary institutions are strongly attracted to the idea of international campus expansion. McMaster's taskforce on internationalization expresses this appeal, stating, "An international footprint is no longer a matter of choice, but rather a necessity."[124] Nevertheless, there are several concerns with international campus

[123] Ibid.
[124] International Revenue Generation Taskforce (2009) *Report of International Revenue Generation Taskforce*, Hamilton, ON: McMaster University

expansion. There are few or no regulations concerning the quality of education and student support services offered at these campuses. In addition, the establishment of international branch campuses may take resources away from the development of domestic institutions.[125] International campuses should provide the same educational quality and quality of student support services as domestic institutions, and should only be pursued if it is clear that they benefit the host country and the expanding institution.

Concern Thirty-Two: Due to a lack of domestic regulation, the creation of international branch campuses carries a host of potential risks which have implications for institutions and the Province.

International branch campuses provide no guarantee that students will receive sufficient support services or that the quality of education expected of Ontario's post-secondary institutions will be maintained. For example, at Waterloo's Dubai branch campus, concerns were raised that the quality of student support services is lower than at the domestic campus. Another concern raised is that the academic staff at international branch campuses may frequently be hired on temporary, contract positions, resulting in a lower quality of teaching for students.[126] In McMaster's assessment of the feasibility of an international branch campus in China, the institutional report notes that international branch campuses are often less expensive to run than domestic campuses.[127] While this may be beneficial to the bottom line of institutions, if cost savings come at the expense of quality student experiences and teaching excellence, then international branch campuses compromise the international reputation of Ontario universities.

Indeed the challenges of operating a branch campus ultimately led to the closure of Waterloo's Dubai campus, due to their inability to sustain and meet enrolment targets, and York's Schulich School of Business experienced delays in opening its doors due to regulations.[128] Students are concerned that valuable time, money, and resources are being diverted to international branch campus projects that may not be sustainable in the long-term. This is particularly concerning the struggles that some institutions, such as Michigan State, George Mason University and the Rochester Institute of Technology, have had in maintaining international branch campuses as economically viable.

A related concern surrounding international branch campuses is whether campuses in host countries will enjoy the same degree of academic and personal freedom as domestic campuses. Particularly, as Canadian institutions expand their educational involvement to countries with authoritarian governance systems, it becomes more difficult to ensure that academic freedom, non-discrimination, and institutional autonomy are maintained.

Recommendation Thirty-One: The Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities must promote the creation of an international branch campus quality assurance.

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[125] American Association of University Professors and the Canadian Association of University Teachers (2009) *On Conditions of Employment at Overseas Campuses,* Ottawa: AAUP/CAUT

[126] ibid

[127] International Revenue Generation Taskforce (2009) *Report of International Revenue Generation Taskforce*, Hamilton, ON: McMaster University.

[128] Rosanna Tamburi (2013) "Universities Open Campuses in Foreign Countries with Mixed Results" in *University Affairs*. Ottawa: University Affairs. Available online: http://www.universityaffairs.ca/universities-open-campuses-in-foreign-countries-with-mixed-results.aspx

The Canadian Association of University Teachers recommends that standards and rule-based regimes govern the internationalization of post-secondary institutions.[129] Students support this as an important step in ensuring that international branch campuses of Ontario's universities and colleges meet the same academic and student support standards as domestic campuses. Considering that the federal government is responsible for foreign affairs and international development while education is the responsibility of provincial government, it is suggested that a regulation regime should be done through the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada to accommodate the intersecting provincial and federal jurisdiction.

Australia has a much longer history of implementing international branch campuses. As a result of a number of campus failures, the Australian government has created a transnational quality strategy aimed at guaranteeing the consistency and quality of post-secondary education services offered abroad. This strategy includes a good-practice guide, a quality assurance and accreditation framework, and comprehensive host country regulations.[130] As Canada's post-secondary institutions expand their research and teaching facilities across the world, it is essential that the government follow in the footsteps of Australia in creating a comprehensive quality strategy for international branch campuses that includes assurance of the provision of student services on these campuses.

Principle Twenty-Nine: Ontario should be seeking to attract the most qualified international students, regardless of the location of their home country.

Universities within Ontario should seek to attract highly qualified students from all around the world. In total, 173 countries are represented with the total population of international students in Canada. However, the top five countries of origin are China, India, Korea, Saudi Arabia, and the United States.[131] These countries represent almost 60 per cent of the total international student enrollment in Canada.

It is important that certain countries are not prioritized, but rather that Ontario's institutions seek to enroll the brightest and best students, regardless of their country of origin. A diverse group of international students studying in Canada provides positive benefits. As 20 per cent of the Canadian population consists of immigrants, it is important that the university sector welcomes the most qualified individuals regardless of country of origin, and that prioritizations for recruitment are based on academic rather than political goals.

Concern Thirty-Three: The Canadian government has explicitly prioritized admitting international students from certain areas of the world over others.

Recruitment and admissions is prioritized for certain regions of the world. The Canadian government has explicitly stated they intentionally have focused recruiting international students from 'developing and emerging economies.' The international education strategy states the Canadian government focuses on recruiting prospective students from

[129] American Association of University Professors and the Canadian Association of University Teachers (2009) *On Conditions of Employment at Overseas Campuses,* Ottawa: AAUP/CAUT.
[130] Australian Government. *Transnational Quality Strategy*. Accessed at http://www.transnational.deewr.gov.au/.
[131] CBIE "Facts and Figures": http://www.cbie.ca/about-ie/facts-and-figures/

countries such as Brazil, China, India, Mexico, North Africa, and the Middle East.[132] Under the current education strategy a cultural bias exists as the Canadian government essentially favours recruiting applicants from specific countries. This raises concern as OUSA values equal opportunity to high-quality education. Canada hosts a range of high-quality, high-caliber universities that are very attractive on the international market. OUSA is concerned that a student may be deprived of an opportunity to one of Canada's prestigious universities as a result of favouritism.

Recommendation Thirty-Two: The provincial government should focus on admitting the most qualified students regardless of home country.

Ontario universities should seek to attract the most qualified international students regardless of home country. OUSA recommends the recruitment prioritization should not focus entirely on emerging and developing countries. Recruitment efforts should be equally distributed to all students from all countries. The provincial government should work with the federal government to re-consider the current prioritization stance.

Outbound Students

Principle Thirty: Studying abroad offers many benefits to Canadian students, and the Canadian economy.

Studying aboard offers excellent educational opportunities for Canadian students and they can greatly benefit from a high-quality experience abroad. Such experiences enhance a student's employability, effectiveness, and global knowledge capacity. It can build the skills required to find meaningful employment in a complex market. As reported in the CBIE (2013) *Pre-Budget Consultations 2013 Submission to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance, "*Canada increasingly needs young leaders with the international awareness, knowledge, skills and connections that study abroad provides."[133] A survey of employers found: when asked if they would hire a graduate with study abroad experience over a graduate with no study abroad experience, 50 per cent of employers responded 'Yes.'[134] It is recognized that an opportunity to study abroad is highly beneficial for a Canadian student. The experience of studying abroad experience can positively shape the minds of young individuals and create successful leaders, ultimately promoting Canada's competitiveness and the Canadian economy.

Studying aboard is a growing trend internationally. Since 1975, the number of students studying abroad has increased fivefold from 0.8 million to 4.3 million in 2011. In 2006 AUCC undertook a survey in which Canadian universities reported being highly interested in providing greater study abroad opportunities to their students[135]. 65 per cent of respondents indicated a 'high' interest – an increase of 18 per cent since 2000. The AUCC also surveyed the top reasons amongst universities for promoting study abroad:

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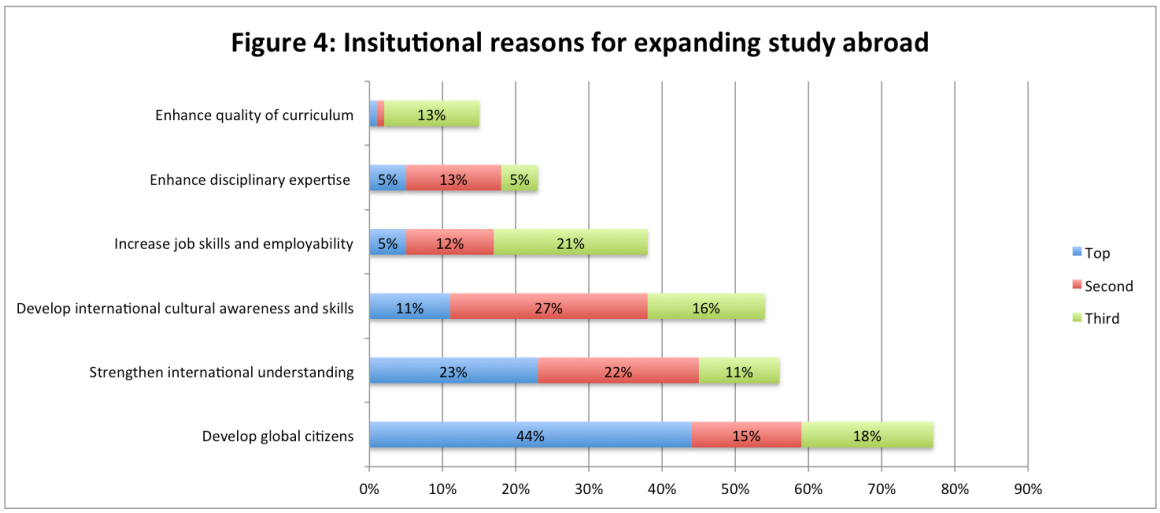
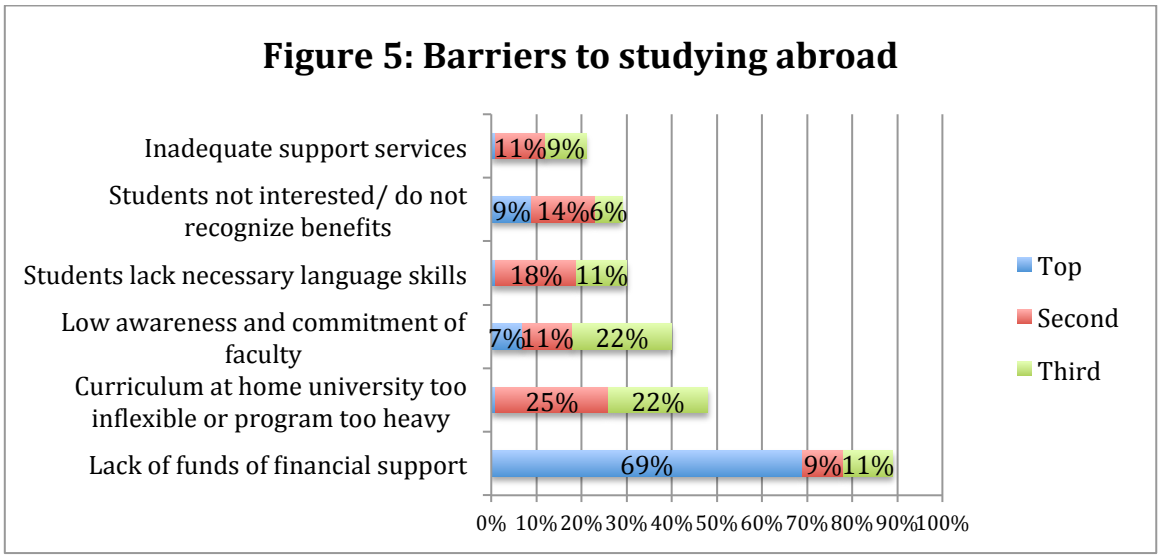
[132] Government of Canada (2014) Canada's International Education Strategy
[133] CBIE (2013) *Pre-Budget Consultations 2013 Submission to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance*
[134] CBIE (2009) *World of Learning* http://www.cbie.ca/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/20100520_WorldOfLearningReport_e.pdf
[135] AUCC (2007) *Canadian Universities and international student mobility*



Concern Thirty-Four: Canadian students are currently less likely to study abroad than students from other OECD countries.

Currently, interest for studying abroad in Canada is relatively low in comparison to other OECD countries. In the AUCC survey (2007) 77 per cent of institutions indicated that student interest or demand had increased[136] in the previous two years, but despite this Canadian student participation in study abroad programs remained low. AUCC estimated that in 2006 17,850 full time students enrolled in Canadian universities participated in a form of study abroad for credit – or 2.2 per cent of the full time student enrollments in Canada. This compares to 33 per cent of German students, 15 per cent of Australian students, and 9 per cent of US students.[137]

The same AUCC survey identified the following factors as the top barriers to studying abroad:



[136] ibid
[137] CBIE (2012) *Facts and Figures*. http://www.cbie-bcei.ca/about-ie/facts-and-figures/

Further barriers may exist for students considering whether or not to study abroad based on their background. A 2006/7 study in the United States found that the majority of study abroad students were female (65 per cent, compared to 35 per cent male).[138] The same study also found that study abroad students were disproportionately likely to be white:

- 82 per cent of study abroad students were white;
- 6.7 per cent were Asian;
- 6 per cent were Latino/a/Hispanic; and
- 3.8 per cent were Black/African American. [139]

Researchers suggested that students from underrepresented groups may be deterred from study abroad due to:

- lack of familiarity with program (no one in their family had previously undertaken a similar opportunity);
- more pressure to complete degree at a quicker pace;
- not being informed about the benefits of study abroad to career opportunities.[140]

CBIE notes that there is a lack of available data on underrepresented groups and study abroad in the Canadian context, thus the need to rely on US data. CBIE undertook their own survey of Canadian study abroad participants and found the following:

- 1 in 5 of study abroad participants had a family member who had previously undertaken study abroad;
- and of those who reported having studied abroad were most likely to fit the following profile: have some form of post-secondary, have a language other than French or English, and come from a household with an income of $80,000 or more.

In a separate study undertaken by the Higher Education Strategy Associates (HESA)[141] area of study appeared to have an impact on study abroad:

- humanities/social science/visual arts and business students were most likely to go abroad (16 per cent/13 per cent of respondents);
- STEM students were least likely (8 per cent of respondents).

When asked if they planned to study abroad, students indicated:

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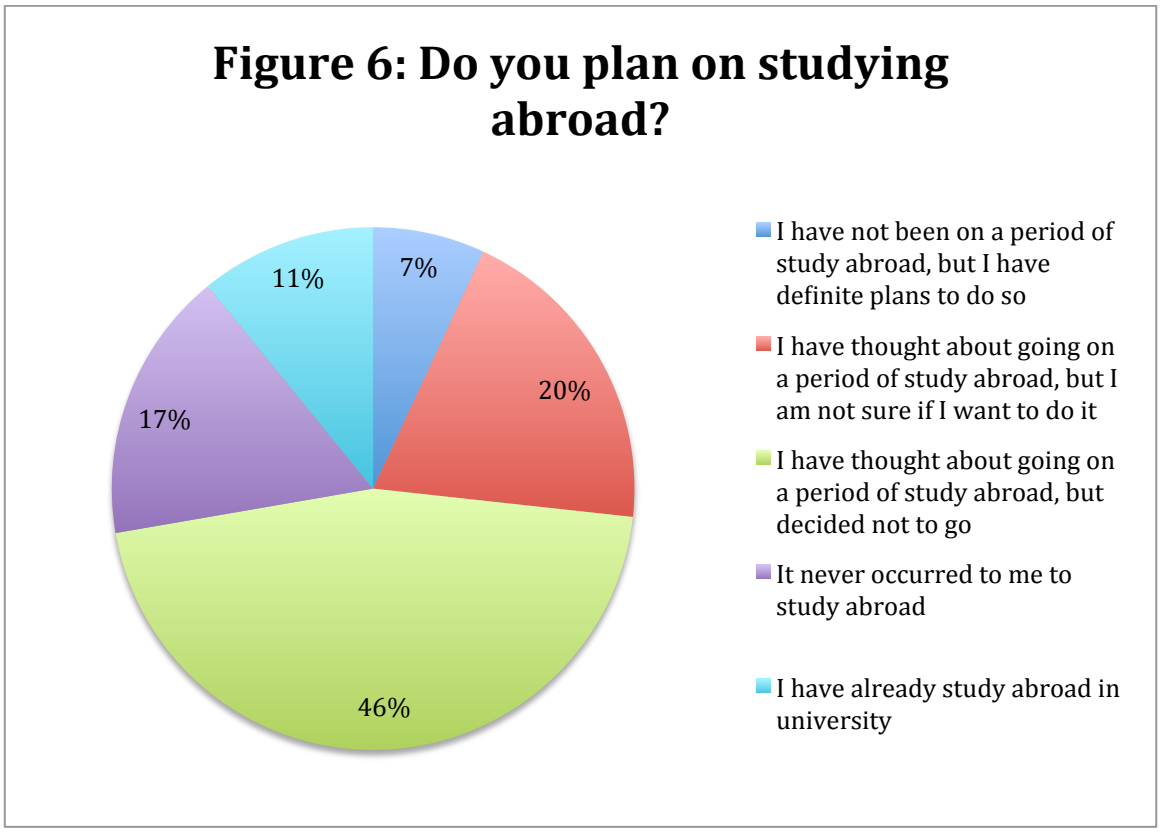
[138] CBIE (2009) *World of Learning* http://www.cbie.ca/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/20100520_WorldOfLearningReport_e.pdf
[139] ibid
[140] ibid
[141] Lambert, J & Usher, A (2013) *Internationalization and the Domestic Student Experience*. Toronto: Higher Education Strategy Associates



For those who had decided not to go abroad the reasons given were as follows:

- Affordability (47 per cent);
- Disruptive of studies/likely to lead to credit transfer problems (53 per cent);
- Do not want to be away from friends and family for that long (30 per cent);
- Doesn't seem like a good use of money (15 per cent);
- I do not think I would comfortable in a foreign environment (13 per cent);
- Other (12 per cent).

Recommendation Thirty-Three: The provincial government should encourage more students in Ontario to study abroad through a range of opportunities.

Study abroad opportunities should be encouraged and readily available for all students in Ontario wishing to gain valuable international experience. Whether this is through a grant, scholarship program, and/or formal exchange program, a wide variety of international educational opportunities should be easily accessible. Study abroad programs should not be mandatory, but rather suggested as a meaningful opportunity for all students at Ontario institutions. Incorporating optional study abroad opportunities into a curriculum can provide an extra incentive to benefit from such an experience. Institutions should encourage students from all faculties to take advantage of study abroad opportunities, especially in programs that have traditional seen low numbers of students take advantage of these opportunities.

It is important efforts are made to eliminate barriers to study abroad opportunities. In order to encourage more students to participate in study abroad programs/opportunities, adequate support services, necessary language training, program flexibility, credit transfer ease and financial support must be provided to promote international opportunities to Canadian students.

Principle Thirty-One: Students whose home institution is in Ontario should be able to access a range of support services before, during, and after a period of studying abroad.

Students who choose to study abroad should be able to easily access a range of advantageous support services throughout the entirety of their application process, during their studies, and thereafter. It is important that students have access to proper support services in the unfortunate case a problem arises regarding their study abroad experience. Whether this be assistance with the application process to managing issues abroad, Ontario students should be provided with the help they need. As study abroad programs/opportunities offer valuable experiences for students, it is important such students are well taken care of.

Concern Thirty-Five: Students are not always able to access the supports they need for their study abroad experiences.

Students participating in study abroad opportunities can face unique challenges that harm their success while studying in a different country. A lack of access to robust support services for outbound students can result in substantial losses for the student, the institution, and the government. Students who are unable to access proper support services before, during, and after their period of studying abroad may be deterred from pursuing future international educational experiences. It is of vital importance that outbound students be equipped with the assistance they may require.

The high costs associated with being an outbound student is especially daunting for students from low-income backgrounds and means that these opportunities are likely to be less accessible to them. Debt aversion represents a significant barrier to pursuing education outside of Ontario and requires adequate financial and informational supports backed by institutions and government to overcome.

Recommendation Thirty-Four: Institutions should invest in providing comprehensive study abroad support for outbound and prospective outbound students.

OUSA recommends Ontario institutions invest in providing and maintaining comprehensive study abroad support services for outbound students. Support services should be able to assist students before, during, and after their period of study. Assistance should include, but not limited to, help with applying/registration, obtaining visas/study permits, academic advice, emergency situations, pre-departure information, and personal support services. Such services should come in the form of telephone assistance, email enquires, and in-person consultations.

Principle Thirty-Two: Canadian students who have studied abroad as part of an exchange agreement made through their institution should be able to gain full recognition of the credits they take while abroad.

Students who wish to study abroad should not have to be concerned about credit recognition. Full recognition of credits should be easily transferable for all outbound students. It is important that Canadian institutions recognize the value of scholarly pursuits outside of Canada. Students who participate in study abroad opportunities are going to experience a range of diverse educational possibilities. It is important that a student's hard work conducted abroad is recognized. The credits taken abroad should be put towards their degree at their home institution to provide an accomplished education.

Concern Thirty-Six: Students have reported difficulty in having institutions accept credits taken abroad.

Students have reported a lack of transparency in terms of information regarding credit transfer. Difficulties have arisen with credit transfer between their home institution and the abroad institution. Credit recognition is important for degree study. Students who participate in a study abroad opportunity should not be disadvantaged. Failing to provide credit recognition can delay a student's graduation date, ultimately costing the student more money, and potentially adding a barrier to success.

Inadequate credit transfers can harm an institutions' credibility and the credibility of all universities in Ontario. It is important Ontario universities provide proper recognition as failing to do so can result in a student becoming deterred from pursuing a study abroad opportunity. In the HESA survey, 53 per cent of respondents who had decided against studying abroad felt it would be disruptive to their studies and that they might face difficulty in having credits recognized at their home institution.

Recommendation Thirty-Five: Institutions should provide clear assessment for the transferability of courses prior to a student's study-abroad departure.

Outbound students have a reasonable expectation that credentials obtained while on exchange or during a semester at an approved foreign institution will be recognized by their home institution. Failure to recognize credits unfairly burdens outbound students as it requires them to pay for learning they've already received by taking additional courses at their home institution to make up for any credits that were not recognized. Credits from approved foreign institutions should be assessed on the basis of the appropriate numerical/letter grade scale or a pass/fail system and should be communicated to the student prior to their departure. This will allow students to make educated decisions regarding what credits to pursue or what foreign institutions will best meet their needs.

Recommendation Thirty-Six: Institutions should commit to the full recognition of credits gained by Canadian students while undertaking studying abroad at exchange institutions.

Canadian institutions should recognize credits taken abroad by outbound students. In order to ensure credit compatibility, credits should be assessed before the student

embarks on a study abroad opportunity. Credits should be assessed on the basis of the appropriate numerical/letter grade scale or a pass/fail system. Recognition should be in-line with the abroad institution. Credits taken abroad should be worth the equivalency of how the abroad institutions classify them. A standardized process for abroad credit assessment should be implemented in order to avoid unnecessary complications with credit transfer.

International Students **Policy Statement**

WHEREAS International students are a positive contribution to campus environments and broader communities

WHEREAS International students are a diverse group of students, with a range of experiences and needs.

WHEREAS Different types of international students may experience unique barriers in participating and succeeding during their studies in Ontario.

WHEREAS International students in Ontario should not be financially subsidized by the government, but should pay no more in tuition than the real cost of their education.

WHEREAS International student tuition should not be used to generate additional revenue to make up for government underfunding at Ontario institutions.

WHEREAS The provincial government has a responsibility to ensure that international students are levied fairly.

WHEREAS When international student tuition increases at a higher rate than the growth in revenue for domestic students, international students move further away from contributing the real cost of their education.

WHEREAS International student tuition is currently completely deregulated, meaning there is a lack of government regulation of these fees.

WHEREAS Any increases in international student tuition should be predictable for students, as well as reasonable, year-to-year.

WHEREAS Due to tuition de-regulation, international students are vulnerable to dramatic and unpredictable fee increases.

WHEREAS Refugees' right to be charged tuition at the domestic tuition level should be protected.

WHEREAS Some students with refugee status have been incorrectly billed international student fees.

WHEREAS Institutions' expenditure of revenue generated from international tuition should be spent in a transparent manner.

WHEREAS It is often unclear how international student fees are spent on support services for international students.

WHEREAS Ontario should be attracting the most academically qualified international students, regardless of financial means or the various non-financial barriers international students face.

WHEREAS The vast majority of international students come from upper-middle and high-income backgrounds, indicating that studying in Canada is not an option for most international students from low-income backgrounds.

WHEREAS When governments and institutions commit to International Education strategies, or to increasing international enrolment, need-based financial assistance should be part of the planning process.

WHEREAS While a number of merit-based scholarships for international students exist, there is currently limited need-based financial aid available to international students.

WHEREAS Financial need should not act as a barrier for students with refugee status who wish to attend post-secondary education in Ontario.

WHEREAS Financial assistance specific to students with refugee status is rare in Ontario's institutions.

WHEREAS In order to benefit from the skills, knowledge and expertise of international students it is in the best interests of Ontario to retain the talent needed to meet labour market demands.

WHEREAS Ontario may in the future find it difficult to retain international students in Canada post-graduation.

WHEREAS International students studying in Ontario should receive a high-quality educational experience.

WHEREAS International students can be targets for illegitimate or poorly regulated institutions.

WHEREAS Wherever possible, international students should be protected from delays in visa processing that may affect their ability to commence studying in Canada.

WHEREAS International students have been subjected to visa processing delays.

WHEREAS International students should be able to access high quality advice regarding visas and immigration.

WHEREAS Changes to immigration law have restricted the ability of international student advisors working within institutions to provide immigration advice to students.

WHEREAS International students who show commitment to living and working in Canada should not be subjected to undue hardship in applying for Canadian citizenship.

WHEREAS Recent changes in federal legislation make it more difficult for students to gain citizenship status after graduation.

WHEREAS International students in Ontario must have access to affordable health insurance during their studies.

WHEREAS Due to the private nature of the University Health Insurance Plan, premium increases are subject to market demand and thus can fluctuate significantly.

WHEREAS International students must have access to any doctor or hospital in Ontario at an affordable rate.

WHEREAS In some cases, students are forced to pay out-of-pocket for health care services that cost above what UHIP will offer.

WHEREAS The UHIP reimbursement system forces students to find the funds to pay up-front for basic health services.

WHEREAS While UHIP is in place, international students should be represented on the governing bodies that makes decisions about their health plans.

WHEREAS There is currently no student representation on the UHIP Steering Committee, and the governance of this committee is not readily available to the public.

WHEREAS On-campus health services should be accessible to all students, and students using them should feel comfortable and welcome.

WHEREAS Some international students feel that on-campus health services may not understand their unique cultural, language or religious needs.

WHEREAS Qualified international students in Ontario should be able to access meaningful employment on and off campus during the course of their studies, including institutional work-study programs.

WHEREAS International students often have difficulty obtaining meaningful employment during the course of their studies and face barriers to employment that domestic students do not experience.

WHEREAS If they choose, qualified international students who seek employment in Canada should have an equal opportunity to find work post-graduation.

WHEREAS International students are discouraged about employment prospects post-graduation, and complicated government policies often make it difficult to obtain employment.

WHEREAS Employers often view hiring international students as more complicated than domestic students due to confusion with government policies.

WHEREAS International students in Ontario should be equipped with the skills they need to succeed in the Canadian workforce during the course of their education.

WHEREAS International students often require greater supports in accessing employment in-study.

WHEREAS Every international student in Ontario must be adequately supported during their studies through well-equipped student offices that provide access to training and resources.

WHEREAS Though all Ontario institutions offer services to international students, the quality of programming varies at each institution, and some services are not offered at all institutions.

WHEREAS Funding models and organizational structures for international student services vary widely between institutions.

WHEREAS Rising international enrollment has not always been met by increased investment in international student supports, leading to pressures on service delivery.

WHEREAS International students should be able to access support services that are culturally appropriate in order to recognize the unique barriers these students may face.

WHEREAS International students face unique challenges when transitioning into, through, and out of post-secondary education.

WHEREAS International students may face a range of pressures that can lead to mental health issues.

WHEREAS International students who are also from equity groups (ie: female students; LGBTQ students; racialized students etc.) may face specific cultural barriers when studying in Canada.

WHEREAS Institutions should recognize the difficulties for international students posed by unexpected changes to their academic year

WHEREAS Changes to the academic year, such as in the event of a faculty strike, may disproportionately affect an international student's ability to complete their credits or program.

WHEREAS International students must meet the equivalent academic standards as domestic students to gain admissions to programs at Ontario's post-secondary institutions.

WHEREAS Some private, for-profit international colleges and programs allow international students to bypass academic requirements for university programs.

WHEREAS International campus expansion efforts must only be pursued if quality can be assured, and if there are clear benefits to both the host country and expanding institution.

WHEREAS Due to a lack of domestic regulation, the creation of international branch campuses carries a host of potential risks which have implications for institutions and the Province.

WHEREAS Ontario should be seeking to attract the most qualified international students, regardless of the location of their home country.

WHEREAS The Canadian government has explicitly prioritized admitting international students from certain areas of the world over others.

WHEREAS Studying abroad offers many benefits to Canadian students, and the Canadian economy.

WHEREAS Canadian students are currently less likely to study abroad than students from other OECD countries.

WHEREAS Students whose home institution is in Ontario should be able to access a range of support services before, during, and after a period of studying abroad.

WHEREAS Students are not always able to access the supports they need for their study abroad experiences.

WHEREAS Canadian students who have studied abroad as part of an exchange agreement made through their institution should be able to gain full recognition of the credits they take while abroad.

WHEREAS Students have reported difficulty in having institutions accept credits taken abroad.

BIRT The government, institutions, and students must ensure that Ontario remains a welcoming place to study for all types of international students.

BIFRT International student tuition should be regulated within the Ontario tuition framework to ensure fairness for students

BIFRT International student tuition should be equal to the government and tuition revenue generated for a comparable domestic student plus additional costs associated with educating these students.

BIFRT International student tuition should be regulated in cohorts to maintain predictability for students.

BIFRT Institutions should implement processes to prevent the incorrect billing of students with refugee status.

BIFRT Institutions should commit to greater accountability regarding how they spend international tuition.

BIFRT The provincial government must mandate that institutions adopt a set-aside of international tuition reserved for need-based financial aid for international students.

BIFRT The provincial government and post-secondary institutions should offer more need-based scholarships aimed at attracting high achieving international students to Ontario.

BIFRT The provincial government and/or institutions should commit to establishing financial assistance programs targeted at students with refugee status.

BIFRT The provincial government should establish a tuition rebate for international students who gain permanent residency in Ontario through the Provincial Nominee Program.

BIFRT The provincial government must establish a transparent criterion for institutions able to admit international students, and maintain a public list of all designated institutions.

BIFRT If a student is unable to attend a university in Ontario due to visa processing delays, any visa or university application fees should be reimbursed to the student.

BIFRT The provincial government, working with the federal government, should work to ensure the processing of study visas is kept to a minimum, and commit to better communication with prospective students in the case of any delays to their visas.

BIFRT The provincial government should encourage the federal government to amend legislation in order to allow international student advisors to take a fast-track certification for student advising.

BIFRT The provincial government should encourage the federal government to allow international students to gain citizenship without undue hardship.

BIFRT The provincial government should allow international students to enroll in the Ontario Health Insurance Plan.

BIFRT International students should contribute a fair and proportional cost towards the Ontario Health Insurance Plan that is equivalent to the amount paid by domestic students.

BIFRT As long as UHIP exists, the UHIP steering committee must have significant international student representation.

BIFRT Expanded cultural sensitivity or international awareness training should be offered for on-campus healthcare providers. Greater efforts should be made to retain healthcare professionals with experience working with students.

BIFRT The barriers facing international students in gaining meaningful employment should be removed through a streamlining of government policy and greater availability of employment skills training.

BIFRT The provincial government must take a more active role in ensuring employers have accurate information regarding the hiring of international students.

BIFRT Institutions should invest in international student focused careers services, including – where possible – providing career clinics through the international student support centre.

BIFRT Organizational structures for international student services should meet a minimum provincial standard. In order to achieve an equitable level of funding, OUSA

advocates that the provincial government mandate that a proportion of international student tuition be used towards the funding of these services.

BIFRT The provincial government must ensure, through incentive or mandate, that senior administrations commit to providing a robust suite of international student support services that are adequately staffed to meet service demands.

BIFRT Institutions should provide comprehensive international student orientation programming, as well as transition, academic supports, and English language supports throughout a student's program.

BIFRT Institutions must provide access to culturally appropriate and sensitive mental health supports for international students.

BIFRT Cultural awareness training should be made available for all students, staff, faculty members, and student groups to ensure the full diversity of international students is recognized and considered in the development of international student supports.

BIFRT In the instance of unforeseen changes to the academic year, institutions should provide alternative assessment or reasonable accommodations for affected international students.

BIFRT The provincial government must work to ensure that universities do not partner with private, for-profit international colleges that allow international students to bypass academic standards.

BIFRT The Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities must promote the creation of an international branch campus quality assurance.

BIFRT The provincial government should focus on admitting the most qualified students regardless of home country.

BIFRT The provincial government should encourage more students in Ontario to study abroad through a range of opportunities.

BIFRT Institutions should invest in providing comprehensive study abroad support for outbound students.

BIFRT Institutions should provide clear assessment for the transferability of courses prior to a student's study abroad departure

BIFRT Institutions should commit to the full recognition of credits gained by Canadian students while undertaking studying abroad at exchange institutions.