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New policies, new students, new direction? Trends in international student enrollment in Ontario's changing policy landscape.

International Students in Ontario's Postsecondary Education System, 2000-2012

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To read the full report please see <http://www.heqco.ca/SiteCollectionDocuments/International%20Students%20in%20Ontario%20ENG.pdf>

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Executive Summary

International students bring immense benefits to Ontario's postsecondary system and labour market through the financial boon they bring to universities and colleges, their cultural diversity, the positive economic impacts they can have on Canadian society after graduation, and the skills they develop and contribute. However, many international students may find it difficult to transition to permanent residence after graduation, or find the career they seek immediately upon completion of their studies. In addition, little is known about the number of international students transitioning to the labour market, their socioeconomic outcomes, or their success in doing so. The present analysis sought to identify the number of international students who entered Ontario from 2000 to 2012, their demographic and socioeconomic characteristics, identify trends in their entry, and identify the ways they most commonly transition to the labour market. It also identified the main policies guiding international student recruitment and transition, and noted the policy changes that would have the most direct effect on international students. Using both quantitative and qualitative research methods, our analysis found that, among other things, the majority of international students are male, college is a more popular entry point than university, source countries have changed, and international students' transition to permanent resident status is challenging. This latter point has important implications for the Ontario postsecondary sector and labour market, including that international students may be less inclined to come to Canada if transition pathways are not clear and that they may find them remain in temporary employment long after their graduation. In this brief, we summarize the findings from a research project for the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario in 2013-2014.

The Policy Problem

Increasing the recruitment of international students is a major policy goal for the federal and Ontario governments, yet international student transitions to the labour market are not widely understood. In addition, former international students' transition to the labour market faces increasingly complex and changing immigration policies in Canada. Evidence highlighted in the present analysis is crucial for the postsecondary system and labour market if Ontario is to remain a leader in the recruitment of international students.

The governments of Canada and Ontario have repeatedly identified the numerous social, economic and cultural advantages that international students bring to the country and province respectively, while extolling the many financial and multicultural benefits they bring to universities and colleges (Canada, 2001, 2012; CIC, 2010; Government of Ontario, 2010). Policy reports and papers written on behalf of universities and colleges have echoed these sentiments and identified both the benefits international students bring and the many challenges facing their overall experiences (Bond et al., 2007; AUCC, 2009; ACCC, 2010; Popovic, 2013; Snowden, 2015). Their experiences during their studies have been documented through numerous reports (e.g. Madgett & Bélanger, 2008; CBIE, 2013, 31-41), and their transition to the labour market and permanent residence has been addressed, if only in a limited fashion (cf. Grayson, 2008; van Huystee, 2011). Concurrently, the rapidly

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changing policy landscape of Canada's immigration system is presenting new challenges for international students and other potential immigrants to Canada (MTCU, 2011; Alboim & Cohl, 2013; Popovic, 2013; CBIE, 2013).

Despite challenges, Ontario's and Canada's places as leaders in providing high-quality, directed and skills-oriented postsecondary education is becoming increasingly recognized at the global level (Trilokekar & Kizilbash, 2013). Many authors have called for increased attention to international students in recent decades, and the government has introduced many policies, some of which have helped and others which have hindered international student transition in Ontario.

Background on Current Practice

In recent decades, the Canadian federal government has been active in formulating policies that have either directly or indirectly affected international students. Most of these have come through amendments to or actions through the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA), enacted in 2002. The Post-Graduation Work Permit Program (PGWP) Program was introduced in 2006 and enabled international students to work for up to two and three years after they graduated. The Off-Campus Work Permit (OCWP) Program was instituted in a pilot phase 2006 and allowed students to work off-campus during their studies, allowing students them the opportunity to work in their chosen field ahead of their transition to the labour market. The OCWP was eventually scrapped in 2014 and now students can work off campus for 20 hours per week without a work permit. The Canadian Experience Class (CEC) was created in 2008 to provide a pathway for international students, recent graduates, and other foreign workers with Canadian work experience in relevant sectors to transition directly to permanent residence. The Student Partners Program (SPP) was created as a pilot program in 2009 between the Association of Canadian Community Colleges and CIC in order to streamline applications for postsecondary study for potential students from India and China.

Study Findings

The first objective of this research was to know how many international students came to Ontario between 2000 and 2012. The second objective was to identify their socioeconomic characteristics as they enter under an international student visa category. The third objective was to assess their outcomes, both in labour transitions and immigration status, after finishing their studies. We also wanted to identify the major federal and provincial policy changes that affected student immigration during this time.

Based on these objectives, we undertook statistical analysis of Citizenship and Immigration Canada and Statistics Canada visa data and found that:

- Ontario is the primary and over time an increasingly important destination for international students bound for Canada;

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- Over three-quarters of international students who changed visa status in 2011 remained in Ontario after their studies ended;
- Ontario-bound international students show a growing tendency to study in the college sector, with over 50% of new entrants attending a college in 2012;
- Over the last ten years gender parity in international student entries has shifted to male bias (60% male in 2012 compared to 52% in 2000); and
- India and China are the dominant sources of international students coming to Ontario. This marks a major shift from source regions in 2000, which were Western Europe and East Asia.

Policy Options and Recommendations

The Government of Ontario needs to commit more resources to analyzing international student labour market transition trends. Currently, the data is not sufficiently available to spark a public discussion on the labour market outcome of international student transition. The key trends discussed in this report, however, can provide an indication of areas in need of further study and data development.

- The greatest share of international students now come to Ontario colleges, this may be reflective of the rising tuition fees incurred by international students, the active internationalization of Ontario's college sector, or the current 3 year maximum length of the PGWP visa. If students are concerned with entry to the labour market, these regulations become significant factors which provide an advantage to colleges.
- The experience of international students within the express entry process must also be monitored. The attractiveness of Ontario's international student market may become diminished if the education and work experience international students gain in the post-secondary system are not adequate enough to allow students to secure PR status. Maintaining educational quality and employment/settlement opportunity will be vital to sustaining international student interest in Ontario. There is also the need to assess international students and their labour market entry as part of a larger analysis of highly educated youth employment rates and experiences. The Ontario government should make greater use of the Provincial Nominee Program to sponsor former international students to aid in their transition to permanent residence through the Express Entry process.
- The gender shift in international student flows should be examined by researchers and policy-makers. A significant portion of population growth in Canada presently and into the future is due to immigration; a gender imbalance in a major immigration flow such as international students has implications for the labour market over time. Further study should take advantage of these data and explore the underlying reasons for this change.

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