

# Knowledge exports by Canadian universities

*Knowledge exports – the provision of educational products and services overseas – involves a number of delivery modes, including distance education, twinning programs, offshore campuses, joint degrees, and franchised courses and programs. The Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada’s (AUCC) 2000 report on the state of internationalization at Canadian universities, Progress and Promise, which is based on findings from AUCC’s 1999 internationalization survey, identified knowledge exports as an emerging area of interest for Canadian universities. 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 knowledge exports.*

The 2006 survey update confirms that knowledge exports are an integral part of many Canadian universities’ efforts to internationalize their campuses. Findings presented in this fact sheet are primarily based on responses found in two of the seven questionnaires to which there were 56 and 60 responses, for a 68- and a 72-percent response rate, respectively. This provides a representative sample of Canadian universities. The questionnaires included both qualitative and quantitative questions.

## Strong interest and increasing involvement

The level of interest in developing and delivering education and training programs outside Canada remains relatively high at Canadian universities, as more than two-thirds of respondents show a high or medium level of interest in designing and delivering education courses and training programs for non-Canadian markets – a proportion similar to the one found in 2000. An even higher proportion of respondents (81 percent) expect that future levels of interest will be high or medium.

Notably, this interest is increasingly backed by first-hand experiences, as three-quarters



*Faculty members from Dalhousie University share their knowledge of geographic information systems with Vietnamese colleagues, who are now better equipped to manage their coastal and marine environments.*

of responding institutions indicated that they are engaged in delivering education and training programs outside Canada and more than two-thirds indicated that they are actively marketing education products and services in other countries. This is a significant increase from 2000, when only 42 percent engaged in marketing and knowledge export activities.

## Benefits to Canadian universities

Survey findings suggest that Canadian university involvement in knowledge exports is in many ways a platform supporting other facets of internationalization. For instance, respondents were asked to identify

their three most important reasons for delivering education and training programs outside Canada. As Figure 1 shows, the top reason identified was the “enhanced reputation of being an international institution,” followed by “opportunities for international student recruitment” and an “alternative source of income generation.” Developing “new national/international partnerships” and providing “international opportunities for faculty/staff” were also frequently cited.

As in 2000, interest in knowledge exports does not appear to be primarily driven by commercial motives, since “alternative source of income generation” has remained the third most frequently selected top rationale.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Progress and Promise* noted that the fact that an alternative source of income was ranked third strongly signalled that “commercial motives do not seem to be driving this increased interest and growth in offshore education delivery” (p. 65).

## Types of programs delivered offshore

While 54 of 56 respondents answered questions on the numbers of programs and students registered in offshore programs delivered by Canadian institutions, a quarter of them provided partial information only, indicating a difficulty in obtaining accurate estimates to reflect the scope of engagement in this area. A further quarter of respondents indicated that their institution is not involved in the delivery of education products and services overseas.

With these limitations in mind, survey findings show that about 10,800 students were enrolled in offshore programs offered in

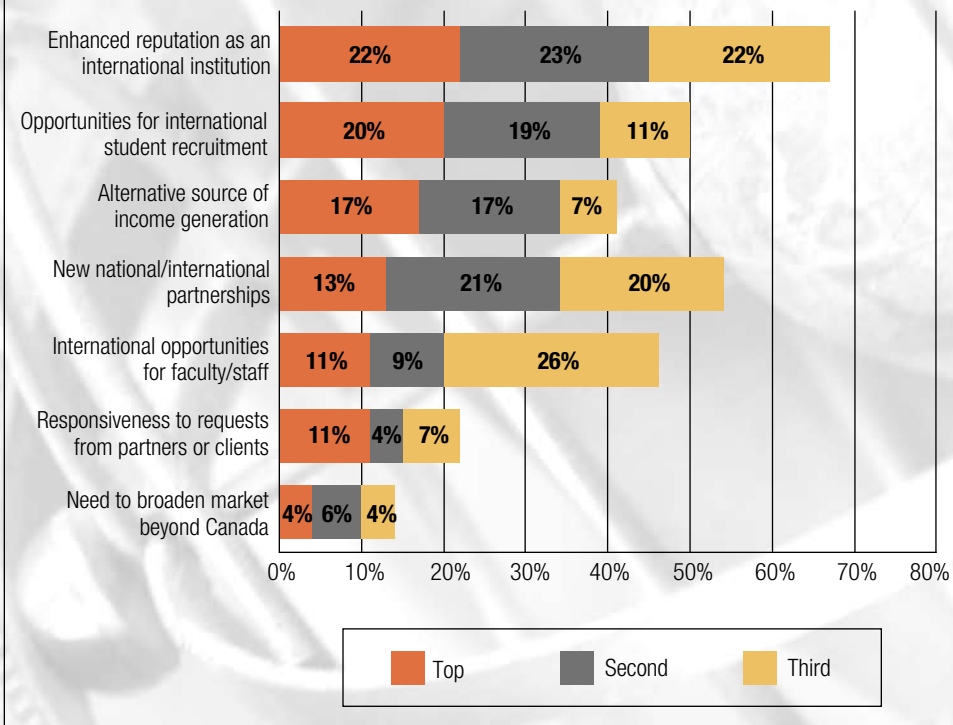
2005-06 by responding Canadian universities and that no fewer than 194 different programs were offered in more than 46 countries (see Table 1). These courses and programs were provided at the undergraduate, graduate and certificate or diploma levels across many disciplines. Programs delivered via distance education tended to be concentrated in business, education and health-related disciplines. Other forms of programming, such as joint degrees, twinning programs and programs delivered and developed outside Canada by Canadian and local instructors, were concentrated in science and engineering as well as in business and education.

Findings suggest that programs jointly delivered and developed by Canadian and

local instructors, twinning programs and distance education were the most popular modes of delivery of educational products and services overseas. As the number of respondents varies considerably between the 1999 and 2006 surveys for each type of academic program probed, it is difficult to identify a trend over time in the types of offshore programming offered by Canadian institutions. On the surface, however, there seems to have been an increase since 1999 in the numbers of joint degree programs (from 10 programs based on 43 responses in 1999 to 21 programs based on 38 responses in 2006) and twinning programs (from 12 programs based on 40 responses in 1999 to 37 programs based on 44 responses in 2006). On the other hand, the number of programs combining distance education programs and direct contact with students by Canadian instructors outside Canada has decreased (from 21 programs based on 43 responses in 1999 to only two programs based on 37 responses in 2006). Having offshore or branch campuses appears to make up only four of the total number of programs offered abroad.

More than 68 percent of institutions said they offer at least one educational program in China. In fact, this country was identified by respondents almost five times more often than the next most frequently cited country (Malaysia) as a host country for knowledge exports by Canadian universities. China is also ranked first, followed by India, in terms of current and future priorities for the export of Canadian university products and services. Moreover, China is the top source of international students for Canadian universities<sup>2</sup> and elicits the greatest interest from Canadian universities for international development cooperation projects. The priority given to China across facets of internationalization

**Figure 1**  
Top motives for delivering education and training programs abroad





**Table 1**  
**Academic programs offered abroad by Canadian universities**

	Programs			Students enrolled			
	Number of institutions reporting 1+ programs	Maximum number of programs per institution	Total number of programs	Number of institutions reporting 1+ students	Maximum number of students enrolled per institution	Total number of students enrolled	Median number of students enrolled
Distance education	18*	10	34	13	570	1,752	17
Combination of distance education and direct contact	2	1	2	1	25	25	–
Program delivered and developed abroad by Canadian instructor(s)	9	3	15	6	156	379	46
Program jointly delivered and developed by Canadian and local instructors	17	18	58	12	1,957	4,464	116
Twinning programs	18	10	37	13	400	828	37
Joint degree programs	13	5	21	7	195	440	18
Customized training programs	11	5	23	7	1,000	1,445	25
Offshore/branch campuses	4	1	4	3	900	1,465	550
<b>Total</b>			<b>194</b>			<b>10,798</b>	

\* Three of the 18 institutions provided information on courses (vs. programs) delivered via distance education. The courses are not counted in the total number of programs.

is another indication yet that involvement in one aspect, such as knowledge exports, is linked to involvement in other aspects, such as student recruitment.

## Remaining challenges

Since 2000 the potential for growth in the knowledge export sector has continued to expand. The demand for higher education worldwide is increasing,<sup>3</sup> particularly in emerging and developing countries, and continues to outstrip the ability of governments in these countries to meet that demand. As a result, these governments

have stepped up their efforts to build in-country capacity and provide opportunities for their own citizens to study within their borders, often through collaborating with foreign institutions to offer higher education and training.

At the same time, the knowledge export sector is becoming increasingly competitive as new actors and technologies emerge. Competitor countries such as Australia and the United Kingdom have the support of large government-funded agencies to market their higher education sector internationally and provide support

for their institutions' international activities, including the export of educational products and services. Canadian institutions, on the other hand, while interested and increasingly active in exporting educational products and services, face a number of key challenges that influence the extent to which they are positioned to engage in this area.

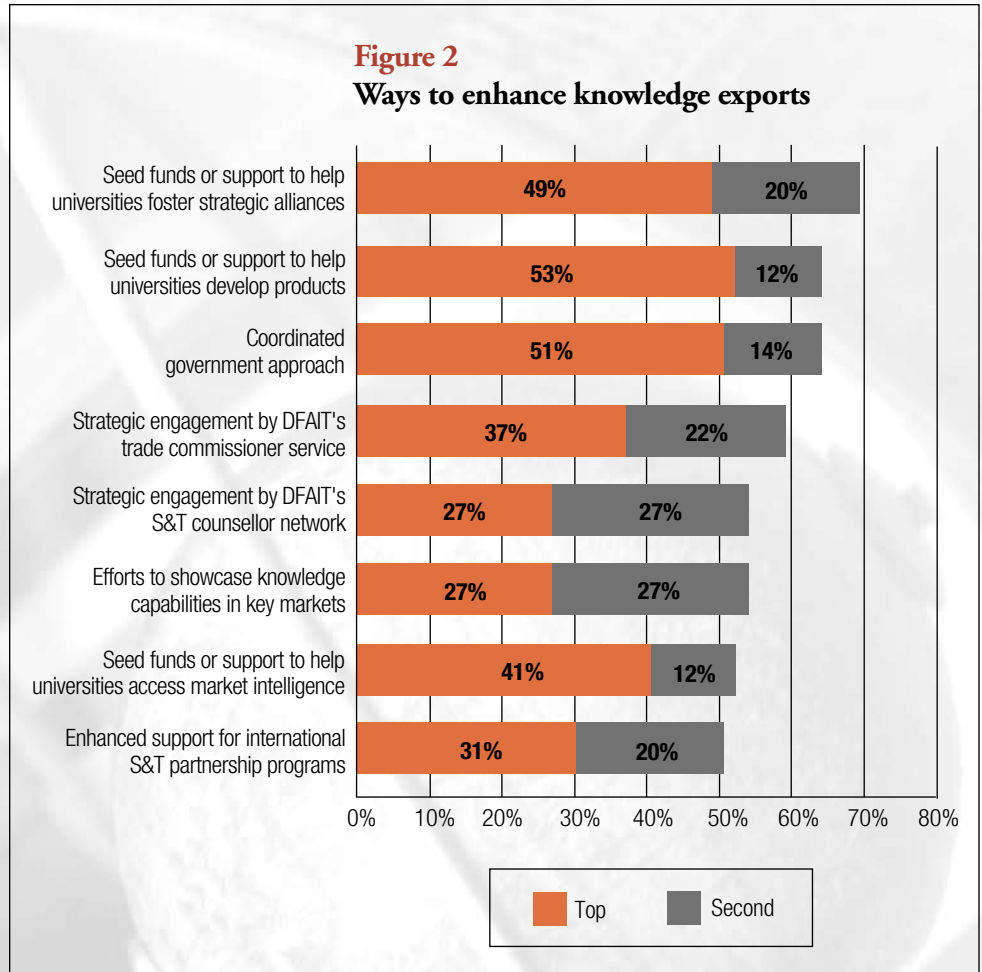
Chief among these challenges is the lack of financial support to offset the considerable upfront costs associated with entering the international market successfully. This was identified in the 2006 survey as the top

2 AUCC, *Trends in Higher Education – Volume 1: Enrolment*, 2007. In 2004, there were 15,000 full-time visa students from China studying at Canadian universities, which represented about 23 percent of full-time visa students.

3 According to a 2002 study by IDP Education (*Australia Global Student Mobility 2025 – Forecasts of the Global Demand for International Higher Education*, by Böhm, Davis, Meares and Pearce), the number of international students looking to study outside their home countries is expected to increase from 1.8 million students in 2000 to 7.2 million students in 2025.

barrier to developing and delivering education products and services overseas. When asked which key support services and measures they needed from the Canadian government and other stakeholders to enhance institutional efforts to export educational products and services overseas, most institutions gave a high level of importance to a number of measures including the need for “seed funds to help universities to foster strategic alliances” and “seed funds to support universities to develop products” (see Figure 2). In addition, respondents underscored the importance of a coordinated government approach and strategic engagement by the Department of Foreign Affairs’ networks of trade commissioners and science and technology counsellors.

The second and third most important barriers to Canadian universities’ involvement in knowledge exports are “lack of faculty and professional staff for programs” and “lack of internal institutional support.” This appears to be a disjuncture between the growing interest and recognition of the role that knowledge exports can play in supporting internationalization at Canadian universities and the apparent limited operational capacity to support growth in this area. There are signs, however, that institutional structures are moving, albeit slowly, to accommodate sustained involvement in knowledge exports. For example, unlike in 2000, all responding institutions say they now have mechanisms in place to ensure the quality of the programs they deliver outside Canada – just as they do with in-Canada programs. In addition, while departmental-level units are often responsible for the delivery and marketing of knowledge exports, more than three-quarters of institutions indicate shared responsibility



between departments and central units, particularly the international office, for the delivery of knowledge exports.

## Moving forward

In 2000, exporting educational products and services overseas was a relatively new interest for Canadian universities. The 2006 survey findings not only confirm this interest, they also show a growing engagement in knowledge exports. Respondents also see how involvement in knowledge exports can support other facets of internationalization

such as international student recruitment and the development of institutional partnerships with key institutions abroad. While there are benefits to university engagement in this area, there are also costs. The federal government’s recent announcement that it would allocate \$2 million over two years for marketing postsecondary education abroad is therefore a welcome first step to many in the Canadian university community, and targeted measures to further support knowledge exports would help maximize universities’ capacity to engage in an expanding global market for international education.