

Canadian universities and international student mobility

International student mobility is one of the cornerstones of the growing internationalization of Canadian universities. It encompasses both international students attending Canadian institutions and Canadian students going abroad for academic credit while registered at a Canadian institution. Both streams have a great impact on our universities and, ultimately, on society as a whole. Likewise, both present complex challenges to university officials and policy-makers who share the goal of raising the levels of international student mobility.

Assessing the ways to address this priority requires, first and foremost, a clear understanding of the current situation in Canada. The Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada's (AUCC) 2006 internationalization survey (see p. 8) sought to do just that – shed some light on the current state of Canadian student mobility and international students in Canada.

Findings from AUCC's 2006 survey suggest that within the university community, there is a growing interest in, and engagement with, international student mobility. Its value is also increasingly recognized. Survey responses also show that although there are differences at the level of individual institutions, on average there has been steady progress on the overall rates of student mobility, including modest growth in the number of Canadian students undertaking short-term study abroad for credit, as well as significant growth in international student recruitment to Canadian universities.

According to survey results, however, there are still barriers to greater growth. Universities identify financial considerations as the chief reason for the lack of uptake on the part of students for study



École Polytechnique de Montréal

Exchange agreements between the École Polytechnique de Montréal and foreign universities allow engineering students to spend one year of their degree studying abroad in universities like the École Supérieure des Techniques Aéronautiques et de Construction Automobile, in France.

abroad programs and for the institutions' own limitations on recruitment activities to increase the Canadian share of the global market of international students.

The data collected in this survey are based on the institutions' assessment of 2005-06 academic year figures and are counted for the purposes of this analysis

as 2006 numbers. Much of the data and analysis related to these two important issues have not been looked at since 2000, when AUCC published *Progress and Promise*, a report on internationalization at Canadian universities. When relevant, the 2006 results are compared in this publication with the results published in *Progress and Promise*.

Canadian students going abroad

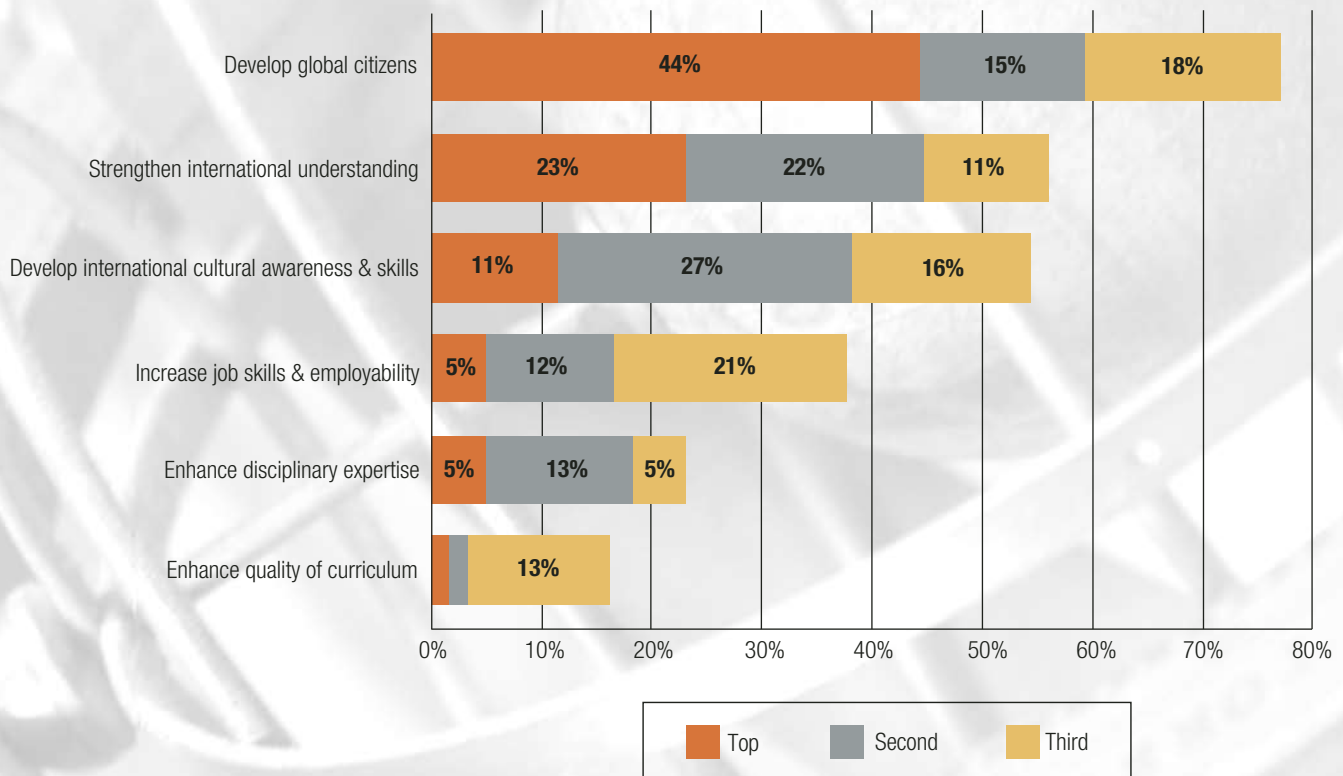
Canadian universities continue to be highly interested in providing study abroad opportunities to their students, with some indication that they are placing even more emphasis on it than they did in 2000. When asked to indicate their institutions' level of interest (high, medium, low or none) for promoting and providing out-of-country learning and research experiences, 65 percent of respondents indicated a high interest – an increase of 18 percent since 2000.

Overall, 93 percent of all responding institutions indicated that there was either a high or a medium interest in providing out-of-country experiences for Canadian students – a slight rise in the rate of 90 percent reported in 2000.

Increasingly, universities have embraced the benefits of study abroad as both a personally enriching experience for students and a practical one that improves their eventual employability (see Figure 1).

When asked to indicate their main reasons for promoting study abroad, three-quarters of respondents placed “to develop responsible and engaged global citizens” among their top three reasons. The next most frequently reported reasons, selected by more than half of respondents, were “to strengthen students’ international understanding, knowledge and perspectives on global issues” and “to develop students’ international cultural awareness and skills.”

Figure 1
Top reasons for promoting study abroad



Student demand for study abroad opportunities is also on the rise. When asked to indicate whether this demand had changed since 2003-04, an overwhelming 77 percent of responding institutions indicated that the student demand/interest had increased over the previous two years.

Support for student mobility

Along with this increased interest on the part of universities and students, there seems to be a growing trend of enhanced activities designed to facilitate study abroad. When asked to indicate which services they provide to promote opportunities for study abroad, 87 percent of respondents reported providing workshops for students to learn what is involved, how to apply and what to expect (versus 74 percent in 2000). In addition, 83 percent indicated that they provide logistical and moral support for students, both prior to departure and during the stay abroad (versus 74 percent in 2000), and 76 percent indicated using returned students as peer support for outgoing students (versus 72 percent in 2000).

Financial considerations remain at the centre of both the demand and the supply for study abroad opportunities (details in section on barriers below). Despite this, universities appear to be backing their institutional commitment toward study abroad with financial support.

Indeed, the number of institutions reporting financial support mechanisms to encourage students to go abroad has increased since 2000. According to survey results, 81 percent of institutions currently provide some type of financial support for Canadian students wishing to have a study/

work/research experience for credit abroad, which represents an 18-percent increase since 2000.

In addition, follow-up services continue to be a key part of universities' approach to Canadian student mobility, with a particular emphasis on evaluating the learning outcomes of students returning from study abroad experiences.

Number of students going abroad

The above survey results indicate that the approach of universities to Canadian student mobility has evolved. There are higher levels of interest, program activity

and support services, all of which appear to have translated into some positive results in study abroad numbers.

For the purposes of this survey and analysis, study abroad is defined as "out-of-country academic experience undertaken by an institution's full-time students for credit." The types of student academic experiences included in the measurement of the study abroad participation rate were:

- undergraduate exchange student (academic course work);
- graduate exchange student (academic course work);
- student on internship or co-op placement for academic credit;



While studying abroad, two women from Simon Fraser University (right) strengthen their international understanding as they join in the celebration of Ghana's 50 years of independence.

Manye Krobo Queenmothers Association

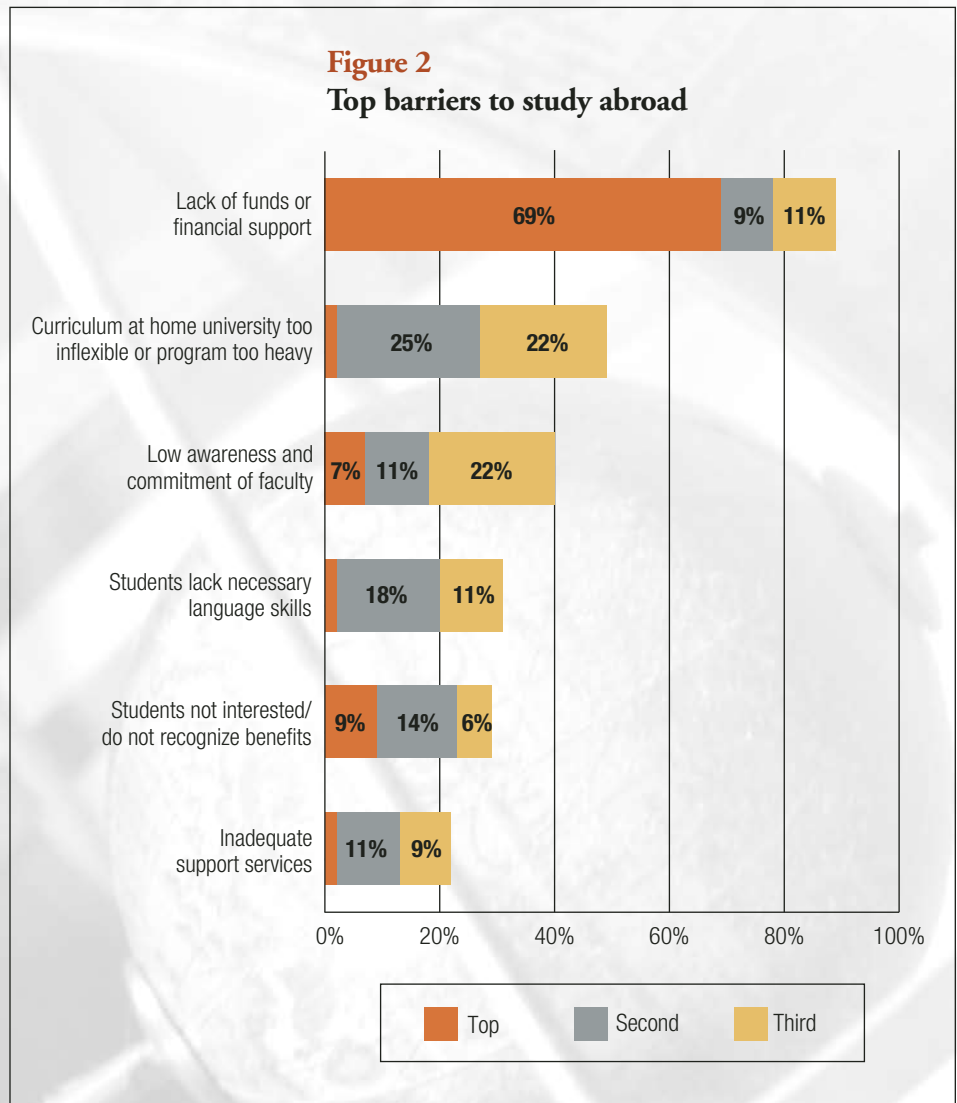
- international field or summer schools;
- field work or service learning placements;
- student involved in international development project;
- semester abroad program for credit (excluding exchange students);
- other opportunities, e.g., undergraduate or graduate student undertaking research assignment.

Based on the 2006 survey results, an estimated 17,850 full-time students enrolled in Canadian universities have participated in a form of study abroad for credit in 2006.¹ This number represents 2.2 percent of the total full-time university student enrolment in Canada of 813,515. It is an increase from the approximately 1 percent of students that were reported to be participating in study abroad in *Progress and Promise* (2000).

Additionally, the 2006 estimate of 17,850 represents a tripling of the absolute numbers of Canadian students reported in 2000 as having participated in study abroad. The greatest numbers of these study abroad students (more than 40 percent) were undergraduates involved in exchange programs with academic course work – most at the third-year level.

Barriers

Finally, and most enlightening in regard to the relatively low levels of Canadian student mobility, results demonstrate that financial considerations are by far the top barrier preventing more students from participating in study abroad. As shown in Figure 2, lack



of funds or financial support was identified as the most significant barrier by more than two-thirds of respondents.

Among the barriers identified as second most important, two stand out: “the curriculum at the home institution is too inflexible or the program is too heavy” and

“students lack the necessary language skills.” These barriers were respectively reported by one-quarter and one-fifth of respondents.

Together with the other barriers shown in Figure 2, these deterrents lead to a limited uptake by Canadian students on study abroad opportunities.

¹ This number is based on a projection from the survey results for 56 responding institutions. In these institutions, the 2006 number of students going abroad is 12,781, which represents 2.2 percent of their full-time student enrolment (581,370). Based on this highly representative sample, we estimate that there were 17,850 students participating in study abroad in 2006.

International students coming to Canada

Enrolment in Canadian universities

AUCC's 2007 publication, *Trends in higher education – Volume 1: Enrolment*, shows that after declining from more than 30,000 full-time foreign students in 1990 to 25,500 in 1996, the number of visa students on Canadian campuses has grown rapidly to approximately 70,000 full-time and 13,000 part-time visa students in 2006.²

In 2006, there were 48,000 full-time visa students enrolled in undergraduate programs. This represents a three-fold increase from the 14,600 who were enrolled a decade earlier. Over the same period, the number of full-time visa students in graduate programs doubled from 11,000 to 22,000; one-third of these graduate students were enrolled in PhD programs.

Visa students therefore represent approximately 7 percent of full-time undergraduate students and almost 20 percent of students at the graduate level in Canada. This compares quite favourably to the generally lower proportion of visa students in United States universities, where they constitute about 2 percent of undergraduate and 22 percent of graduate enrolment at four-year public universities, and 4 percent of undergraduate and 17 percent of graduate enrolment at four-year private institutions.

Statistics Canada data for 2004 provide an overview of the most popular fields of study for international students in Canadian universities. Business, management and public administration were the most

popular fields, attracting 21 percent of international students. This was followed by social and behavioral sciences, and law, claiming 15 percent, then by architecture, engineering and related fields, at 14 percent. Notably, from 1996 to 2004 the strongest growth of international students in PhD programs occurred in the fields of mathematics, computer and information sciences, where enrolment doubled.

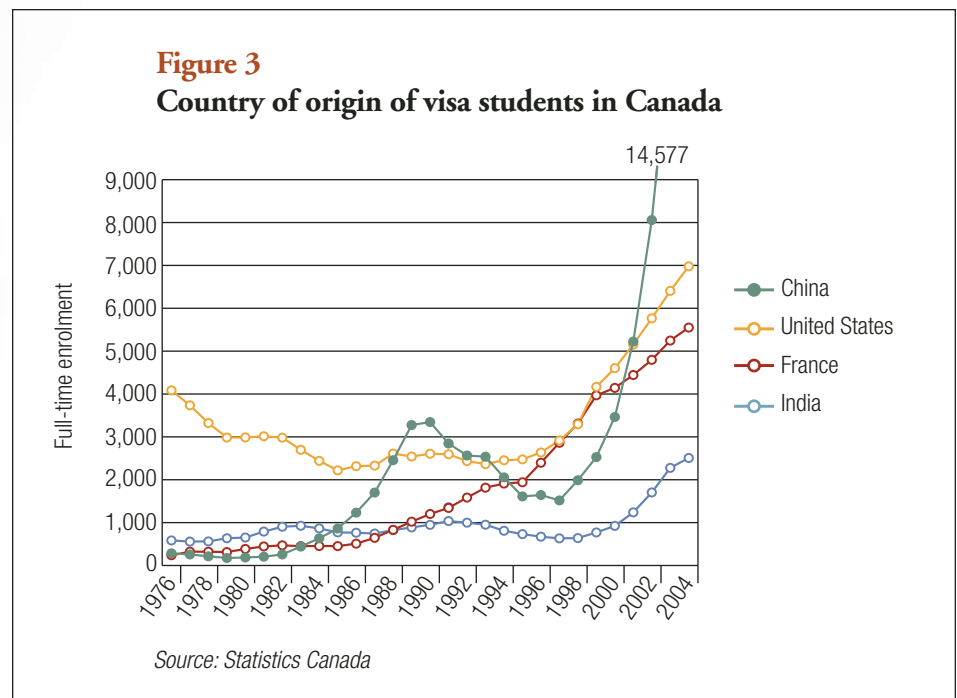
Also according to Statistics Canada, Canadian universities attract full-time students from more than 200 countries. China has been and continues to be the leading country of origin since 2001. In 2004 China accounted for 23 percent of full-time visa students in Canadian universities, totalling

close to 15,000 students. Other main source countries included the United States with close to 7,000 students, France with more than 5,000 students, India with 2,500 students, and South Korea, Iran, Japan, Hong Kong, Mexico and Pakistan all having about 1,000 full-time visa students in Canada. Taken together, these top 10 countries account for 60 percent of all international students in Canada (see Figure 3).

Recruitment of international students

Results from AUCC's 2006 internationalization survey indicate that universities recognize the many benefits of a strong presence of international students and see

Figure 3
Country of origin of visa students in Canada



2. AUCC, *Trends in Higher Education – Volume 1: Enrolment*, 2007, p. 17

it as a key component of a truly internationalized campus. Particularly, institutions increasingly appreciate the intrinsic value of globalizing their campuses and place it above any considerations of immediate revenue generation. When asked to indicate their most important reasons for recruiting and enrolling international students, almost all respondents (92 percent) said their institution did this to promote an internationalized campus and greater diversity on campus (see Figure 4).

While cited as the next most important reason overall, generating revenue was rated much lower, by 62 percent of respondents. Moreover, only 10 percent of all respondents rated it as their first reason for recruiting international students.

The next two most frequently identified reasons overall were to increase enrolment in specific programs and to enhance institutional profile and increase contacts, which were reported by close to half of respondents.

Institutions were asked if they had an overall target in place for the percentage of international students relative to their overall student enrolment. Three in five institutions indicated that they did have a set target, and two in five indicated that there was no target in place. Institutions with a set target were asked if they had attained their recruitment goal; the vast majority (69 percent) had not.

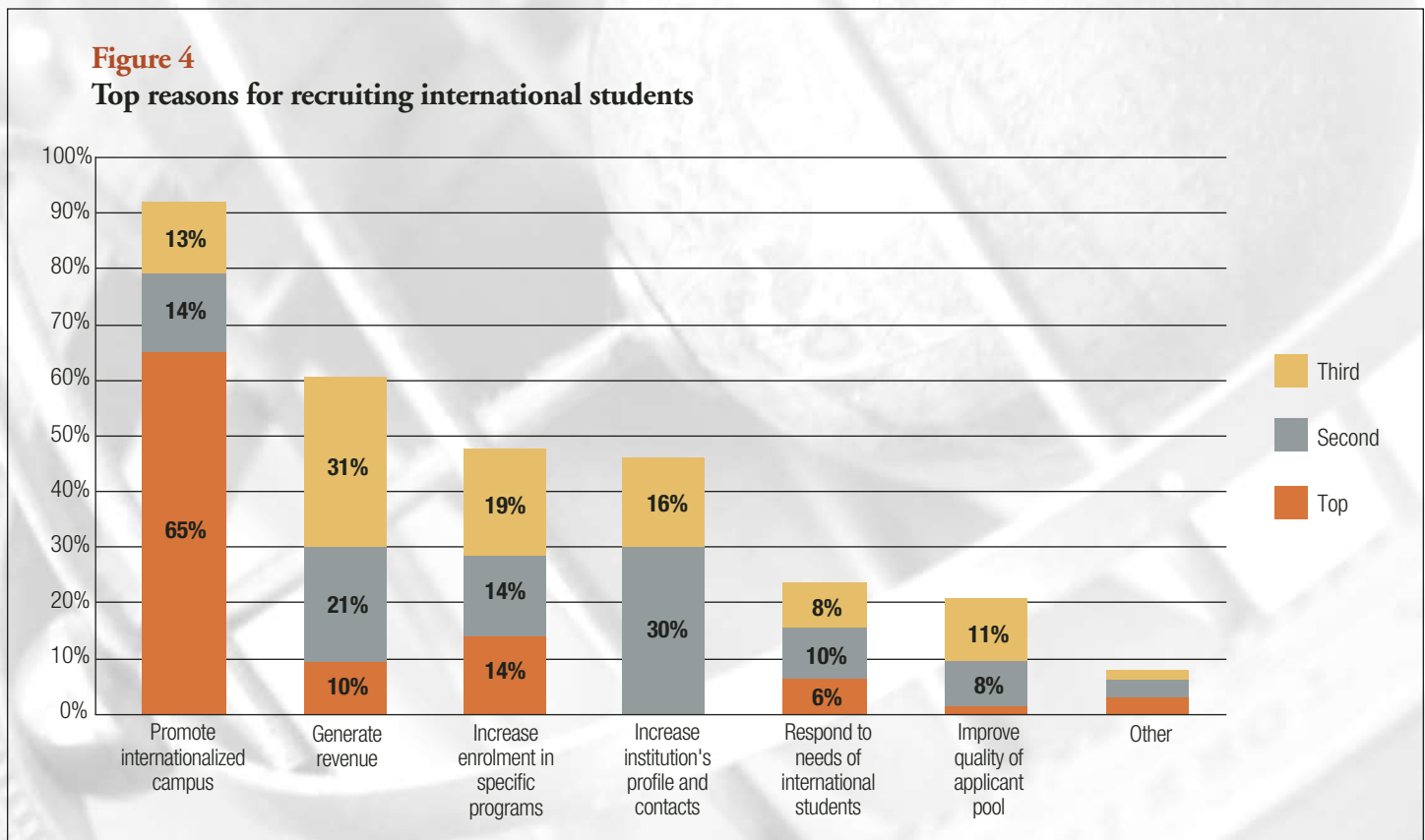
On the question of specifically earmarked funds to support recruitment of full-time international students, more than two-

thirds of respondents indicated specifically funding full-time international recruitment officers to support their recruitment efforts. Most respondents (about 90 percent) reported earmarking funds to support travel for recruitment officers and allocating specific resources for publications and fairs.

Support services and scholarships

The support services available to international students comprise an important part of their overall study experience and can help attract and keep international students to Canadian universities. This is especially true as competition increases among a greater number of countries for a share of the international student market.

Figure 4
Top reasons for recruiting international students



When asked whether their institution offered specific programs to ensure a successful experience for international students during their academic stay in Canada, 47 percent of respondents said yes, 17 percent said these services were being developed, and 37 percent said no.

While the types of services varied across individual universities, the most frequently mentioned services included:

- ongoing counseling and non-academic support;
- orientation program upon arrival;
- designated international student support staff;
- academic advising or support;
- international student clubs; and
- designated international support office.

Offering scholarships is becoming essential to attracting the brightest international students in a competitive global market. As a result, universities have significantly stepped up their efforts in providing their own targeted scholarships to international students.

Overall, 69 percent of responding institutions indicated that they offer scholarships especially targeted to international undergraduate students, an increase of 33 percent from 2000. For international graduate students, 62 percent of respondents indicated that they offer targeted scholarships, an increase of 24 percent. Additionally, 58 percent of respondents indicated that first-year undergraduate scholarships available to domestic students were also accessible to international students. Only 22 percent of responding institutions indicated that they have scholarships targeted to specific countries or disciplines.

Capitalizing on university and student interest

A central observation from the 2006 survey results is Canadian universities' rising interest in student mobility – both in bringing more international students to Canada and in sending more Canadian students abroad to study. Along with this, the responses of universities demonstrate that their overriding objective for promoting student mobility in both directions is tied to the desirable outcomes of a global perspective for students and creating a truly international campus. In this regard, the 2000 *Progress and Promise* report had speculated that “revenue generation” could become a more important rationale in the future, particularly for international student recruitment. The 2006 survey clearly demonstrates, however, that academic rationales remain the most important considerations for international student mobility.

Consequently, as indicated by the 2006 survey results, universities are intensifying activities to promote and facilitate inter-

national student mobility such as providing financial support for study abroad, offering more scholarships to international students, and enhancing their recruitment efforts in general. This investment is contributing to slight increases in the number of Canadian students participating in study abroad and to significant growth in the number of international students on Canadian campuses. Nevertheless, there are still major challenges ahead on both fronts.

Challenges ahead

The increase of the study abroad rate for Canadian students from approximately 1 percent in 2000 to 2.2 percent in 2006 is a very modest gain and continues to represent an inadequate proportion of students. While exact international comparisons are difficult given the vast differences in data collection methods throughout the world, it is clear, for example, that many



Valisoa Razafindrakoto (right), from Madagascar, studies economics at the Université de Sherbrooke. She is one of 70,000 full-time foreign students who bring greater diversity to Canadian campuses.

European countries are far ahead in study abroad rates. The successful ERASMUS program, for instance, has sent more than 1.2 million students to study in another country within the European Union since 1987.³ Canada's percentage of students opting for an academic experience abroad, while on par with that of the United States – where the recent report of the Lincoln Study Abroad Commission states that “the proportion of all students who study abroad annually is minuscule, amounting to less than 2 percent of the American university and college enrollment”⁴ – is very low overall and falls short of many other comparable OECD countries.

The picture with respect to international students in Canada, while varied among individual institutions, is quite positive on a national level. However, Canada will face intensifying competition for international students – and for the best and brightest international students in particular – even as the number of these international students is expected to grow rapidly over the coming decade. Not only will traditional host countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia continue to be strong competitors, but other countries with historically small numbers of international students such as New Zealand, Korea and the Czech Republic are poised to become more competitive as they increase their activities to carve out a greater share of the international student market.

Survey results have shown that student mobility and international student recruitment are cornerstones in the internationalization strategies of all universities. At the same

The AUCC 2006 internationalization survey update

Since the early 1990s, AUCC has sought to track the depth and breadth of its member institutions' international activities with a view to understanding how this has contributed to the integration of an international and intercultural dimension to teaching/learning, research and community service on campuses across the country. An initial survey in 1991 was followed by a more extensive and systematic survey in 1993, which resulted in the publication of the national report *Internationalization of Canadian Universities: The Changing Landscape* (Knight, 1995). In 2000 AUCC published the findings of a 1999 follow-up survey in its comprehensive report *Progress and Promise – The 2000 AUCC Report on Internationalization at Canadian Universities*.

Six years later, in September 2006, AUCC launched a seven-part survey of its member institutions (89 at that time) to gather comprehensive, up-to-date information about the nature and scope of internationalization at Canadian universities. Seven member institutions, as affiliates, were included in the responses of their parent institution. A total of 64 member institutions submitted at least one of the seven questionnaires, for an overall response rate of 78 percent. The cross-section of respondents reflected the diversity of size, mission and region of Canada's universities.

For this fact sheet, 63 responses to Questionnaire 2 – Canadian Students Studying out of Country and Questionnaire 4 – International Students at Canadian Universities were examined. The 63 participating institutions represent a 77-percent response rate. The questionnaires included both qualitative and quantitative questions.

All publications based on the 2006 internationalization survey update appear on AUCC's web site at www.aucc.ca/internationalization.

time, the lack of financial support for Canadian students to go abroad emerges again as the key barrier to increasing student mobility rates. Additional AUCC survey results have shown that Canadian universities' overall internationalization activities, including international student recruitment, are hindered by financial constraints and an overall lack of a federal strategy to enhance internationalization efforts.

Were these two concerns more closely examined and new initiatives designed to address them, great strides could be made toward enhancing student mobility. Significant growth could be achieved in these two areas of concern by capitalizing on the growing interest and investment on the part of Canadian universities and the heightened interest and engagement on the part of their students.

3 See the European Commission's web site: http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/llp/erasmus/erasmus_en.html

4 *Global Competence and National Needs: The Final Report of the Commission on the Abraham Lincoln Study Abroad Program*, 2005, p. 13