

# Internationalization of the curriculum

*Canadian universities pursue many avenues to internationalize their institutions, and internationalization of the curriculum in particular is a key aspect of these activities on the home front. The Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada's (AUCC) 2000 report on the state of internationalization at Canadian universities, Progress and Promise, which was based on findings from AUCC's 1999 survey, identified internationalization of the curriculum as an area of concern, where universities had low levels of activity. In September 2006, AUCC launched a comprehensive survey of its member institutions to gather up-to-date information about the nature and scope of internationalization at Canadian universities, including activities related to the curriculum.*

Internationalization of the curriculum is defined here generally as an effort to introduce an international, intercultural or global dimension into course content and materials and into teaching and learning methods.

Findings presented in this fact sheet are primarily based on responses found in Questionnaire 3 – Curriculum and the Teaching/Learning Process, which included both qualitative and quantitative questions. Sixty institutions responded to this questionnaire, with a resulting 73-percent response rate that ensures a representative sample of Canadian universities.

According to AUCC's 2006 survey, Canadian universities are committed to the goal of internationalizing the curriculum. When asked whether bringing an international dimension to the curriculum and teaching/learning process is a strategic priority, respondents almost unanimously indicated that it is either an overall strategic priority or part of a strategy under development. This priority is aligned with most universities' overall objective of internationalization, which they view both as essential to the quality of higher education and, increasingly, as a core element of their institutional strategies.



*Originally from Rwanda, Joséphine Mukamurena brings an international perspective to her teaching of pedagogy at the Université de Sherbrooke.*

Universities focus a good deal of their internationalization efforts on the teaching and learning process. Indeed, improving the curriculum is seen as a goal of internationalization in itself, as survey respondents chose “to promote innovation in curriculum and diversity of programs” as the third most important reason overall for internationalizing their campuses. Given that their most important rationale in this respect is to prepare graduates who are internationally knowledgeable and intercultural competent, institutions clearly value

the contribution of internationalization toward academic goals. Internationalizing the curriculum itself makes the teaching/learning process more relevant for international students on campus and raises the institution's profile on the global stage of higher education. More importantly, an internationalized curriculum provides an avenue for Canadian students to develop global perspectives and skills at home. This is particularly important given that many students currently do not have access to study abroad opportunities.

## Leadership within the institution

As internationalization of the curriculum becomes a more important element of institutional strategies, efforts to lead and support it are becoming more integrated as well. When asked which departments or offices have responsibility for facilitating and monitoring the process of internationalizing the curriculum, most respondents (69 percent) indicated that this process involves either institution-level responsibility or shared responsibility between the institution- and the department-level bodies or offices. Only 14 percent indicated that this oversight role rests exclusively at the department level.

This trend is further demonstrated by results showing international offices becoming more of a focal point for facilitating the internationalization of the curriculum. As in 2000, respondents were asked what role the international office or unit plays in the promotion and facilitation of internationalizing the curriculum. While 2000 results showed that “international offices have a minor role in promoting or facilitating the internationalization of the curriculum,”<sup>1</sup> 2006 results suggest that international offices now play a greater role, with 83 percent of respondents reporting some role for the office. Some of the activities performed by international offices include: providing support to

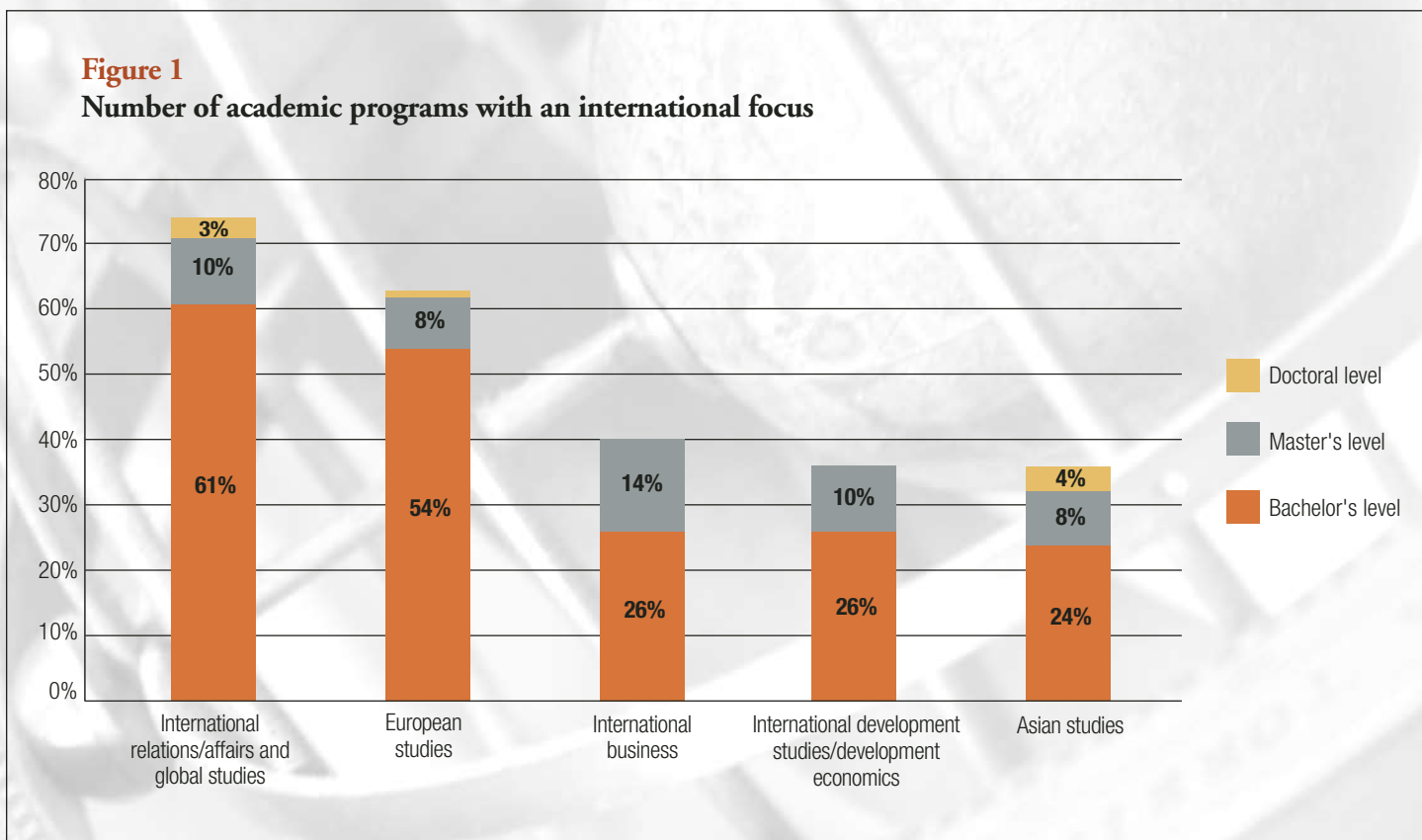
departments, overseeing program development, raising awareness of opportunities for internationalization, and providing resources to the university teaching centre. This demonstrates the diversity of roles that the international office can play within the institution.

## International programs

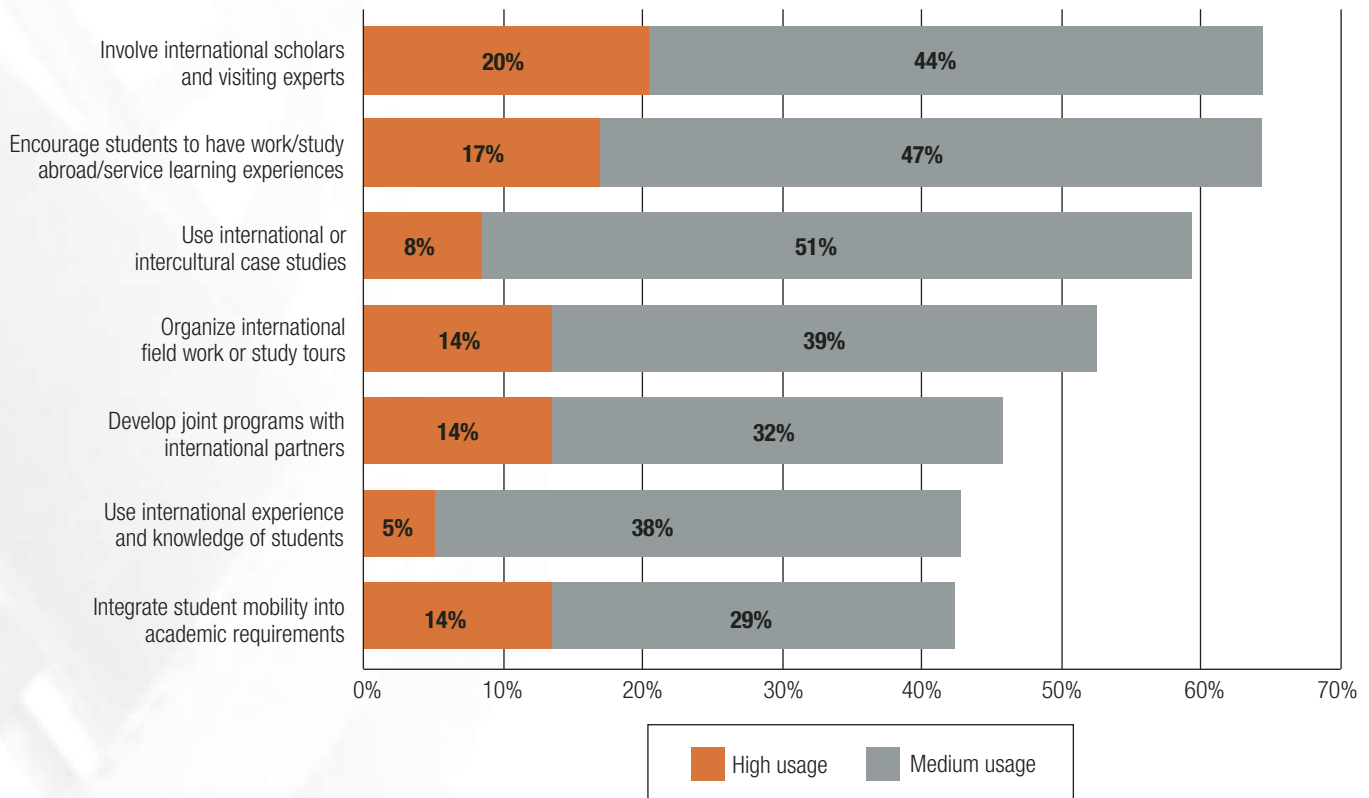
Offering academic programs with an international focus is a vital component of the internationalization of the curriculum. The growing commitment to internationalizing the curriculum is demonstrated by the increasing number of internationally oriented programs.

1 AUCC, *Progress and Promise – The 2000 AUCC Report on Internationalization at Canadian Universities*, 2000, p. 47

**Figure 1**  
Number of academic programs with an international focus



**Figure 2**  
**Strategies used to integrate an international dimension into the curriculum**



Using data from its Directory of Canadian Universities, an electronic database of all academic programs offered by member institutions, AUCC undertook a search all of all disciplines offering these types of programs (e.g., international relations, area studies, international development) as well as modern foreign language and literature programs. The analysis showed that 61 universities offered a total of 356 programs with an international focus in 2006 – at all levels of study. The four most prevalent fields of international study were international relations, European studies, international business and international development (see Figure 1). Additionally,

47 institutions offered a total of 355 programs devoted to the study of modern foreign languages and literature. Of these, the four most prevalent were Spanish, German, Italian and Russian.

Moreover, AUCC's 2006 survey shows growing enrolment in these programs. Two-thirds of respondents indicated that the level of enrolment in internationally oriented degree programs has increased over the previous five years. The programs experiencing the most growth are: international business-related programs, international affairs/relations-related programs, and international development studies.

Foreign language programs are also growing, with 50 percent of respondents indicating that the level of enrolment in these programs has increased over the previous five years – and only 4 percent indicating a decrease. By way of contrast, the number of institutions requiring graduates to have knowledge of a second language has declined, with only 9 percent of respondents indicating that knowledge of a second language is necessary for first-degree graduation at their institution (down from 16 percent in 2000) and 7 percent requiring it for second-degree graduation (down from 22 percent in 2000).

Finally, there is a marked contrast between the growth in internationally oriented programs and the small number of institutions (only 5 percent) that reportedly require undergraduates to take one or more courses with an international dimension, primarily featuring perspectives, issues or events from specific countries or areas outside Canada.

## Involving faculty

Progress has generally been made since 2000 to support faculty members and increase their level of engagement in internationalizing the curriculum. Nearly 60 percent of respondents indicated that their institutions use workshops to help faculty members internationalize the teaching/learning process and curriculum – or said that a plan to do this is under development. This was an area of concern in 2000, when 70 percent of institutions did not have such an approach in place. Likewise, the support given to faculty on how to use the experience and knowledge of either international students or returned Canadian exchange students in class has grown from 19 percent in 2000 to 32 percent in 2006. Some examples of the types of support listed by respondents include workshops for faculty provided by an educational development centre or an international office, the appointment of an international student advisor, the distribution of faculty handbooks and course-internationalization grants.

Overall, despite the range of demands on their time, faculty members are fairly interested and engaged in internationalizing the curriculum. When asked how active faculty members are in using a number of strategies designed to integrate an international or intercultural dimension into appropriate

courses, respondents reported a vast array of activities. Consistent with 2000 results, some of the most popular strategies used in 2006 (see Figure 2) were:

- involving international scholars and visiting experts;
- encouraging students to have work/study abroad/service learning experiences or projects with local cultural/ethnic community groups;
- using international or intercultural case studies, role plays, etc.;
- organizing and conducting international field work or study tours; and
- developing joint programs with international partners in specific disciplines.

## International activities on campus

Institutional support for internationalizing the curriculum shows up in indirect ways as well. For instance, 75 percent of responding institutions specifically earmark funds to support extracurricular international activities on campus, which supplement the more formal teaching/learning process. The most frequently identified internationally focused activities offered to students beyond the classroom are:

- regular and ongoing international events on campus (cited by 82 percent of respondents);
- buddy programs that pair Canadian and international students (72 percent);
- meeting places for students to discuss international issues and events (68 percent);
- International Education Week (61 percent);

- language partner programs that pair Canadian and international students (53 percent);
- student-sponsored seminars (51 percent); and
- International Development Week (47 percent).

## Developing a global perspective at home

Although there are many differences across individual institutions, results of the 2006 AUCC survey point to a general increase across Canadian institutions in the focus given to internationalization of the curriculum and in the activities supporting the process. More efforts have also been made to introduce an international dimension into the teaching/learning process.

Internationalization of the curriculum is clearly an institutional priority, and this has translated for the most part into increased leadership and action on the part of institutions – specifically supporting faculty members in internationalizing the curriculum, expanding academic programs with an international focus and providing extracurricular international activities. Institution-level efforts to increase faculty participation in the process of internationalizing the curriculum are more common, contributing to growing levels of activity among faculty members for bringing an international dimension into their courses. With a strong academic rationale driving internationalization, the large majority of Canadian students who do not have the opportunity to study abroad will nevertheless be able to gain a valuable global perspective through an internationalized education at home.