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## *Internationalising Canadian Universities*

### *Student Mobility to Developing Countries*

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#### Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada

#### *Context*

The concept of internationalising Canadian universities is currently an issue of considerable interest. The Smith Commission, an independent commission established by the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, recommended that internationalisation be integrated into the mission statement of every university (Smith *et al*, 1991). This would require both adapting the curriculum in Canada and encouraging Canadians to pursue studies abroad.

The AUCC is fully aware both of European schemes to promote greater student mobility and of recent Commonwealth calls for more two-way mobility between post-industrial and developing countries (Commonwealth Secretariat, 1989 and 1991).

At the end of October 1991, the International Division of AUCC committed themselves to undertake a preliminary study on the flow of Canadian students to Commonwealth developing countries, for the Commonwealth Secretariat. To date, very little research had been done in this area, and little was known about the out-flow of Canadian students to educational institutions abroad.

This pilot study was based upon questionnaires and interviews. It has attempted to reflect some perceptions of administrative staff at Canadian universities and awards organisations, as well as a number of Canadian students who could be contacted. It provides an overview of the situation and highlights some general trends.

Findings must be qualified by its limited data base. In 1987, only 439 Canadians were studying at the post-secondary level in developing

countries in Africa, Asia and Oceania. The enquiry remains of interest, however, because of the qualitative content of responses. Canadian universities do indicate an interest in strengthening their links with universities in the developing countries of the Commonwealth, while Canadian students voice the desire to learn more about the socio-cultural and economic environments of these countries.

### ***AUCC and the internationalisation of Canadian universities***

Two specific issues which the Smith Commission Report highlights are the importance of stays abroad as part of co-operative educational programmes, and the internationalisation of research. The promotion of regional studies, history, culture and language are equally necessary.

According to William Saywell, President and Vice-Chancellor of Simon Fraser University in British Columbia, internationalisation implies not only the presence of foreign students on campus, but also exchange arrangements and programmes in foreign countries for students and faculty – and the administrative structures to support such programmes (Saywell 1991).

The Commission recommended that federal government agencies be asked to fund the increasing number of opportunities for studies abroad and educational exchanges. In Canada, both provincial and federal governments play a role in funding universities. (Although autonomous, almost all Canadian universities receive the vast majority of their funds from public sources.) While there is no Department of Education at the federal level, each province has a Ministry of Education responsible for the organisation and administration of public education.

In 1991, the AUCC carried out a survey of its 89 member universities on the topic of 'Globalisation: Challenges and Opportunities for Canadian Universities'. Some of the findings were as follows:

- 44 of 71 universities declared that their international role was mentioned in their mission statement (64 per cent include in this role the international experience to be provided to Canadian and foreign students)
- 25 of 71 universities require knowledge of a second language
- 48 of 71 universities offer students an opportunity to live for some time or even up to a year in another country

- 31 of 68 universities allow students to integrate their international experience into their programme of studies
- 51 of 66 universities stated that they were actively engaged in human resources development in developing countries through a teaching programme

### *A general statistical picture*

Canada ranks fifth among host countries in the world in the number of international students received, and students from abroad make up close to 20 per cent of its student population. In 1987–88, this country's international students came mainly from Hong Kong, the United States, the Philippines, China, Malaysia, the United Kingdom and Singapore.

Since there is no requirement of a legal clearance to leave Canada, there is no direct source of information on the number of Canadian students going abroad. The Unesco *Statistical Yearbook* is limited (as Callan and Steele have explained in Chapter 8). The only way to remedy this lack of information would be to carry out surveys in host countries, and even this route might not produce complete information.

According to Céline Fortier (1990), the Canadian student body at the post-secondary level in Canada increased from 606,907 in 1980 to 770,100 in 1987. In 1987, 53.5 per cent of these students were at the undergraduate level and only 6.2 per cent at the graduate level. The number of Canadians studying abroad increased from 17,929 in 1980 to 19,975 in 1987. Of the latter figure, seven Canadians studied in Africa, 277 in Asia, 155 in Oceania, 3,845 in Europe and 15,691 in the United States. The breakdown by level of study was 55.9 per cent at the undergraduate level and 39 per cent at the graduate level. As shall be seen later, this last figure does not correspond to the level of study of participants in this survey, no doubt because funds available for study in Commonwealth developing countries focus on graduate studies.

### *Conduct of the survey*

The methodology used in this research was similar to that used by Callan and Steele. Due to the paucity of background information and the limited time available it was decided to use questionnaires and interviews as a means of collecting data. These have the advantage of collecting responses on focused items of interest, and allowing for comparative studies with other countries, the International Division of AUCC maintained close liaison with the UK Council for Overseas

Student Affairs in the preparation of these questionnaires. By soliciting responses from both students and universities, it was hoped that both individual and institutional perspectives might be better reflected.

Two questionnaires were prepared, targeting Canadian institutions and Canadian students who had studied in 51 Commonwealth developing countries. Questions fell into two categories: closed questions which required a 'yes', 'no', or optional answer; and open questions which solicited feedback and recommendations. (Information acquired through the latter category of questions has been reflected in the survey results in the following pages.)

*The institutional questionnaire* was prepared in English and French, to respond to the needs of all Canadian universities who are members of the AUCC. It sought both quantitative and subjective information related to:

- types of exchange programmes in which the university is engaged
- sources of financial support
- Canadian scholarship administrative structures
- numbers of Canadian students abroad in each of the Commonwealth developing countries, since 1980
- assessment of the availability in Canada of information on Commonwealth developing country universities
- opinions on the obstacles of Canadian student mobility to Commonwealth developing countries
- the impetus for an exchange programme with a university in a Commonwealth developing country

The institutional questionnaire was sent to the 58 International Liaison Officers (ILOs) who are charged by their university to coordinate international issues in their institution, and to three organisations that administer awards for overseas study: the Canadian Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan Committee of the AUCC; the International Development Research Centre (IDRC); and the Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE). Of the universities, 22 responded (34 per cent); no francophone university was among the respondents. All three organisations solicited provided replies.

*The student questionnaire*, prepared in English only, sought information on:

- personal motive for choosing to study or undertake research in a Commonwealth developing country

- academic level obtained prior to going abroad
- field of study abroad
- financial support
- type and duration of stay abroad
- assessment of access to information on host country and university administrative and academic structures
- assessment of Canadian mechanisms which promote student mobility to Commonwealth developing countries
- suggestions for areas of improvement within the host country (both academic and non-academic)

The questionnaire was sent to the 20 Canadian scholars who had studied in Commonwealth developing countries between 1980-90, and could be traced through the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan. It was also sent to 40 Canadian embassies in the countries involved, with the request that they forward it to any Canadian student whom they could contact. At the AUCC's request, CBIE and IDRC sent the questionnaire to their 49 awardees, and IDRC posted a notice in its international newsletter. International Liaison Officers were asked to forward the questionnaire to relevant students in their institutions. Of the 69 students contacted, 21 (30 per cent) responded, including three participants who had studied in the 1970s and 18 in the 1980s. Ten host countries were involved: Ghana, Hong Kong, India, Jamaica, Kenya, Lesotho, Malaysia, Papua New Guinea, Sri Lanka and Zimbabwe.

With limited time available, *interviews* took place with programme administrators of the AUCC, IDRC, CBIE, and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), as well as with one Canadian student who has been to Ghana in the 1970s. Feedback from these interviews is reflected in the analysis on the following pages, which represent the distillation of a substantial piece of research.

### ***Canadian universities: Programmes and viewpoints***

*Exchange Programmes* The majority of responding universities do not have an *exchange programme* whereby Canadian students can study or conduct research in a developing country of the Commonwealth. This may reflect a perceived lack of interest on the part of the students who seem to prefer to study in the United States, Europe, or Latin America, or who opt for studies in science/technology and feel that the

developing countries cannot offer strong programmes in these areas. A lack of interest on the part of the potential host institutions/countries was also cited. Insufficient financial resources is considered a major obstacle to the establishment of an exchange programme.

Only four of the 58 universities approached offer a Canada-Commonwealth developing country exchange programme. All four programmes are founded on contacts established by individual professors or the university's historical emphasis on such a link. Respondents underlined the availability of external funding as a major contributor to the success of their programmes. In all cases, the Canadian institution recognises the exchange as forming part of the student's degree programme, and for two universities, the exchange is a requirement. Among the four universities which have an exchange programme in place, all fields of study are covered, although agriculture, the arts and administration are highlighted, while languages and medicine are in some cases restricted. Exchange programmes apply to all levels of study except Diploma/ Certificate, although the emphasis is on graduate studies, possibly due to the availability of funding at that level.

Among the remaining respondents, one university is in the process of developing programmes which include exchanges with developing countries, and another has indicated an interest to set up a programme with Commonwealth developing countries in the future.

*Financial support* Although potential sources of external funding exist, few universities offer financial support for study in Commonwealth developing countries. Only two of the four universities which offer an exchange programme provide financial support. Of these two, only one institution considers this financial support adequate. While this is a very small sample, it is indicative of the low level of internally available resources that such programmes have to offer.

Many university respondents, however, suggested external sources of support, including: the Association of Commonwealth Universities, CIDA, CSFP, the Commonwealth Foundation, External Affairs and International Trade Canada, IDRC, and some university scholarships and programmes. Thus, there was an awareness of possible funding for students who are prepared to apply to external sources. Programme staff can also facilitate the process by having application forms available in their offices, and by keeping abreast of each funder's selection criteria, as well as new sources of money.

*Administrative structures for award schemes* The administrative structure of the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan is satisfactory, according to respondents. The application guidelines, the selection

process and the follow-up procedures all live up to the expectations of Canadian universities.

Respondents were also satisfied with the operation of other scholarship/fellowship programmes in which their universities participated. These included: IDRC Young Canadian Researcher Awards, CIDA Awards for Canadians (administered by CBIE), CIDA programmes for Botswana, Lesotho, Swaziland and Malawi Scholarship Fund, CIDA's Africa 2000 Programme, Jamaica Training Plan, Canada-Caricom Scholarship Programme, Kenya General Training Fund, Pan-American Health Organisation, Health Manpower Training Programme, and the British Columbia Scholars and Students Programmes (currently being established).

It is, however, important to note that, with exception of the first two awards listed above, all of these programmes bring students to Canada.

*Commonwealth developing country universities* Most universities do not have the resources to track the number of their students who have studied in developing countries of the Commonwealth since 1980. Only two universities were able to provide figures of, respectively, 22 students and 37 students for the period in question.

The mechanisms used by Commonwealth developing countries to inform Canadian students and attract them to their universities could be greatly improved. Ten respondents rated the effectiveness of Commonwealth developing country information on their educational institutions as not satisfactory; only one rated it as adequate.

Respondents did demonstrate an awareness of foreign university programmes by suggesting a range of other sources of information: *Commonwealth Universities Yearbook*, *Awards to Commonwealth Universities*, non-governmental organisations such as CUSO and WUSC, development centres, embassies, professors and other academic staff, and university resource centres.

*Recommendations* Comments on the opportunities and obstacles faced by a Canadian student considering study in a Commonwealth developing country were heavily weighted on the negative end of the scale, and recommendations put forth were major and involved considerable cost. The 16 respondents to this question underlined the lack of financial support available, the shortage of information on the programmes (and in particular, the equivalences for diplomas obtained), and the absence of dialogue and communication. In addition to a general lack of awareness of the developing countries in question, specific concerns (such as the absence of any welcoming structure or medical insurance) were put forth.

The recommendations provided by respondents to find ways to effectively overcome these obstacles included:

- exploring the European programmes mentioned earlier for elements that might apply to the Commonwealth developing countries
- developing graduate field research programmes in Commonwealth developing countries in order to enable Canadian students to engage in field research
- encouraging the Commonwealth Secretariat to establish a 2:1 matching fund for each student wishing to study in the Commonwealth developing countries

### *For overseas study: An organisational conspectus*

Of the three awards organisations consulted, two are linked with Canadian resources, and one is linked directly with awarding agencies in Commonwealth developing countries. Of particular note are the numbers of applicants compared to the number of awards granted for the three organisations. Over a nine year period, 291 Canadian applications were received for the CSFP awards – 20 Canadians were recipients; 48 applied for CIDA Awards for Canadians between 1989 and 1992 – 26 awards were granted; while 80 to 100 candidates applied each year for IDRC awards in all developing countries between 1982 and 1991 – 64 awards were given for study in Commonwealth developing countries.

- (a) *Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan* The plan has been described by Callan and Steele in Chapter 8. It is the responsibility of the Canadian Secretariat to publicise these awards in Canadian universities. The Awards Division of AUCC has administered this programme on behalf of External Affairs and International Trade Canada since its inception. Under it, the Canadian Committee may nominate Canadians for Commonwealth scholarships offered by: Ghana, Hong Kong, India, Jamaica, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka, and Trinidad and Tobago. Between 1981 and 1989, India had four awards each year for Canada, while the others offered between one and ten awards for all Commonwealth countries. In some cases, the awards are offered for research only towards a Canadian degree, the others are for postgraduate study towards a Master's or Ph.D. degree, with a minimum tenure of one year.

The only country with restrictions as to field of study is Trinidad and Tobago, where the award may only apply to Agriculture, Economics and Engineering.

The minimum value of awards includes the student's travel to and from the awarding country, a monthly living allowance and payment of all compulsory tuition fees. As this support is deemed inadequate in some countries which offer awards, the Government of Canada pays a supplementary living allowance of \$250 per month to award recipients.

Between 1981 and 1990, a total of 291 Canadian candidates applied for awards tenable in developing countries of the Commonwealth through the CSFP, 20 Canadians received awards, for study in the following countries: Ghana, Nigeria, Hong Kong, India, Sri Lanka and Malaysia (which no longer offers an award).

- (b) *CIDA Awards for Canadians* The Canadian Bureau for International Education has administered this programme on behalf of CIDA since 1989. Incorporated in 1966, the CBIE is a national, non-profit organisation comprising educational institutions and individuals working together to promote international education, international development and intercultural understanding. Its focus is on international students, both the non-Canadians studying in Canada and the Canadians studying abroad.

Up to 50 awards can be given each year for studying in over 100 developing countries. The programme covers the fields involved in this survey, with restrictions in Medicine and the exclusion of Technology and students may participate at the postgraduate level. The value of each award is \$25,000 per year, and covers all related expenses in most cases.

From 1989 to 1992, 26 awardees travelled to Commonwealth developing countries, while a total of 48 Canadians had applied.

- (c) *DRC Young Canadian Researcher awards* The International Development Research Centre was established in 1970 as an autonomous public corporation, with the mandate to stimulate and support research responding to the priorities of developing countries. The award programme was created in 1982 as a means of encouraging Canadian graduate students (primarily Ph.D. candidates) to become involved in international development research, and strengthening links between Canadian universities and developing country research institutions. The programme

covers only the overseas field research, and is available to graduate students who intend to conduct their thesis field research in a developing country on a topic of relevance to IDRC. Eligible fields of study include:

- At the Ph.D. level: Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Sciences, Communications/Media, Earth and Engineering Sciences, Health Sciences, Information Sciences, Social Sciences
- At the Master's level: Communications/Media, Health Sciences, Information Sciences, Environmental Policy

Award tenure corresponds to the period of field research in the developing country; in general, a minimum of three months and a maximum of 12 months, which may be extended to a maximum of 24 months for Ph.D. students whose field research requires more than 12 months. Awards cover a maximum of \$20,000, or \$40,000 for those Ph.D. students whose research requires more than 12 months. This is considered adequate in most cases.

Between 1982 and 1991, 64 awardees travelled to Commonwealth developing countries, while some 80–100 candidates apply for IDRC awards each year for all developing countries. One of the selection criteria for these awards is the relevance of the candidate's research to IDRC's priorities. Given that IDRC supports research in developing countries, applications involving research in the newly industrialising countries such as Hong Kong and Singapore would not be considered a high priority.

The awards organisations expressed views on:

(a) *Administration:*

- too much time is needed to obtain a research permit in certain countries

(b) *Communications:*

- not enough information is provided in Canadian universities
- little awareness on the part of Canadian students of overseas programmes and their funding was inevitably a concern, since there seemed to be a lack of resources in Canada and overseas stays were often inordinately costly. The Canadian CSFP administrator, as an intermediary between awarding agencies in Commonwealth developing countries and Canadian students voiced the following concerns:
  - the amount of funding is insufficient for the purpose

- there is very little communication for the awarding agency following the announcement of the award

The three agencies also passed on complaints that they have received from their awardees (most of which will also be found in the following section on the student questionnaires), such as the difficult living conditions, the inefficiencies of the awarding agencies and the university authorities, and the insufficiency of funds.

### *The student viewpoint*

*Personal motivation* The reasons provided for the decision to study in a Commonwealth developing country were extremely individual, and seem more related to the personality of the participant rather than to the efforts of any one institution (Canadian or overseas) to attract students.

Reasons provided included: encouragement of professors and friends; previous work with a non-governmental organisation; personal contacts in a developing country; personal interests in a developing country issue, for example, Eastern religion and Sanskrit religious literature in India, the effect of Chinese political and economic changes on Hong Kong, the political and ideological history of the liberation war in Zimbabwe. Nevertheless, information received on available bursaries seems to have sparked the initial interests in overseas study.

Study abroad seems more attractive to students at the graduate level, perhaps because the available awards favour Master's and Ph.D. studies. Of the respondents (all of whom had a Bachelor's degree), almost half had a Master's degree. During their stay overseas, six were Ph.D. candidates and seven followed a Master's programme (although only three completed it). While all the fields of study except Engineering drew candidates, Humanities seems to be the most popular field.

*Financial support* Without external financial assistance, very few Canadian students would be able to pursue studies overseas. The funds provided were considered adequate by respondents. Most were the beneficiaries of awards from one or another of the three awards organisations highlighted in this study (CSFP, CIDA and IDRC).

However, a few other sources were cited: the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, the Indo-Canadian Shastri Institute, McMaster University, the Quebec Government, the Woodrow Wilson Fellowship and Canadian Crossroads International. The fact that only

one of these appeared in the list of potential sources put forth in the institutional questionnaires indicates that ILOs are not as well informed as they might be in this area, and that perhaps an annual compilation of a complete list of sources might form part of future plans increasing overseas study opportunities. Sponsorship funds and fee subsidies do not figure very highly on the list of sources of financial support. Here again is an opportunity for exploring whether this is due to unavailability or simply lack of awareness.

*The stay abroad* Perhaps the most revealing and encouraging piece of data is that most students (15 of the 21 respondents) accomplished their academic goals. Although the sample was so small, this does suggest that, despite all of the obstacles listed by students and institutions, students do by and large achieve what they set out to do during their stay abroad.

Most students travelled to a Commonwealth developing country in order to conduct research as an integral part of their home institution's programme. While study was often a component of their stay, it was rarely their primary purpose.

A fair number of participants were working towards a degree at the host institution, indicating that the fear that a foreign degree would not be recognised in Canada is not as widespread as might originally have been thought. Work tours, study tours and cultural exchanges are not frequent, undoubtedly due to the lack of available funds and the possibility of participating in such programmes through other channels. For most students, their time spent abroad ranged from one to two years and was considered sufficient.

*Assessment of administrative and academic structures* Information on the receiving country and university is not readily available in Canada. That access to such basic information is difficult to obtain no doubt discourages many potential candidates early in the application process. There is a great variation in the students' evaluations of the host institutions, but for the most part, the assessments were on the low end of the scale (average to below average). That the universities received such low ratings calls for further investigation and analysis.

*Students' comments* Overall, the students were impressed with the awards administrators and/or organisations and pleased with their overseas experience.

Their recommendations are, for the most part, quite realistic, and focus on the availability of information and advice, as well as the application process itself. It seems that the provision of some documentation would go a long way towards solving many of the students' concerns,

without involving tremendous costs. The suggestions can be divided into two categories:

(a) While in Canada:

- more information on the host country and institution, available bursaries, and programmes
- greater awareness of Canadian equivalences for overseas study
- streamlining the bureaucratic mechanisms of the application processes
- improving links between the Canadian awards organisations and the host institutions
- more time between the announcement of the award/acceptance into host country programme and departure date/beginning of classes
- learning a foreign language

(b) While in the host country:

- staying in better contact with the Canadian High Commission
- being welcomed upon arrival in the host country, and receiving information on registration at the host university
- better accommodation
- reducing government controls in the host country

A sentiment of insecurity was voiced by many of the respondents, often linked to difficult living conditions. Women respondents, in particular, mentioned cultural differences and fear of travelling alone. These issues cannot be permanently solved by one organisation; only increased internationalisation (such as through these programmes) will help minimise them. There are, however, a few measures that might be taken to ease students' living conditions and increase security for women.

## *Conclusion*

This pilot study undertook to survey the perceptions of Canadian university administrators of programmes which support study in a Commonwealth developing country, as well as the experiences of Canadian students in those countries. While the response rate cannot be considered scientific, the answers and comments are probably representative of the situation. When these answers and comments from all types of respondent universities, awards organisations and students – several common themes emerge: communications, funding and administration.

### *Communications*

- lack of information of host countries and universities, on programmes and bursaries, on equivalences of degrees, and on programmes of study overseas
- communication problems with host countries
- a need for increased communication with the authorities (Canadian High Commission, award organisation, host institution)
- insufficient understanding, on the part of the host country, of Canadian students' needs

### *Funding*

- lack of resources in Canada
- high cost of stays abroad
- insufficient amount of funding provided by Commonwealth developing country awards

### *Administration*

- insufficient time between announcement of award and departure of student (often only two weeks)
- too much time required to obtain field research permit in host country
- lengthy and heavy administrative process in Canada and in host country
- inadequate accommodation in host countries, and questionable medical facilities
- lack of follow-up by awarding agencies and host universities

Each host country, of course, has its strengths and weaknesses, and therefore the above comments cannot be applied across-the-board to all cases of overseas study.

In general, the universities emphasise internationalisation and cultural links, as well as the need for more bursaries. The awards organisations also call attention to the need for more funding, but are concerned by the lack of information available as well. Finally, the students are preoccupied by the recognition of their overseas studies in Canada, as well as the need for more security.

On a more positive note, the students have highlighted the satisfaction of their overseas stays, and the advantages, in Commonwealth countries, of being able to study within a familiar academic structure. For their part, the universities have underlined their interests in

establishing and maintaining links with universities in Commonwealth developing countries. These should be the starting points for any expansion of student mobility to Commonwealth developing countries.

If this issue is to be pursued, researchers must go back to these three groups involved, in order to obtain a broader spectrum of responses, as well more detailed information and recommendations on many of the aspects touched upon this preliminary study. Only then will it be possible to prepare a strategy that will bring about improvements to all levels involved, from the host universities and institutions, to the awards organisations which are acting as the intermediary in many cases, right down to the crucial role of the ILOs as providers of information and advice. The importance of this last group cannot be stressed enough, for if the students are not receiving sufficient or accurate information and advice as they begin the application process, they will become discouraged, lose interest and discontinue the process.

While many of the changes recommended will require financial input, this alone will not ensure the success of the exchange programmes – human resource input is just as important to this process.

The next phase, that of expanding upon the initial research that has been analysed here, requires sufficient time to generate and evaluate the information, as well as the funds necessary to conduct an in-depth survey. As other writers in this book have also said, it is only once there is a solid foundation of data that the process of expansion and improvement may be undertaken and that the governments, awarding bodies and institutions can evolve realistic policies.

*Note* The AUCC is the national organisation representing 89 Canadian universities and university-level colleges, mandated to promote the interest of higher education since 1969.