Internationalization & Career-Focused Programming for International Students
A Qualitative Study of Universities in Canada

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Research Questions, Method & Design
Research Question(s):
The main question that guided this project was:
What approaches are universities in Canada taking to support international students in the development of professional or career-focused skills?

Secondary questions include:
• What kind of strategies or programming help international students in their transition to the workplace?
• What factors influence institutional approaches to career-focused programming for international students?

Context: Universities from across Canada
Participants: participants were administrators in charge of international portfolios of their respective institutions. Participants’ institutions provided differences in the size of the student population, the geographic regions of Canada, and the rural/metropolitan dimension

Data Collection & Analysis:
Survey (descriptive statistics)
Survey sent to CIBSE (Student Advising/Conseiller aux étudiants) Listeners Members
260 responses (26 institutions)

Semistructured Interviews (discourse analysis)
Professional staff indicate they are interested in being interviewed
8 semistructured interviews with practitioners from BC, Alberta, Newfoundland, Nova Scotia & Ontario

Documents (content analysis)
Analysis of documents from the interview participants institution

Problem: Canadian HEIs are recruiting and benefitting from increased enrolment of international students. However, there are indications that international students are not as well prepared, and face a number of challenges in transitioning from studies to the workforce in comparison to domestic students.

Key Challenges identified include:
• insufficient language skills;
• lack of host country work experience;
• inconsistent employers;
• lack of personal and professional networks;
• lack of job entry support;
• legal barriers to employment;
• dropping out of academic studies.

• Train & Retain: Career Supports for International Students in Germany, Canada, Netherlands, and Sweden (Morrison-Lange & Brands, 2015)

Recommendations & Conclusion
For Practitioners
• Coordinated and comprehensive international student supports: The importance of comprehensive international student supports is a critical factor in international student success.
• Intercultural training & competency development for all students: The importance of providing intercultural training and support for all students is an opportunity for programming as well as developing students with skills that are globally focused. Creating meaningful and intentional interactions between domestic and international students, for example through career-focused programming, workshops or alumni sessions, provides a good opportunity to develop intercultural competences through the utilization of campus resources.
• Intercultural training & competency development for faculty and staff: Providing intercultural training and support to university employees is one part of enhancing the student experience of international student, specifically in the area around career supports and understanding the unique challenges faced by students.

• Engaging with employers – partners in the process: Universities should engage with employers as partners, creating strategic and ongoing relationships, specifically related to international students’ employment. Universities can highlight the value add of international students to all sizes of employers, but specifically for small and medium size businesses, which may be locally focused and not experienced in hiring international graduates.

• Engaging with employers – debunking myths: University programming should be an important opportunity to engage with employers and debunking myths about hiring and retaining international students. Providing opportunities for employers to learn more about the ability to hire international students as workers is also a great chance to engage with them on the topic of intercultural training.

• Engaging with students early, often and throughout their academic journey: The recommendations in this report are intended to provide a key recommendation as part of this research. The importance of engaging early and informing students of the importance of starting to think about their goals with regard to their career outcomes. While this may not be the initial impetus of most universities with their programming models, this should be reconsidered. Given the noted importance of employability outcomes for students, the importance of immigration opportunities and the factor of time related to work experience and building a network in Canada, the earlier students are able to engage with career programming, the greater the benefit.

Future Research
Further research in this field would benefit from an examination of the student experience and outcomes will allow university administration to make better-informed decisions about funding opportunities and strategic engagement with community partners. Another area for future research and will become increasingly relevant is the long-term outcomes of former international students. Specifically, this is identified in recent research around the relatively low rate of conversion from international student to PR and concerns around varying disparity between former international students and other groups.

Research Findings & Recommendations
What approaches are universities in Canada taking to support international students in the development of professional or career-focused skills?
• Highlighted programs being implemented across the country (local partnerships, conferences, programming initiatives): One key aspect that has emerged is the importance of regional variations and the contextual factors at play with the implementing of programming. The contextual dimension is essential as the various local stakeholders are often best able to respond to the unique needs of the region and are also best able to support students in their career transitions.

• University as a stepping stone for immigration: Highlighted the prevalence of the discussion of the link between study and immigration options for international students. Specifically issues identified in recent research around the relatively low rate of conversion from international student to PR and concerns around varying disparity between former international students and other groups.

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