

# Heading north



The experience of American students  
at Canadian universities



Universities  
Canada.

October 2016



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Across Canada, international students from more than 200 countries enrich our campuses and communities with a rich diversity of language, culture and global perspectives. Amongst these students, nearly 10,000 are from the United States.

Universities Canada is proud to present *“Heading north: The experience of American students at Canadian universities”* in partnership with the U.S. Embassy in Ottawa.

Why do American students come to Canada to study? The high quality and breadth of academic programs available at our universities, coupled with affordable tuition and vibrant campus communities, make Canada an ideal study destination. And as this report demonstrates, American students have very positive educational experiences in Canada.

The *100,000 Strong in the Americas* initiative recognizes a powerful contemporary reality. To succeed in a competitive global economy, today’s young people must be bold, well-educated, flexible and open-minded. Study abroad helps students build these competencies.

Study abroad also builds the international connections that foster what the Right Honourable David Johnston, Governor General of Canada, terms “the diplomacy of knowledge.” As we collaborate through learning, research and innovation, the ties between countries and individuals grow stronger – as does our ability to work together to solve the global issues facing our communities.

We hope to welcome even more students from the United States to Canadian campuses in the future, and look forward to strengthening ties with our American neighbours through the diplomacy of knowledge.

**Paul Davidson**  
President, Universities Canada



It is a great privilege for the U.S. Embassy in Ottawa to work with Universities Canada in producing and presenting the report *“Heading north: The experience of American students at Canadian universities.”* Greater student mobility between the United States and Canada expands the circles of collaboration and innovation that will shape our shared future. The success stories of tomorrow begin in classrooms and laboratories today.

President Barack Obama’s *100,000 Strong in the Americas* initiative has boosted academic exchanges in our region, with students throughout the Western Hemisphere traveling north and south to enrich their academic experience. U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry identifies education diplomacy as a way to harness the assets of our academic communities. The United States and Canada enjoy recognized leadership in higher education. Education diplomacy supports our shared prosperity agenda as a strong driver of economic growth. Educational exchanges foster mutual understanding and long-term connections between academics, students and the wider community in both countries.

Encouraging American students to seek higher education in Canada, whether it’s for one term, an academic year or an entire degree program, is a productive investment for both countries. The U.S. Department of State’s Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, a longtime leader in providing support to recruit international students to U.S. campuses, established a U.S. Study Abroad Branch in 2015. The office works to increase the number of Americans studying in other countries and to promote diversity of students, fields of study, locations of study and types of institutions.

Along with the Canadian institutions that welcome American students, we in the U.S. Mission to Canada want to ensure that American students have a productive, successful experience at their hosting school. We hope they will go on to encourage other students in the United States to look at the wealth of opportunities available in Canada when they are considering study abroad.

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**Bruce Heyman**  
U.S. Ambassador to Canada

## About Universities Canada

Universities Canada is a national not-for-profit membership organization representing 97 public and private not-for-profit universities. Our mission is to promote the interests of higher education and university research, and we accomplish this by facilitating the development of public policy and encouraging cooperation among universities and governments, industry, communities and institutions in Canada and abroad. Universities Canada works closely with our members on all aspects of internationalization and mobility themes.

## Executive summary

Canadian universities are increasingly seeking to internationalize their campuses and to offer their students opportunities to have international experiences that will help enhance their global skills. In early 2016, Universities Canada, at the invitation of the U.S. Embassy to Canada, conducted a series of focus groups to identify push and pull factors that draw American students to Canadian universities, and the challenges they face in doing so.

American students who choose Canada as a study destination do so for two main reasons: the relatively lower tuition fees at Canadian universities — especially at the undergraduate level — and the fact that they can experience another culture while remaining relatively close to home. At the graduate level, the major pull factor tends to be tied specifically to a program, a field of research or a faculty member.

Students from the United States describe their experience at Canadian universities in very positive terms with respect to the quality of academic offerings, campus life and preparation for their career of choice.

Major barriers they face in the process of coming to Canada to study revolve around uncertainty with respect to the immigration process, paucity of funding they can access (scholarships and grants) and logistical concerns related to daily life.

American students enrolled at Canadian universities recommend that these institutions, along with Canadian and American government bodies, do more to raise awareness about the quality and breadth of available academic programs in Canada, and promote opportunities to study in Canada south of the border. They suggest that universities' marketing efforts highlight the value-for-money, relative safety and diversity of cultural experiences that the Canadian postsecondary education system has to offer. Students also recommend that more funding be made available and accessible, especially at the graduate level,

to American students. Finally, focus group participants suggested that universities continue to make support services available to American students to facilitate their transition to Canada.

## Context

Nearly all Canadian universities engage to some degree in internationalization activities that help establish global networks and develop global competencies among students, faculty and staff. In 2014, Universities Canada conducted a comprehensive survey among its 97 members which looked at multiple aspects of Canadian universities' internationalization efforts, including:

- strategic institutional internationalization;
- partnerships and activities abroad;
- student mobility;
- teaching, learning and faculty engagement;
- international research collaboration; and
- geographical trends in terms of the focus of Canadian universities' international activities.<sup>1</sup>

The Government of Canada estimates that international students contribute more than \$11 billion to the Canadian economy every year.<sup>2</sup> In 2015, there were 96,000 full-time visa students<sup>3</sup> enrolled in undergraduate programs on Canadian university campuses. This represents an almost four-fold increase from the 26,000 who were enrolled in 2000. Over the same period, the number of full-time visa students in graduate programs also almost quadrupled from 13,000 to 46,000. Visa students therefore represent approximately 12 per cent of full-time undergraduate students and almost 29 per cent of students at the graduate level in Canada.<sup>4</sup>

At the invitation of the Embassy of the United States to Canada, Universities Canada undertook a study to:

- Enhance understanding of the motivations or pull-factors for American students to choose to study in Canada;
- Increase understanding of the barriers and challenges American students face in coming to and studying in Canada; and
- Identify recommendations on ways to increase the number of American students choosing Canada as a study destination.

<sup>1</sup> Universities Canada, Internationalization Survey, 2014.

<sup>2</sup> Global Affairs Canada, 2016

<sup>3</sup> The terms 'visa student' and 'international student' are often used interchangeably. In this case, 'visa students' refers to U.S. students who study in Canada for more than six months, and therefore require a study permit. A U.S. student coming to Canada for less than six months does not require a visa. The scope of this initiative included only U.S. students who enrol in a Canadian university for a full degree completed over multiple years, and is therefore limited to visa students.

<sup>4</sup> Universities Canada estimates

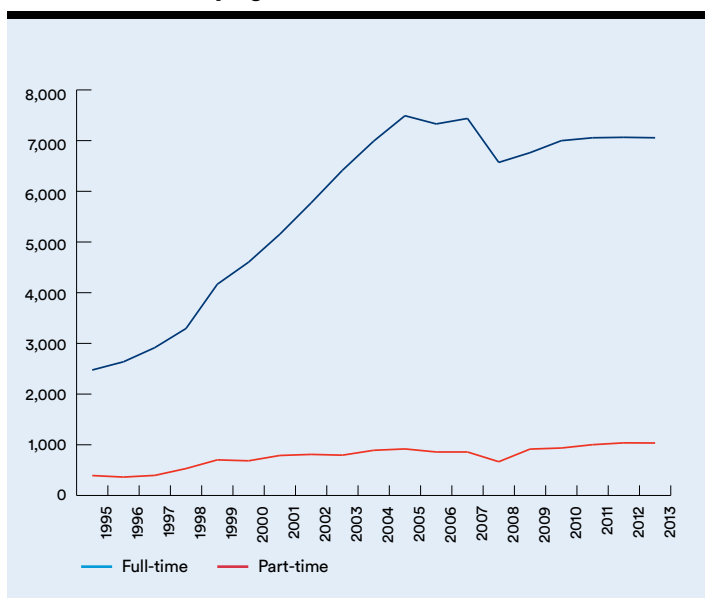
## Methodology

In January and February 2016, Universities Canada facilitated eight focus groups to gather robust qualitative data around themes related to the desired outcomes. The focus groups served to identify trends related to the motivations and challenges American students experience when deciding to study in Canada. To paint a picture of the decision-making process leading up to studies in Canada, as well as of the experience itself, the focus groups explored themes including recruitment, reputation, challenges and barriers, cultural integration, and immigration.

The focus groups were held in Halifax, Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver, and respondents were drawn from a range of institutions, listed in Appendix A.

Respondents included a mix of undergraduate and graduate students, who were enrolled in a wide array of fields of study, including STEM disciplines (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math), social sciences, humanities and arts. Several states of origin were represented, as indicated in Appendix B.

## U.S. students studying in Canadian universities



Source: Statistics Canada, Postsecondary Student Information System

## Background

University students around the world choose to study abroad because they value the knowledge, soft skills and enhanced employability that international experiences generate. Student mobility helps create globally aware graduates with skills suited to the jobs of today and tomorrow. A 2014 analysis of the European’s Commission’s Erasmus mobility program<sup>5</sup>—the largest in the world — found that students who take part in mobility opportunities develop a wide range of skills and aptitudes that employers value, such as tolerance of ambiguity, curiosity and openness to new experiences, self-confidence, self-awareness of strengths and weaknesses, decisiveness, and problem-solving abilities.

After their stay abroad, 52 per cent of students showed real improvements in these areas — the change in their personality traits was equivalent to a change over four years of life. The Erasmus study also found that 10 per cent of students who had taken part in Erasmus work placements started their own businesses after graduation — 10 times the usual rate among graduates. But the benefits of student mobility are not limited to students: institutions develop relationships with international partners, which help them continuously refine their curricula, fostering globally connected research and scholarship.

Employers see value in the skills and knowledge acquired by students through experiences abroad.

The Erasmus Impact Study also found that between 2006 and 2014, the proportion of employers who considered international experience important for recruitment doubled, and they paid higher salaries to employees with international experience.

European research shows that young people typically consider education abroad because of the opportunities it grants them to live abroad and travel, to meet new people, to learn or improve foreign language skills and experience a different culture, to develop “soft” skills and self-awareness, and to improve or widen their career prospects.<sup>6</sup> These motivations are confirmed in the United States by the Institute for International Education.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Uwe Brandenburg, Obdulia Taboadela and Mihaela Vancea, Mobility Matters: the Erasmus Impact Study, *International Higher Education*, Number 82, Fall 2015, pp. 5-7.

In 2013, according to Statistics Canada Postsecondary Student Information System data, nearly 7,060 full-time and 1,035 part-time American students were studying on Canadian university campuses. The number of American students in Canada tripled between 1995 and 2005, with a slight decline since 2005. Appendix C provides a table that outlines the number of American students seeking undergraduate and graduate degrees from Canadian universities in 2013.

In 2011, the United States introduced the *100,000 Strong in the Americas* initiative to increase the number of U.S. students studying in the Western Hemisphere to 100,000, and the number of Western Hemisphere students studying in the United States to 100,000. It is important to note that, while the focus of this

report is on U.S. students pursuing a full degree at a Canadian university, one of the goals of the *100,000 Strong in the Americas* initiative is to encourage more short-term international experiences (such as for one semester or one academic year). Push and pull factors may differ for short-term students.

Between 2010-11 and 2011-12, the number of U.S. students pursuing full degrees abroad rose by five per cent to a total of 46,500.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> *The Erasmus Impact Study: Regional Analysis – A comparative analysis of the effects of Erasmus on the personality, skills and career of students of European regions and selected countries*, European Union, January 2016.

<sup>7</sup> Allan Goodman, Stacie Berdan, Cyril Taylor, *A Student Guide to Study Abroad*, Institute of International Education, [www.iie.org/blog/2014/january/top-10-reasons-to-study-abroad](http://www.iie.org/blog/2014/january/top-10-reasons-to-study-abroad) viewed on March 29, 2016.

<sup>8</sup> Raisa Belyavina and Rajika Bhandari, *New Frontiers: U.S. Students Pursuing Degrees Abroad*, Institute of International Education, 2013.

### U.S. students Pursuing Degrees Abroad, by Host Country, 2010-11 and 2011-12

Country	2010-11	2011-12	Per cent change
United Kingdom	16,185	16,745	3.5
<b>Canada*</b>	<b>9,310</b>	<b>9,280</b>	<b>-0.3</b>
France	4,358	4,449	2.1
Germany	3,704	4,057	9.5
New Zealand	1,839	2,467	34.1
Australia	2,570	2,498	-2.8
China	1,666	2,184	31.1
Netherlands	1,500	1,650	10
Ireland	915	991	8.3
Spain	1,036	951	-8.2
Sweden	460	540	17.4
Japan	560	505	-9.8
Denmark	142	154	8.5
Malaysia	158	100	-36.7
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>44,403</b>	<b>46,571</b>	<b>5.2</b>

Source: New Frontiers: U.S. students Pursuing Degrees Abroad, IIE, 2013.  
\*Note that Canada is the only Western Hemisphere country represented.

Between 2010-11 and 2011-12, the number of U.S. students pursuing full degrees abroad rose by five per cent to a total of

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## Focus group findings

### Choosing to study abroad

Generally, focus group participants said that they specifically chose to study in Canada because of the financial, cultural and geographical advantages of doing so, rather than first choosing to study abroad, and then choosing Canada as a destination.

The cost of postsecondary education was a significant push factor to seek opportunities for education outside the United States, especially at the undergraduate level. Several participants referred to the cost of education in the United States as “prohibitive.”

A few students indicated that a desire for adventure and experiencing a different culture had led them to explore options for studying abroad, but several noted that independence from their parents while remaining relatively close to home had been an attractive prospect.

Most students said that they had only submitted applications to postsecondary institutions in the United States and Canada. Those students who did seek out opportunities overseas tended, for the most part, to apply to institutions in English- or French-speaking countries, mainly in Europe (such as the United Kingdom, France or Belgium) and other popular studyabroad destinations, namely Australia.

Only a small percentage of focus group participants had previously taken part in a study abroad experience — as part of their high school studies, for instance — but those who had previously studied abroad said it made them more inclined to seek out opportunities to complete their postsecondary education in a country other than the United States.

For the most part, students did not specifically mention the benefits of international experience in terms of career-readiness as a motivation for choosing to complete a degree abroad. However, when asked specifically about the benefits of studying abroad, many felt that employers would see their international experience as a valuable asset, and identified the skills that they were developing through their experience — such as adaptability, independence, cultural awareness, self-confidence and problem-solving — as beneficial.

### Why Canada?

An overwhelming majority of focus group participants, and in particular those completing an undergraduate degree, stated that their primary motivation for choosing Canada as a study destination was related to lower tuition costs at Canadian universities compared to American institutions.

However, their choice was also influenced by a complex mix of other push and pull factors. In Toronto, Halifax and Vancouver focus group participants indicated that cultural and linguistic similarities between Canada and the United States had influenced their decision to study in Canada. They felt the transition would require less adjustment than might an international experience in a non-English-speaking country outside of North America. Similarly, geographical proximity to the United States was an important consideration for many students.

A sizeable proportion of students also said that they had dual American-Canadian citizenship, and that this was a factor in their decision. A small number of American students chose to pursue a graduate degree at a Canadian university after having obtained an undergraduate degree from another Canadian institution.

Several focus group participants ultimately chose Canada because they had a prior connection to the country through family members, friends or spouses. For instance, one student said that his parents had encouraged him to follow in a family member’s footsteps and study at a Canadian institution. A small number of focus group participants also shared that they chose Canada as a study destination because their partner or spouse is Canadian. In a few cases, participants said that they decided to come to Canada as students because their partner was moving to Canada, and it would be easier for them to immigrate as students than as part of the labour market. In another case, a participant noted that his family had owned a cottage in Ontario for multiple generations, and that his familiarity with the area had positively influenced his decision to seek a postsecondary education in Canada.

A number of undergraduate students said that the relative ease of the application process at Canadian universities (as compared to the process in place within the American system) was an important factor in their decision to apply to university in Canada.

Several students specifically mentioned that not having to undergo the Graduate Record Examinations (GRE) when submitting an application to a Canadian university was an incentive to apply. The GRE is a standardized test taken by students who are applying to postgraduate courses in the U.S. and in some other parts of the world. Students described the Canadian application process as “simple, short and inexpensive.” A few participants implied that they had not considered seeking a postsecondary education at all until they realized how simple it would be to apply to a Canadian institution. The relative ease of the application process was not raised as a pull factor for graduate students. One graduate-level participant described it as “equally gruelling” in Canada and in the United States.

One notable difference raised by focus group participants was that in Canada, prospective students are not asked about their family’s alumni affiliations, whereas in the United States, this is an important factor that can have an influence on whether a student is admitted.

While only two students expressly mentioned the relative safety of Canada as opposed to the United States as a factor in their decision to pursue a degree at a Canadian institution — specifically, in one case, the safety of the participant’s children in relation to gun violence in her city of origin — several focus group participants noted that they were surprised at how safe Canadian cities were. Students in Halifax and Montreal specifically commented on their feeling of personal safety both on and off campus.

Canada’s overall reputation as a destination for high-quality education was rarely mentioned as a deciding factor for American students, generally because of their lack of awareness about Canadian universities. However, several participants said that a specific institution or program’s reputation had incited them to apply to that particular institution or program.

Some students said that they were drawn to Canada because of the differences between the Canadian education system and the American one, be it in terms of the campus culture or the relatively less transactional, business-like nature of postsecondary education in Canada. “I wanted the opposite of what you get in the American school system — sororities and sports,” said one participant.

## Factors influencing the choice of institution

### Awareness of opportunities

Students were generally not aware of the reputation of Canadian universities prior to coming to Canada, though most focus group participants were familiar with McGill University — possibly because this institution takes part in multiple college fairs in the United States, and has a reputation as a world-class institution. A small number of students noted that they had been aware of the University of Toronto, the University of British Columbia, the University of Victoria, Simon Fraser University, Concordia University, Emily Carr University of Art + Design, the University of King’s College (Nova Scotia), and Dalhousie University. College fairs appeared to be students’ most common source of information about Canadian institutions. Some institutions, such as Simon Fraser University, held information sessions and advertised at American high schools. Focus group participants noted that their high school guidance counsellors had been largely unfamiliar with Canada’s postsecondary offerings.

### Academic programming

A significant portion of focus group participants were drawn to their particular institution because of a unique academic program offered there. This was true for both undergraduate students and graduate students. At the graduate level, motivation to study abroad is almost always linked to specific research tied to a specific institution, program or faculty member. Unique, world-class facilities and equipment also have a major impact on students’ choice of institution. The choice of institution and even geographical location is corollary. One student chose her university based on an opportunity to train at a world-class speed-skating facility (in Calgary, Alberta). Another was drawn to McGill University’s sailing team, while one student indicated that he chose Simon Fraser University because of its international reputation for bagpipes.

#### Recommendations from relatives or friends

With regard to choosing an institution, a number of those who took part in the focus groups told us they had based their decision on the recommendation of a relative, friend or acquaintance who had previously attended or was currently attending that institution. However, in most cases, participants said that their parents had not attended a Canadian university.

#### Culture as a pull factor

Many American students viewed the culture of a particular region as a draw, and selected an institution accordingly. For instance, several focus group participants applied to universities in British Columbia in part because they were attracted to the Pacific Coast's culture and connection to the natural environment.

During the Montreal focus groups, several participants said they had opted to study in Quebec because of its distinct French Canadian culture or to study French. For example, one participant whose field of study involves traditional folk music was drawn to Montreal because of its cultural richness. These students identified Montreal's cultural status as a "gateway between North America and Europe" as a valuable asset that enhanced their international experience while allowing them to remain geographically close to home.

Some students registered at small institutions or in smaller cities indicated that they were attracted to the close-knit communities that these locations offered. The opportunity to interact with faculty in smaller classes was another notable consideration in their choice. Numerous participants told us that they ultimately chose their institution after visiting its campus based on a combination of fit, urban environment and geographical location.

#### Reactions from relatives and friends

We asked focus group participants what their friends and family's reaction had been when learning that they would be pursuing a degree in Canada. Most of them noted that reactions had been positive, but some indicated that they had experienced "gentle chastising" in light of some misconceptions on the part of their family and friends — for instance, some of their peers assumed that they had applied to a Canadian university because they were unable to successfully enrol in an American college. Others

raised concerns about the relatively low cost of tuition, and made assumptions as to the quality of education based on the price.

#### Experience at Canadian universities

##### Quality of education and career readiness

The American students who took part in the focus groups universally described their experience at a Canadian university in positive terms. The vast majority of them said they felt their program of study was of a high quality, and that they were confident that their education at a Canadian university was preparing them well for their desired career. Some focus group contributors observed that Canadian universities appeared to have more academic rigour than their American counterparts.

Most participants indicated that they would make the same decision to study in Canada again, and that they would recommend this educational path to others.

Multiple students saw their Canadian postsecondary degree as a platform for other experiences abroad. "If I hadn't had this experience in Canada," said one student, "I wouldn't have had the confidence to apply to grad school in Europe."

##### Transition to life at a Canadian campus

When investigating options for their postsecondary education, students primarily relied on information they received from their high school counsellors, at regional college fairs, through word-of-mouth from friends and relatives, and from presentations and marketing materials shared by institutions themselves. Students indicated that very few Canadian institutions had visited their high schools, distributed marketing materials or taken part in regional college fairs, with the exception of McGill University. Several focus group participants also noted that students in the United States often rely on lists of institutional rankings to guide them in their choice, but that Canadian universities are generally absent from these lists. Moreover, they were not aware of a similar rankings system in Canada, and felt that this made it difficult to assess the relative quality of a Canadian postsecondary institution.

Once they had selected an institution to apply to, students turned to institutional websites and university staff for information



about the application process, campus life, program and courses, etc. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram were not a significant source of information about universities themselves, but some students did indicate that they used social media networks to share and gather information about some of the logistical aspects of transitioning to a Canadian campus.

Notably, no participants mentioned Universities Canada as a source of information about universities, signalling a potential opportunity for the organization to expand its efforts across the southern border to raise awareness about Canadian education pathways and attract more American applicants to Canadian universities.

Many students praised university staff for their responsiveness and the quality of the support they provided to them once their applications had been submitted. University staff were generally helpful in answering questions about housing, course registration, logistical issues, etc. For the most part, focus group participants said that the one-on-one support they received from university staff via telephone and email conversations was more efficient and useful than information contained on university websites, which were at times unclear and confusing.

Participants described a wide range of experiences with respect to university orientation services, depending on the institution in which they were enrolled. According to them, some institutions offer orientation services specifically designed for international students, while others provide uniform introduction and transition services for all students.

The experience of American students who took part in orientation for international students varied as well. Some felt that the information provided was useful primarily to students from overseas with a very different cultural background, and that this information was not useful or relevant to them as American students. Others felt that important information had been relayed during orientation, and that this had helped them in their transition to university and to life in Canada. In some cases, students criticized university orientation for being too focused on social activities and not sufficiently focused on providing information about Canadian culture, university life, and logistical challenges such as health care, banking and student loans.

### Cultural integration

Several participants indicated that they often do not feel like international students, given the similarities between American and Canadian culture, especially when compared to international students from countries overseas. However, they cautioned that they still need the transition and acclimatization supports that are offered to other international students to help them adjust to university life in Canada. In one case, a participant noted that American students were explicitly ineligible to receive services typically designed for international students, and that she had had to request them specifically. “I feel like an invisible international student,” said one participant.

When asked whether their group of friends and acquaintances included primarily Canadians, Americans or other international students, most students said that their friends and cohort include a mix of Canadians and international students, including other Americans. This would seem to contradict a recent finding by the Canadian Bureau for International Education’s research, which found that 54 per cent of international students in Canada did not count Canadians in their circle of friends.<sup>9</sup>

A few participants revealed that, while they had not felt unwelcome, they had experienced a certain stigma because they were American. They felt that some of their peers had made assumptions about their world view and their politics when they had found out they were American.

Students at commuter campuses said that they sometimes felt isolated and described their campus as a “bubble”. This was also mentioned by some participants in relation to McGill University – an Anglophone university in the midst of a predominantly French-Canadian city. “It’s more of an international experience than I was expecting,” remarked a student in a Montreal focus group. Interestingly, several focus group contributors also observed that, while students at American colleges tend to live on campus for their entire degree, the culture in Canada is for most students to live off campus, especially after the first year of their degree.

<sup>9</sup> *A World of Learning: Canada’s Performance and Potential in International Education*, Canadian Bureau for International Education, 2015.

#### Challenges encountered by American students

Focus group participants relayed a number of challenges they encountered in their transition to a Canadian university and as part of their studies.

#### Immigration and border crossing

Students described mixed experiences with the immigration process. Some found the visa application process and border crossing relatively simple and straightforward, while others whose circumstances diverge from the norm — especially those whose partners and children were coming to Canada with them, or who were crossing the border with pets — found the experience tremendously frustrating. The participants' perspectives on the information and resources available to learn about the immigration process, such as Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada's website, varied widely. Several focus group respondents criticized the website for providing vague information and felt that they had received conflicting information from the Canadian Border Services Agency and Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada with regard to the immigration and border-crossing process. Multiple respondents also expressed frustration at the lack of consistency in how policies were applied at the border.

In Quebec, a participant noted that their study permit only lasted three years even though most undergraduate degrees were four-year programs, forcing the student to reapply before completing their degree. Another Quebec participant expressed frustration at the fact that standard forms were only available in French.

Several participants noted that they had initiated the process of applying for permanent residency and described it as frustrating and lengthy.

#### Logistical issues

Logistical issues, such as a lack of clarity around obtaining a social insurance number, health insurance and applying for a health card, opening a Canadian bank account, securing student loans, finding housing, getting a cell phone plan, and filing tax returns, were identified by American students as sources of frustration. Most participants expressed that they would have benefitted from receiving more detailed information and clarity about the procedures they needed to follow in these areas. Several students also struggled with the limits placed on how

many hours of off-campus work they are allowed to perform while studying in Canada.

#### Cost of living

In most cases, the cost of living was reported as being comparatively lower in Canada than in the United States. However, in Vancouver, participants noted that they had been surprised to find that the cost of living was much higher than they had expected.

#### Age of majority

In those provinces where the age of majority is 19 years old, participants occasionally mentioned having to overcome unique challenges — in one instance, a student's parents had to sign their guardianship over to the university because the student was 18. Another student sought advice from a lawyer about being her own health proxy as a minor.

#### Credit recognition and transfer

Students reported a few instances where their prior credits — including Advanced Placement<sup>10</sup> courses — had not been recognized by their institution.

#### Lack of funding

Grants, scholarships and other funding are very difficult for American students at Canadian universities to access, especially in the case of graduate students, since they are not eligible for granting council funding. This lack of funding opportunities was noted as the most substantial challenge for American graduate students wishing to study at a Canadian university.

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<sup>10</sup>Advanced Placement is a program in the United States and Canada, created by the College Board, which offers college-level curricula and examinations to high school students. American colleges and universities often grant placement and course credit to students who obtain high scores on the examinations.

## Recommendations

### For governments

The gap between Canada and other major destinations for international students is due in large part to the fact that governments of countries such as Australia and the United Kingdom have made considerable investments in branding and marketing initiatives.<sup>11</sup> There is a need for more promotion and marketing to raise awareness in the United States of the opportunities to study at Canadian institutions, and to improve understanding of the benefits of doing so. This role could be performed collaboratively by the Government of Canada, provincial and territorial governments, Canadian universities and stakeholders, and United States government representatives — such as through the U.S. Embassy to Canada and its consulates.

In 2012, the Advisory Panel on Canada's International Education Strategy released its final report which offered a suite of recommendations aimed at enhancing Canada's international education approach. The report included a call for substantial resources to maintain activities at a level at least equivalent to current funding for mature markets such as the United States. It also called for an enhanced role for Canadian embassies and offices abroad, including the formation of education teams comprising trade commissioners and visa officers, who would be accountable for the promotion and facilitation of the international student recruitment process.

The report noted that a stronger presence of the Canada brand abroad at key international events would strengthen Canada's recognition and international students' exposure to the possibility of studying and conducting research in Canada.<sup>12</sup>

Focus group participants — particularly at the graduate level — observed that promoting Canada's reputation as a world-class education destination, along with its outstanding research, faculty and researchers, to an American audience would be an effective way to incentivize American students to Canadian universities.

Numerous respondents recommended that the Government of Canada streamline its immigration and border-crossing process and make the visa application process more transparent, while eliminating inconsistencies in the application of policies at the border. Tools such as a walk-through of border-crossing

requirements and a "TurboTax-style" approach to immigration were suggested.

Participants noted that it would be helpful for an Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada representative be affiliated with each university to help troubleshoot the process. Universities Canada will share these recommendations with officials within the Government of Canada.

Graduate students highlighted the imperative to provide funding to American and other international graduate students in order to increase the number of students who choose Canada as a study destination. Focus group participants indicated that they are eligible to receive some doctoral and post-doctoral awards, such as the Vanier Canada Graduate Scholarships and Banting Postdoctoral Fellowships, but that competition for this funding is fierce and that the total number of scholarships awarded is limited.

Some suggested that Canada and the United States establish joint reciprocal scholarships. Examples of best practices in this area include:

- The Mitacs Globalink Program, which attracts promising international students to Canadian universities and enables Canadian students to train abroad.
- The Canada-U.S. Fulbright Program, which strengthens bi-national collaborative research and promotes thoughtful public debate on topics that reflect the broad range of contemporary issues relevant to Canada, the United States and the relationship between the two countries. The Fulbright Program operates on the principle of reciprocal exchange and provides the opportunity for exceptional Canadian and American students and scholars to lecture, research and pursue graduate study in the United States and Canada, respectively.
- The Canada-Brazil Awards which provide scholarships for exchanges of researchers and graduate students in support of reciprocal, team-based research projects.

<sup>11</sup> Canada: Partner of choice in international education, Universities Canada, in The Observatory on Borderless Higher Education, October 2013.

<sup>12</sup> *International Education: A key driver of Canada's future prosperity*, final report of the Advisory Panel on Canada's International Education Strategy, August 2012.

### For Canadian universities

Participants identified several measures that could help raise awareness about Canadian universities in the United States, such as networks whereby American alumni from Canadian universities would act as ambassadors in their communities and high schools. A handful of focus group participants indicated that they had returned to their communities to speak to current high school students about their academic experience in Canada, and many others said they would be willing to do so.

Providing tools and guidance for American students — perhaps through international student centres or U.S.-specific groups on campus — to deliver presentations on their experience at their high schools or in their communities is an example of a best practice that would help raise awareness among high school students, teachers, orientation counsellors, etc. in the United States about what students can expect when they come to Canada to study. According to focus group respondents, only a handful of individual Canadian universities currently hold information sessions at American high schools, and this number could be increased — especially at high schools located in States neighbouring the border with Canada. Marketing efforts could highlight the cost differential, along with cultural opportunities and the advantageous aspects of the city or area where the institution is located.

Focus group respondents also suggested that universities provide more information on the logistics of living in Canada, including healthcare options, what to expect in terms of banking, financial aid, credit card applications, cell phone plans and housing. In the case of the latter, they recommended that universities provide details on where to look, neighbourhoods and tenant rights, for instance. Best practices in place at some institutions include matching incoming American students with a more senior student from the United States who can provide guidance, advice and information, and identifying one university staff member as a contact point to answer questions and help resolve issues.

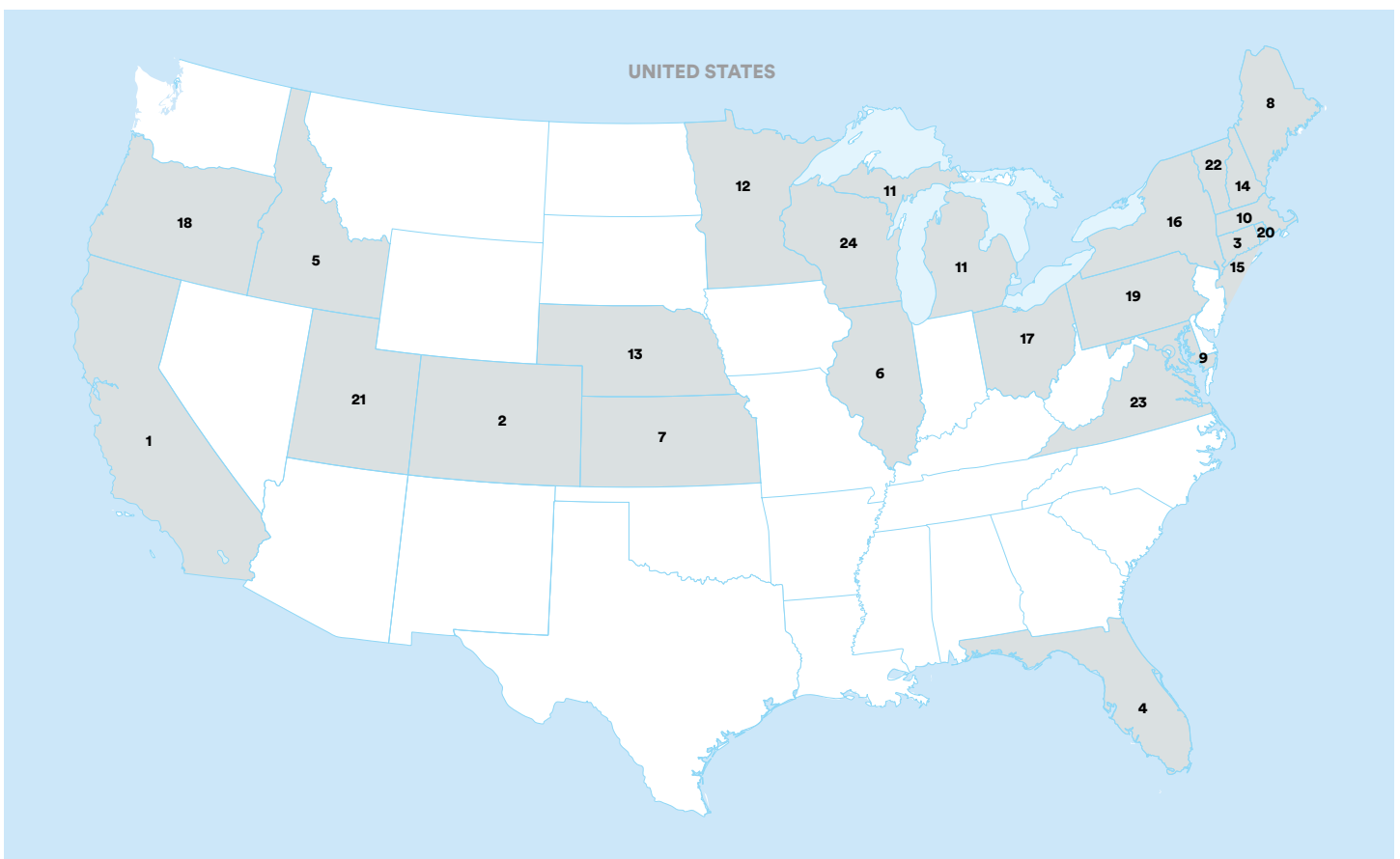
### List of institutions represented during focus groups

Bishop's University  
Concordia University  
Dalhousie University  
HEC Montréal  
McGill University  
Nova Scotia College of Art & Design  
(NSCAD University)  
Sheridan College Institute of Technology  
and Advanced Learning\*  
Simon Fraser University  
University of British Columbia  
University of Guelph  
University of King's College  
Université de Montréal

\* Sheridan College is not a Universities Canada member institution.

### **Focus group participants’ state of origin**

The participants in the eight focus groups conducted in Halifax, Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver represented 24 different states, as indicated below:

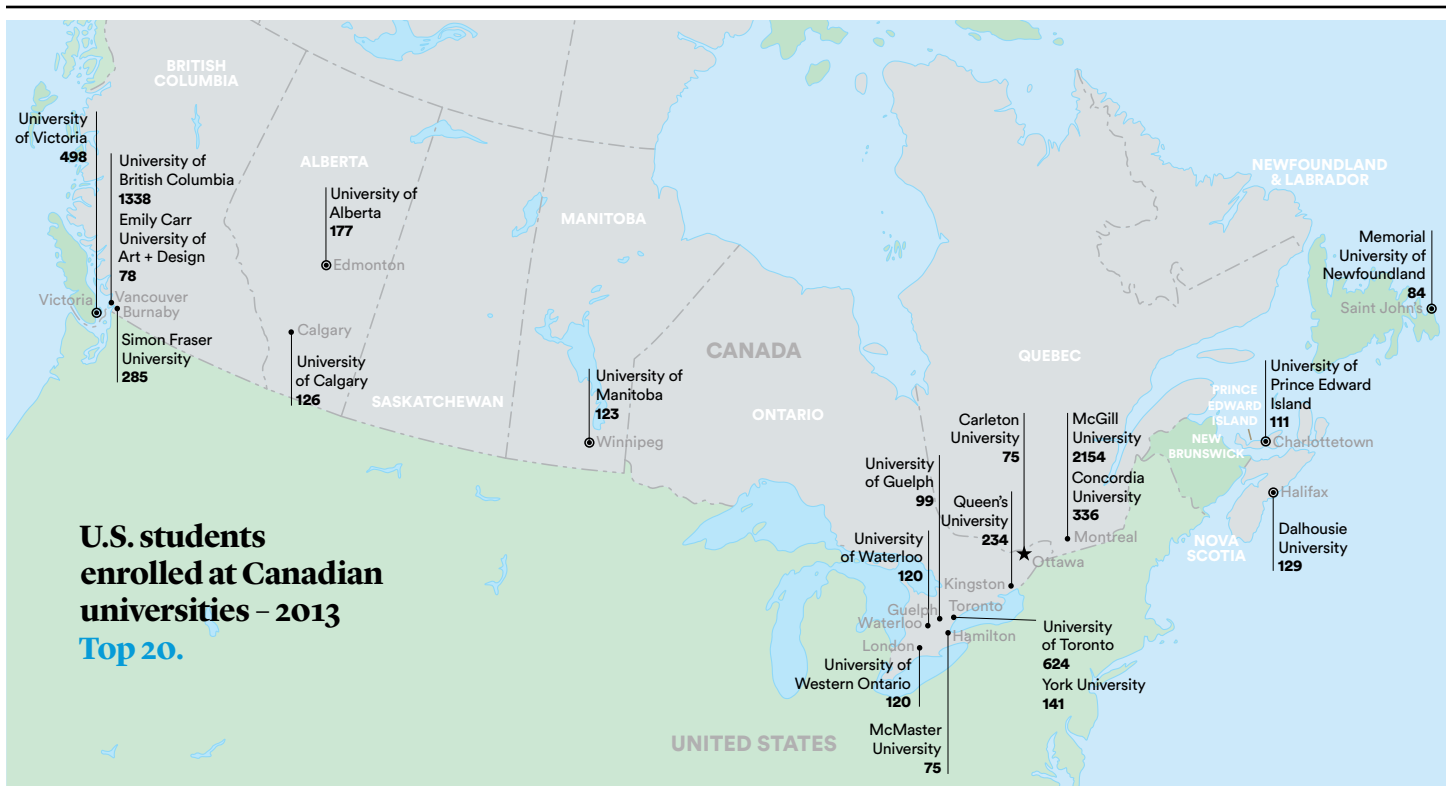


- |                |                   |                  |
|----------------|-------------------|------------------|
| 1. California  | 9. Maryland       | 17. Ohio         |
| 2. Colorado    | 10. Massachusetts | 18. Oregon       |
| 3. Connecticut | 11. Michigan      | 19. Pennsylvania |
| 4. Florida     | 12. Minnesota     | 20. Rhode Island |
| 5. Idaho       | 13. Nebraska      | 21. Utah         |
| 6. Illinois    | 14. New Hampshire | 22. Vermont      |
| 7. Kansas      | 15. New Jersey    | 23. Virginia     |
| 8. Maine       | 16. New York      | 24. Wisconsin    |

## U.S. students enrolled at Canadian universities – 2013

University	City	Prov	Undergrad	Grad	Total
McGill University	Montreal	QC	1707	447	2,154
University of British Columbia	Vancouver	BC	753	585	1,338
University of Toronto	Toronto	ON	243	381	624
University of Victoria	Victoria	BC	375	123	498
Concordia University	Montreal	QC	264	72	336
Simon Fraser University	Burnaby	BC	123	162	285
Queen's University	Kingston	ON	69	165	234
University of Alberta	Edmonton	AB	24	153	177
York University	Toronto	ON	81	60	141
Dalhousie University	Halifax	NS	108	21	129
University of Calgary	Calgary	AB	45	81	126
University of Manitoba	Winnipeg	MB	78	45	123
University of Waterloo	Waterloo	ON	48	72	120
University of Western Ontario	London	ON	27	93	120
University of Prince Edward Island	Charlottetown	PE	105	6	111
University of Guelph	Guelph	ON	63	36	99
Memorial University of Newfoundland	St. John's	NL	27	57	84
Emily Carr University of Art and Design	Vancouver	BC	78	0	78
Carleton University	Ottawa	ON	60	15	75
McMaster University	Hamilton	ON	24	51	75
Toronto School of Theology	Toronto	ON	18	42	60
University of Saskatchewan	Saskatoon	SK	12	48	60
University of Ottawa	Ottawa	ON	30	24	54

University	City	Prov	Undergrad	Grad	Total
University of Windsor	Windsor	ON	30	24	54
Athabasca University	Athabasca	AB	45	3	48
Bishop's University	Sherbrooke	QC	42	0	42
Acadia University	Wolfville	NS	33	9	42
Brock University	St. Catharines	ON	18	24	42
Mount Allison University	Sackville	NB	36	3	39
Ryerson University	Toronto	ON	27	12	39
University of New Brunswick	Fredericton	NB	15	24	39
Canadian University College	Lacombe	AB	33	0	33
Saint Mary's University	Halifax	NS	18	15	33
University of King's College	Halifax	NS	30	0	30
Trent University	Trent	ON	6	24	30
Université de Montréal	Montreal	QC	6	24	30
Thompson Rivers University	Kamloops	BC	27	0	27
Université Laval	Quebec City	QC	12	15	27
St. Thomas University	Fredericton	NB	24	0	24
University of Winnipeg	Winnipeg	MB	24	0	24
St. Francis Xavier University	Antigonish	NS	21	3	24
University of Northern British Columbia	Prince George	BC	15	9	24
Université Saint-Paul	Ottawa	ON	0	24	24
Capilano University	N. Vancouver	BC	21	0	21
Ontario College of Art and Design (OCAD University)	Toronto	ON	15	6	21
University of Regina	Regina	SK	12	9	21



University	City	Prov	Undergrad	Grad	Total
University of Lethbridge	Lethbridge	AB	12	6	18
Vancouver Island University	Nanaimo	BC	15	0	15
Brandon University	Brandon	MB	12	3	15
Providence College and Seminary	Otterburne	MB	12	3	15
Lakehead University	Thunder Bay	ON	9	6	15
Université du Québec à Montréal	Montreal	QC	9	6	15
Wilfrid Laurier University	Waterloo	ON	9	6	15
NSCAD University	Halifax	NS	12	0	12
Alberta College of Art and Design	Calgary	AB	9	0	9
Mount Royal University	Calgary	AB	9	0	9
Mount St. Vincent University	Halifax	NS	9	0	9
HEC Montréal	Montreal	QC	3	6	9
Cape Breton University	Sydney	NS	6	0	6
Kwantlen Polytechnic University	Surrey	BC	6	0	6
The King's University	Edmonton	AB	6	0	6
MacEwan University	Edmonton	AB	6	0	6
Université de Saint-Boniface	Winnipeg	MB	6	0	6
Royal Roads University	Victoria	BC	0	6	6
Université de Sherbrooke	Sherbrooke	QC	0	6	6
Algoma University	Sault Ste. Marie	ON	3	0	3
Concordia University of Edmonton	Edmonton	AB	3	0	3

University	City	Prov	Undergrad	Grad	Total
Polytechnique Montréal	Montreal	QC	3	0	3
Nipissing University	North Bay	ON	3	0	3
St. Thomas More College	Saskatoon	SK	3	0	3
Université de Moncton	Moncton	NB	3	0	3
Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue	Rouyn-Noranda	QC	3	0	3
University of the Fraser Valley	Abbotsford	BC	3	0	3
Atlantic School of Theology	Halifax	NS	0	3	3
Institut national de la recherche scientifique	Quebec City	QC	0	3	3
Université du Québec à Chicoutimi	Chicoutimi	QC	0	3	3
Université du Québec à Rimouski	Rimouski	QC	0	3	3
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>5046</b>	<b>3027</b>	<b>8073<sup>15</sup></b>

The institutions represented in the focus groups are highlighted in [■] blue. Institutions highlighted in [■] red are not members of Universities Canada.

Source: Statistics Canada Postsecondary Student Information System

<sup>15</sup> **Clarifying note:** Statistics Canada and the Institute of International Education report different figures as a total number of U.S. students completing a degree in Canada. The data presented are from different years, and Statistics Canada and the Institute of International Education may have used different methodologies in their calculations.

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