

Knowledge Synthesis

# **Improving the Assessment of International Students’ Contribution to Canadian Society**

Chedly Belkhodja, Université de Moncton and Victoria Esses, Western University<sup>1</sup>  
Pathways to Prosperity Partnership  
in collaboration with World Education Services (WES)

December 2013

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<sup>1</sup> The authors would like to thank Eric Thomas from Université de Moncton, as well as Stelian Medianu and Alina Sutter from Western University for having participated in document retrieval and the drafting of the synthesis document.

## **Highlights**

Our knowledge synthesis measures the success factors of the integration of international students into Canadian society and identifies the challenges associated with attracting and professionally integrating these highly-qualified immigrants. The economic contribution of international students in the Canadian labour market depends on its ability to develop the skills and conditions that foster the professional integration of highly-qualified individuals. Certain highlights can be drawn from this knowledge synthesis:

In traditional immigrant-receiving countries, like Canada, Australia and Great Britain, policies aimed at selecting highly-qualified immigrants openly favour international students.

International students are an important source of revenue for the Canadian economy, and many studies and reports provide empirical data that clearly establishes their direct impact on Canada's economic growth. These students also make a significant contribution to innovation and knowledge development. Lastly, they are a source of cultural creativity, notably in regions that are less marked by diversity.

The possibility of acquiring permanent residency, through policies that facilitate this transition, has become an important motivational factor for international students considering study in Canada. However, a key factor in the decision to study at a foreign university remains that of education quality.

The country of origin is another factor that has an impact on the probability of international students to choose to make the transition towards permanent residency, irrespective of age, sex or educational sector.

In order to ensure the complete transition of these newcomers as members of the host society, the delivery of settlement and integration services must be adapted to this clientele.

International students must vary work experiences and take advantage of cooperative and internship programs, be accompanied by their mentors and acquire references through relationships built in these workplaces.

One of the key hurdles identified in the professional and social integration process concerns the cultural differences between the student's culture of origin and the Canadian environment. An inadequate understanding of English and cultural skills appears to be the biggest cultural barrier to professional integration.

The development of good practices in the areas of integration and diversity management has gained momentum in recent years in Canada. They are primarily present at the micro level, since the ways they are being developed and the strategies vary considerably in the field.

Since they are a source of revenue for postsecondary institutions, there is a danger of wanting to develop customized training aimed at very specific client groups, at the risk of neglecting the quality of university education.

## Summary

The main purpose of our knowledge synthesis is that of measuring the success factors for integrating international students into Canadian society and identifying the challenges linked to attracting and professionally integrating these highly-qualified immigrants. Finding skills and talent are vital elements in Canada's economic prosperity, and attracting international students is part of this strategy. The economic contribution of international students in the Canadian labour market depends on our ability to develop the skills and conditions that promote the professional integration of highly-qualified individuals. In this synthesis, we will consider a series of elements to better assess the performance and benefits of international students and graduates in Canadian economic life.

The rapprochement of the student and immigrant characterizes the evolution of public policies in Canada and elsewhere in several Western societies (Suter & Jandl, 2008; Becker & Kostler, 2012; King & Raghuram, 2013). For a long time, the student remained a stranger with mobility that was limited to his/her level of studies, rather than someone who is invited to explore an immigration project. If the student decided to become an immigrant, he/she had to leave the territory to complete an application for admission. There was a semantic distance between the student and the immigrant (Slama, 1999). In the early 2000s, international students were still primarily seen as a source of revenue for educational institutions, an asset for the internationalization of Canadian campuses and "ambassadors" for Canada in their country of origin. In the space of a few years, they have become a sought-after source of immigration for different levels of government (Hawthorne, 2005). Public discourse and policies make no effort to hide the strategy of drawing on the human capital of students by offering to facilitate the transition process leading to permanent residency and turning them into ideal candidates for economic immigration (Alboim & Cohl, 2012; Papademetriou & Sumption, 2011; Picot and Sweetman, 2012; Baas, 2010). In most OECD countries, a temporary, two-step immigration process is replacing the classic permanent immigration framework (Hawthorne, 2010).

This literature review covers a vast terrain of literature and takes several sources of information into consideration. It uses an analytical approach to develop certain themes. We paid particular attention to scientific production on the theme of international students, considering the reputation of journals; methodological, quantitative and qualitative approaches and policy development recommendations. The literature review takes grey literature into consideration, since there are numerous official reports, studies, theses, dissertations and working papers on international students.

Our analysis of the selected corpus is structured around five key questions:

- What are the factors that explain whether or not an international student will choose to move towards permanent residency status in Canada or elsewhere?
- What are the factors that determine the economic and social contribution of international students during and after their studies?
- What is the contribution of international students to the prosperity of Canada?

- What are the professional and social immigration challenges that international students face in Canada?
- What are the good practices enabling international student integration, and what is the responsibility of postsecondary institutions, employers and various levels of government in this regard?

### **The contribution of international students to Canada's prosperity**

International students are an important source of revenue for the Canadian economy, and many studies and reports provide empirical data that clearly establishes their direct impact on Canada's economic growth. International students also make a significant contribution to innovation and knowledge development. Lastly, they are a source of cultural creativity, notably in regions that are less marked by diversity.

### **Transition towards permanent residency**

The transition of international students towards permanent residency is a critical issue of Canadian immigration policy. Several studies stress that it is not so much the education opportunities that attract the majority of these students, but rather the possibility of applying for permanent residency post-graduation. However, a key factor that explains the decision to study in a foreign university remains the quality of the education offered.

### **International student integration**

The impact of international students goes well beyond the university environment, and this leads to new questions and issues for both the student and host society (Nunes & Arthur, 2013). It is within this context that research has been focused on issues related to economic and social integration. The interesting matter is that of understanding when integration begins: is it during studies or post-graduation?

To help ensure the complete transition of these newcomers as members of the host society, the delivery of settlement and integration services must be re-evaluated. There is a need to intervene more quickly, since the transition has an impact on integration, and integration has an impact on the transition towards a feeling of belonging to the host society.

### **Good practices**

The development of good diversity integration and management practices has grown in recent years in Canada. They are primarily seen at the micro level, since the ways they are being developed and strategies vary considerably in the field. However, some issues are quite similar and can be transposed to different environments. They are distributed along three levels: what the educational establishment does as an institution; what takes place between the university and community – notably the degree of involvement of immigrant service providers – and, lastly, what takes place in terms of employer awareness.

Moreover, a critical eye must guide research in the context of new reality of major reforms to the Canadian immigration system.

First, it is important to understand the reasons pushing universities and colleges to intensify their international recruitment efforts. It is obvious that – due to differential tuition fees – international students are an additional source of income for postsecondary institutions, and that these institutions try their luck in the lucrative international student recruitment market. There is then a danger of wanting to develop customized training aimed at very specific client groups, at the risk of neglecting the quality of university education (Alboim & Cohl, 2012). It is also important to understand the distinction between student recruitment targeting undergraduate programs and that aimed at graduate students. This dimension can then later come into play in integration and retention outcomes.

Second, the successful integration of international students requires a broad range of services, including settlement, integration and a project to remain post-graduation. In the context of internationalization, some universities focus primarily on promotion and recruitment, but less on monitoring international students during their studies and post-graduation. Several studies emphasize the importance of not overlooking certain elements of integration into Canadian society: social integration, friendships with Canadian students and classroom dynamics.

Third, in order to facilitate the student's transition towards permanent residency, settlement and welcoming structures receive a temporary clientele, but they are not able to adequately meet its needs. Since 2008, major reforms to the Canadian immigration system have affected the delivery of services for different categories of immigrants. Increasingly, the temporariness of the immigrant status in Canada is a reflection of a complex, hierarchical system (Hari, McGrath & Preston, 2013).

Lastly, the involvement of economic players remains problematic and requires considerable work in terms of employee awareness in small and medium-sized businesses. A homogenous population and highly hermetic business environment can lead to problems for international graduates who find it difficult to develop a professional network. However, there are many interesting initiatives, such as mentoring, volunteering and training for the Canadian market context. It is also important to examine the quality of the integration of international students into Canadian society. With respect to this, the involvement of municipalities and civil society players must translate into concrete actions beyond advisory committees and round tables on the reception of newcomers. The local level is a place for developing innovative welcoming and integration strategies (CMF, 2011).

## Introduction and context

In recent years, increasing numbers of international students have been moving beyond their borders to study elsewhere (Migration Policy Institute, 2012; WES 2013a). Several factors influence this mobility, such as economic reasons, the attraction and recruitment strategies of universities and colleges and immigration policies encouraging permanent residency transition. According to recent data published by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), close to 4.3 million people studied abroad in 2012 (OECD, 2013), this figure represents an increase of 70% compared to results gathered in 2000. Of these students, most received their training in the United States (16.5%), the United Kingdom (13%), Australia (6.1%), Germany (6.3%) and France (6.2%) (p. 307). In Canada, the number of international students increased to more than 105,000 entries in 2012 and over 265,000 in enrolment (CIC, Facts and Figures, 2012). This represents 4.7% of the total number of foreign tertiary students enrolled, with 44% of these international students coming from China, India and South Korea (WES 2013b). With a cost of living and tuition fees that remain affordable, Canada has placed among the key destinations of choice<sup>2</sup>.

The rapprochement between student and immigrant characterizes the evolution of public policies in Canada and in several other Western societies (Suter & Jandl, 2008; Becker & Kostler, 2012; King & Raghuram, 2013). For a long time, the student remained a stranger with mobility that is limited to his/her level of studies, rather than someone who has been invited to explore an immigration project. Should the student decide to become an immigrant, he/she would have to leave the territory to complete an application for admission. There was a semantic distance between the student and the immigrant (Slama, 1999). Historically, Europe has a tradition of student mobility with programs like ERASMUS, which encourages transnational cooperation and the mobility of students and higher education professors, without however focusing on the transition of the international student (of third-country origin) from the status of student to that of immigrant or permanent resident post-graduation (Ballatore, 2010). In terms of policies, the Bologna Declaration – signed by 29 European countries on June 19, 1999 – was created as a vast project for the harmonization of a European Higher Education Area by 2010 and means of encouraging student mobility and employability. However, for many students from southern countries, Europe remains a stepping stone towards more welcoming immigration societies, such as Canada and Australia (Guissé, 2011).

In countries with an immigration tradition, like Canada, Australia and Great Britain, policies aimed at selecting highly-qualified immigrants are openly favorable to international students. In the early 2000s, international students were still primarily seen as a source of revenue for educational institutions, an asset for the internationalization of Canadian campuses and “ambassadors” for Canada in their country of origin. In the space of a few years, they have become a sought-after source of immigration for different levels of government (Hawthorne, 2005). Public discourse and policies make no effort to hide the strategy of drawing on the human

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<sup>2</sup> A recent HSBC study places Canada in 5<sup>th</sup> place (\$18,474) behind Australia (\$25,375), the United States (\$25,226), the United Arab Emirates (\$21,371) and Great Britain (\$19,291).

<http://globalnews.ca/news/777089/canada-boasts-some-of-the-lowest-international-student-fees-amongst-western-developed-nations-survey-finds/>

capital of students by offering to facilitate the transition process leading to permanent residency and turning them into ideal candidates for economic immigration (Alboim & Cohl, 2012; Papademetriou & Sumption, 2011; Picot and Sweetman, 2012; Baas, 2010). In most OECD countries, a temporary, two-step immigration process is replacing the classic permanent immigration framework (Hawthorne, 2010).

An analysis of policies and discourse concerning international students and graduates at the federal level notes the importance that this type of temporary migration has taken. In the early 2000s, the Canadian government was already in agreement that immigration helped stimulate the economy by attracting qualified migrants, and that it recognized the “social and economic benefits that foreign students bring to Canada” (CIC, 2003a). The federal government committed to making the country a “destination of choice for talented foreign students” (CIC, 2004a). By allowing students to work off-campus while perusing their studies, the goal was to “enhance the global competitiveness of Canada’s economic institutions” (CIC, 2004b), on the one hand, while enabling international students to “experience the Canadian labour market and gain a greater understanding of Canadian society” (CIC, 2005), on the other. Progressively, the federal government allowed international students and graduates to work during and after their studies, in order to gain work experience that was deemed essential to their successful integration into the labour market. In 2012, over 60,000 international students held an off-campus work permit (Alboim & Cohl, 2012).

An extensive body of Canadian and international literature deals with several themes surrounding international students. Coming from the field of migration studies, research places students in the context of the mobility of highly-qualified individuals and the promotion and recruitment policies and practices of postsecondary institutions (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Bolsmann & Miller, 2008; Tremblay, 2005; IOM, 2008; Zigurus & Law, 2006). There is evidence that a mobile, circular process of migration facilitates the movement of certain categories of individuals, notably international students who have the capital that allows them to be more selective when choosing a destination and integrate the global education market (Findlay et al., 2011). The role that governments have been led to play has also transformed, as they react to the competitiveness of the global market of qualified immigrants (Lavanex, 2007; Pellerin, 2010; Sassen, 2009).

A series of studies examines the sociodemographic, economic and cultural characteristics of international students, viewing the students as immigration candidates (Lowe, 2012). They are young and can respond to the problems of declining birthrate and population aging in industrialized societies. In Canada, this type of argument is often heard in the context of immigration distribution efforts beyond large urban centres (Wade & Belkhdja, 2012; Walton-Roberts, 2011). Also, foreign graduates, who are young and are familiar with Canadian life and culture, are perhaps more apt to integrate into communities than skilled immigrants who are part of other categories. They constitute an important source of skilled labour, which helps increase Canada’s global economic competitiveness and innovation (Gribble, 2008). They hold a Canadian postsecondary degree and, as graduates, can more easily integrate the labour market. They possess Canadian work experience and the acquired cultural codes, notably linguistic skills in one of the two official languages and an understanding of the professional environment. This argument has considerable weight in a context where the consideration of skills becomes a critical issue for the labour market, innovation and competitiveness. In this context,

postsecondary institutions become important players when it comes to developing the skills necessary to integrate the labour market (Arthur & Flynn, 2011). Consequently, since 2008, Canadian policies have been dedicated to promoting the temporary and permanent integration of international students and graduates into the labour market.

Finally, international students are seen as cultural agents capable of helping small communities evolve toward values of openness towards cultural diversity (Wade & Belkhdja, 2012; Walton-Roberts, 2008 and 2011; Mosneaga, 2013). As such, universities play a bigger role with respect to attracting, integrating and retaining international students, since they are actively participating in producing both qualified graduates and first-line ambassadors who can help new international students adapt to Canadian society.

The purpose of our knowledge synthesis is that of measuring the success factors of the integration of international students into Canadian society, and to explore the challenges of the attraction and professional integration of this highly-skilled migration. Seeking to establish a link between research on the issues of attracting and recruiting international students and their economic and professional performance, we developed a novel perspective.

This synthesis project responds to the “complexity, diversity and creativity of the new knowledge paradigm of the 21<sup>st</sup> century” (SSHRC, 2012). It is in line with a federal government priority, namely the participation of public and private sectors in immigration, innovation and economic growth efforts. Finding skills and talent are vital elements in Canada’s economic prosperity, and attracting international students helps create a “prosperous and resilient economy and a just society” (SSHRC, 2012). Due to increasing numbers of students, Canadian universities are players that are increasingly involved in immigration strategies and policies, notably recruitment and retention efforts. In small communities, the university plays an important economic development role and creates ties with other authorities involved in immigration: governments, municipalities and economic players. The impact of our knowledge synthesis is measured by the way knowledge is distributed to target audiences, notably the different levels of government, economic development employees and agencies, and international students.

## **Methodology**

The methodology we used was that of literature analysis based on a systematic literature review. We wanted to produce the most comprehensive review of the state of knowledge on the economic performance of international students and their professional integration into Canada’s labour market and Canadian society. The approach we used was that of selecting search engines that would allow us to systematically extract our literature. The following search engines were used: ABI/Inform, CBCA Complete, EBSCOHost, Google Scholar, Ingenta Connect, Proquest, Scopus, Sociological Abstract and Summon. The second step was that of identifying keywords for exploiting the search engines. These words were distributed throughout our key research questions.<sup>3</sup> The literature review takes grey literature into consideration, since there are numerous official reports, studies, theses, dissertations and working papers on international students. Public and private institutions also produce useful and pertinent knowledge<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> Consult Annex 1 for a presentation of keywords.

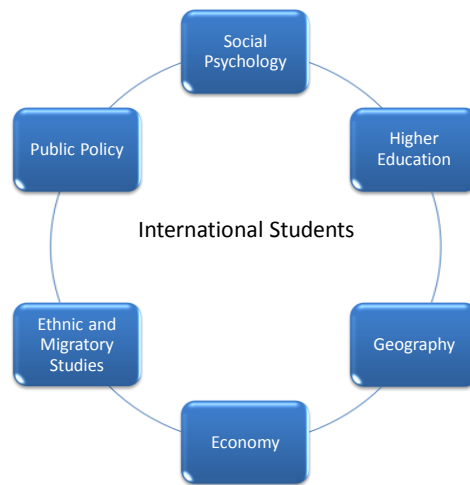
<sup>4</sup> Consult Annex 2 for a list of these institutions.



This literature review covers a vast terrain of literature and takes several sources of information into consideration. It uses an analytical approach to develop certain themes. We paid particular attention to scientific production on the theme of international students, considering the reputation of journals; methodological, quantitative and qualitative approaches and policy development recommendations<sup>5</sup>. Figure 1 illustrates the various disciplines and theoretical approaches that study international students.

**Figure 1**

**Methodology: Diverse Literature**



Research on international students has evolved over the past twenty years. Starting in the eighties, literature was focused on examining the challenges of establishing international student services and the many requests for accommodation of student special needs (Arthur, 2004; Pilote & Benabdeljalil, 2007; Farr, 2005). This was carried out in a spirit of accessibility to postsecondary education and the internationalization of universities that sought to develop international promotion and recruitment strategies (Brooks & Waters, 2011). Initially, research on international students focused on the steps of reception and adaptation into the study environment and cultural diversity management within the classroom (Popadiuk & Arthur, 2013). Many empirical research studies, particularly in social psychology, examined interactions between students, foreigners and locals (Moore & Popadiuk, 2011; Gu, Schweisfurth & Day, 2010; Sawir et al., 2008; William & Johnson, 2011). In a later phase, the field of study on international students extended into other disciplines and theoretical approaches. Several reasons explain this evolution: an increase in international student mobility throughout the world, the

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<sup>5</sup> Consult Annex 3 for a list of these journals.

evolving immigration policy framework, the internationalization of universities and involvement of civil society stakeholders in immigration strategies.

Our analysis of the selected corpus is structured around five key questions:

- What are the factors that explain whether or not an international student will choose to move towards permanent residency status in Canada or elsewhere?
- What are the factors that determine the economic and social contribution of international students during and after their studies?
- What is the contribution of international students to the prosperity of Canada?
- What are the professional and social immigration challenges that international students face in Canada?
- What are the good practices enabling international student integration, and what is the responsibility of postsecondary institutions, employers and various levels of government in this regard?

## **1. Contribution to the Canadian economy**

International students are an important source of revenue for the Canadian economy and many studies and reports present empirical data that clearly establishes their direct impact on the economic growth of Canada<sup>6</sup>. In 2010, they spent over 7.7 billion dollars on tuition fees, housing services and discretionary expenses. This sector of activity also created over 81,000 jobs and increased government receipts by over 445 million dollars (Kofmel, 2013; Kunin & Associates, 2012).

According to a study carried out by the firm Roslyn Kunin & Associates (2012) for the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, there are substantial economic benefits to be gained for Canada from the growing presence of international students (K-12 and postsecondary). Total expenditures of long-term (at least six months) students residing in Canada rose to 6.9 billion dollars in 2010, which represents a contribution of almost 4.2 billion dollars to Canada's gross domestic product (7% of the total GDP contributed by the educational services sector). Moreover, the services in place for these international students contributed 70,240 jobs to the Canadian labour market. This figure represents 5.7% of the total number of jobs in the educational services sector in Canada. International educational services for international students alone represent approximately 1.7% of Canada's export total.

Moreover, it is estimated that international students in short-term language training programs have contributed an additional 788 million dollars per year in total spending; this represents a contribution of about 455 million dollars in GDP, 10,780 jobs and 48 million dollars

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<sup>6</sup> Consult the report by the Advisory Panel on Canada's International Education Strategy. 2011, *International Education: A Key Driver of Canada's Future Prosperity*, Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada. [http://www.international.gc.ca/education/assets/pdfs/ies\\_report\\_rapport\\_sei-eng.pdf](http://www.international.gc.ca/education/assets/pdfs/ies_report_rapport_sei-eng.pdf)

in government revenue (Kunin & Ass., 2012). In addition to their contribution for spending related to tuition and living expenses, 336 million per year can be attributed to tourism activities and other related activities enjoyed by international students, members of their family and friends. Both levels of government benefit economically from the presence of international students, since the total amount of indirect net taxes collected in 2010 was estimated at 455 million dollars (this includes tax revenue generated from the delivery of services to long-term and short-term international students as well as tourism activities). Of this amount, the authors estimate that 180.6 million dollars was tax contribution to the federal government and 273.9 million dollars contributed to provincial and territorial tax revenues (Kunin & Ass., 2012).

In Atlantic Canada, the economic impact of international students was estimated to be approximately 376 million dollars in 2009-2010 (Sidiq et al., 2010). The total economic contribution of international students is estimated at 565 million dollars from 2009 to 2010, after applying the spending multiplier. Direct expenses of international students are \$2,900 over the same period. International students spent 2.64 dollars (1.91 dollars of which was money injected into the economy) in Atlantic Canada for every dollar spent by the four provincial governments in education and health. This return on investment varies from one province to another in Atlantic Canada, due to students spending variations and government spending variations.

Focusing on the spending habits of international students during their stay in the small university town of Bendigo (150 km from Melbourne), in Australia, Yao and Bai (2008) came to the conclusion that they made a direct economic contribution of approximately three million dollars to the regional economy. However, the authors estimated that the “potential economic benefits” could be between 2.5 and 3 times higher, if local institutions were able to attract more international students (at a level that reflects the national average). Moreover, they stressed the presence of other, “hidden benefits”, like that of having access to “an immediate low source of skilled migrants” (p. 261). International students also bring a cultural contribution to the region of Bendigo. This contribution could be further encouraged, since few international students (20%) stated that they took part in activities or community work. A low rate of international students stated that they took part in sports activities (18.8%). Others noted that they taught locals their native language (21.2%).

International students also contribute to innovation and knowledge development, and several studies concur. By measuring the number of patent applications and grants, Chellaraj, Maskus and Mattoo (2008) came to the conclusion that international graduate students registered in science and engineering programs contribute significantly to the host country when it comes to innovation, in this case in the United States. The authors demonstrated that there is a correlation between a high number of international graduate students enrolled, the number of patent applications and the number of patents awarded. In short, according to the authors, international graduate students have a strong positive impact on the development of ideas in the United States. Along the same lines, Stuen, Mobarak and Maskus (2012) explored the contribution of international science and engineering students to knowledge development in the United States. However, based on the data studied, diversity has little impact on research production, though they clarify that the findings suggest that departments that receive students from a wide variety of regions of the world benefit more greatly in the research findings. However the effect is not that significant. The authors maintain that diversity increases coordination costs, which could offset the productivity gains associated with it.

## 2. Transition to permanent residency

The transition of international students towards permanent residency has become a crucial issue in Canadian immigration policies. This issue is part of a specific economic context. Several studies have, in fact, demonstrated that recent cohorts of immigrants from the economic category in Canada experience difficulties when it comes to integrating into the Canadian labour market, with a higher unemployment rate than the Canadian-born population (Reitz 2005 & 2007; Conference Board of Canada, 2008). This has prompted the federal government to rethink its immigrant selection system for the economic category (Picot & Sweetman, 2012).

The possibility of becoming a permanent resident, through policies facilitating this transfer has become an important motivational factor for foreign students (Alboim & Cohl, 2012; Bass, 2005; Eskelä, 2013; Geddie, 2013; Lowe, 2012; Robertson, 2011; Zigurus & Law, 2007). Several studies stress that it is not so much the education opportunities that attract most of these students, but rather the possibility of applying for permanent residency post-graduation. In the case of Indian students pursuing their studies in Australia, the distinction between student and migrant is increasingly blurred: “the majority of Indian overseas students are actually migrants. Their concerns, motivations, hopes and ideas about the future are focused on the goal of migration” (Bass, 2005: p. 13). Moreover, institutions that receive the highest numbers of Indian students are often referred to as “PR factories” by these students. Baas (2005) emphasizes that, for Indian students, the Australian degree often does not contribute to their professional advancement once they return home. Their reason for studying in Australia is so that they may eventually immigrate there. According to Baas, this demonstrates that it is important to know what “the [...] student market is about” (p. 22): “a market now exists and a product has been created to fill it that looks like it is about education but is actually about migration” (p. 23).

The logic presented by Baas (2005) is in keeping with what Robertson (2011) refers to as “student switching”, or the practice of switching from a temporary student status to that of a permanent resident status through policies that, in fact, have been developed to facilitate this switchover. Following the same train of thought as Baas, Robertson states that “through these policies, migration options have clearly become both a key motivation and a key outcome for many international students who undertake degrees in Australia” (p. 103). In other words, it is not necessarily the education (or at least not just the education) that attracts many international students, but the possibility of acquiring permanent residency as well. The study by Kim, Bankart and Isdell (2011) conducted in the United States is also interesting in this regard. Although it does not specifically discuss the transition to permanent residency, it examines the actual decision of international students having just received their PhD in the United States to return home or stay in the US. Covering the 80s, 90s and 2000s, this longitudinal study demonstrates that the intention rate increased from 49.5% in the 1980s to 66.1% in the 2000s. The authors attribute this increase to two changes: labour market demand and immigration reform. Lastly, based on a study conducted by Arthur and Flynn (2011), the possibility of finding work was the key motivating factor expressed for remaining in Canada post-graduation. In this study, the desire of international students to remain in the host country was spurred by a combination of two factors: employment opportunities and better working conditions when compared to those in their home countries.

Regarding the transition towards permanent residency, the authors were of the same mind, indicating that a series of factors influence the choice of students to pursue their education abroad and their decision to stay or return home post-graduation.

Certain studies carried out with international students in New Zealand, like those of Wilkinson, Merwood and Masgoreth (2010) and Soon (2010 & 2012), analyze the intention of international students to remain in the host country (New Zealand), return to their home country or migrate elsewhere. Wilkinson, Merwood and Masgoreth (2010) indicated that the country of origin was the factor that most influenced the probability of international students deciding to transition to permanent residency, regardless of age, sex or the students' educational sector. Students from India were, by far, those with the highest transition rate (47%), followed by Chinese students (23%). Some of the key reasons that led international students to choose New Zealand's institutions were the quality and cost of postsecondary education, the opportunity to work in the host country after graduation and the possibility of applying for permanent residency. Soon found that there was a significant drop in terms of the numbers of students intending to return home and an increase in those intending to remain in New Zealand when the international students remained one year after having completed their studies. However, she also stresses that having, initially, a strong intention to return was generally associated with an effective return of the student to his or her country of origin.

Baruch, Budhwar and Kahtri (2007) carried out a study that was similar to these with international students (n=949) registered in a graduate program in Business Administration (MBA) in two universities in the United States and Great Britain. They concluded that the three factors that most influenced the decision to remain or return were the perception of the labour market in the host country, the adjustment process and family ties in the host or home country. Because they were interested in the intention of international students coming to the United States to pursue a study program, Hazen and Alberts (2005, 2006) wanted to find out, as mentioned by Baas above, whether the students' stay was temporary or a springboard to permanent residency. The conclusion of these authors was that the decision to remain or return was a complex one that involved different factors that were often affected by the student's cultural background. According to Hazen and Alberts (2005, 2006), the decision to remain or return posed a real dilemma for the students. They are a distinct group of qualified migrants, due to the fact that the time spent in the host country provided considerable experience, they were already more familiar with the host society and had developed professional and personal relationships, allowing them to have a clearer understanding of the possibility of immigrating. Whereas, generally speaking, it seems that professional factors incite them to stay and societal or personal factors push them to return to their country of origin. Regarding these personal factors, it is interesting that Lu, Zong and Schissel (2009), following the results of a survey distributed to Chinese students pursuing a study program in Saskatchewan, advanced that the social and emotional adaptation of international students was just as important as economic integration regarding their intention to remain in the host country post-graduation. Furthermore, this study established interesting, gender-based distinctions. The variables influencing men tended to be "instrumental" (human capital, social networks and career success), whereas women were more influenced by socioemotional variables, such as family circumstances, parental expectations and a sense of belonging. The important point to make here is that social and emotional adaptation must also be considered as just as important in the intention to remain as economic adaptation.

In a study carried out with international students who were registered or graduates of a Master's or PhD program in science or technology at a university in metropolitan Copenhagen, Mosneaga and Winther (2013) note that the decision to study abroad often stems from an vague idea based on motivations like the desire to gain new cultural insight, pursue a specific sector of study, change one's current living environment or improve future prospects (personal and/or professional). Here, again, the destination choice is based on a variety of factors: availability of financial resources and situational elements (such as admissions procedures, study program structure, the institutions' reputations, perception of the lifestyle in the host country, proximity to the "domicile" of origin, the presence of a spouse and career objectives). The authors emphasize that the complex web of factors is a reminder that, as part of the decisionmaking process, individual considerations, like social networks and relationships exist independently of the guidance provided by policies. Furthermore, individual decisions, in addition to being shaped by the student's personality and personal situation, greatly depend on the context and are often subject to the influence of unforeseeable externalities. The fact that personal, contextual circumstances are subject to change means that the construction of policies targeting certain "ideal prototypes" of international students is difficult and, at times, simply ineffective. If finding relevant employment opportunities and/or developing relationships are both considered retention factors, then the creation of social networking possibilities during the study period is an important avenue for developing the attachment of international students to their host society. This means that initiatives aimed at integrating international students into the labour market must be followed/supported by possibilities for inclusion in the host society. To help facilitate the transition of international students, the coordinated cooperation of stakeholders, public authorities, universities and private sector companies is required.

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Other studies examine the reality of smaller communities, because international students choose to pursue their studies in universities located outside of large urban areas or in lesser known destinations (Eskelä, 2013; Walton-Roberts, 2011). Eskelä (2013) feels that a more peripheral destination, like Finland, when compared to leading European universities, can offer certain academic benefits. She notes, however, that educational institutions must distinguish themselves by the quality of their graduate programs and renowned researchers.

Using a survey that was distributed to international students attending a university in the Bendigo region of Australia, Yao and Bai (2008) stress how the students reacted to studying in a smaller locality. Some traits were attractive: human environment (friendly, quiet and safe region) and physical (air quality, landscape), the cost of living and proximity to Melbourne. Others traits were not appealing: boredom, lack of entertainment and shopping malls, poor public transit, access to housing, equity and employment opportunities.

Two recent studies conducted in Atlantic Canada stress these concerns (AAU 2013 & Chira, 2013). Commissioned by the AAU, a survey administered to 2163 international students noted the need to better inform students of their options upon completion of their studies and present a clearer picture of the labour market situation<sup>7</sup>. Of the key factors taken into

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<sup>7</sup> Corporate Research Associates, *International Student Online Study*, Prepared for: Association of Atlantic Universities, February 2013.

consideration when making the decision to come study in Canada, the three most common factors were the teaching quality (49%), the reputation or quality of the university or particular program (44%) and Canada's cultural diversity (41%). A majority of international students expressed a desire to work in the Atlantic region once they had completed their study program (56%). Whereas, even if there was a strong desire to remain, the perception was that there were few economic opportunities. It was the main reason cited (35%) to explain the lack of interest in remaining post-graduation. The students had little knowledge of the specific programs that could facilitate their transition to permanent residency: only a third of the students (37%) were aware of the existence of these programs, and the program that was most often cited was that of provincial nominees. An important recommendation of the study was to better publicize the Canadian Experience Class (CEC) because, after hearing of its existence, a great majority of international students said that they were interested in applying (76%). Universities need to be more active in disseminating information.

Through interviews carried out with 35 participants, Chira (2013) studied the intentions of international students to immigrate to Canada and settle in Atlantic Canada. Half of the participants (46%) stated that they intended to immigrate to Canada, once they had decided on an educational institution, but the rate increased considerably (to 77%) once acclimatized to Canadian culture. The question, however, is that of knowing whether they plan to stay in the region long term. Due to limited employment and socialization opportunities, several ended up moving to big Canadian cities.

That said, the transition to permanent residency, even for those who clearly stated their intention to want to settle in Canada, is not always a fait accompli. The difficulty in finding work is a key hurdle to the immigration projects of many. Chira emphasizes that "the discrepancy between strong intentions and success rates makes international students at risk of transitioning to undocumented status in Canada" (p. 26). Some participants stressed that it is difficult to find a good job in the Atlantic region without adequate mentoring, in other words: "connections and people you know". Others said that they were victims of racism and discrimination. Furthermore, some find it difficult to tackle the various immigration procedures or find the support required to navigate through the system (p.28)

### **3. Integration challenges**

The impact of international students goes well beyond the environment of universities and this leads to new questions for the student and host society (Nunes & Arthur, 2013). It is in this context that some studies examine economic and social integration issues. The interesting question is that of understanding where integration starts. Is it during the study period or post-graduation? In the current context, would it not be possible to develop an integration continuum for students or an integrated vision of migrant/student integration? This vision leads us to consider research that examines student integration post-graduation, without neglecting all the work conducted in universities and colleges.

According to Gates-Gasse (2012), if Canada really wants to keep international students in the country as immigrants, "there is a need for comprehensive settlement services and supports for international students to facilitate a smooth transition towards their full integration and participation in Canadian society" (p. 272). The Canadian Experience Class accelerates the

access of international students to permanent residency, this program, however, represents “a shift towards immigrants who are self-funded in terms of education, skills development, and integration” (p. 273). Whereas, in order to ensure the full transition of these newcomers as members of the host society, it maintains that the delivery of settlement and integration services need to be rethought. Quicker intervention is required, since the transition impacts the integration, and integration has an impact on the transition towards what she refers to as “full membership” in the host society.

The views of Robertson (2011) are similar to those of Gates-Gasse when she suggests that the impact of the economic and social integration transition period experienced by international students must also be taken into consideration. Obtaining permanent residency is a very significant event in the migratory journey of many international students, stresses Robertson, but the fact remains that the transition to permanent residency is not always harmonious or easy. The life of international students wanting to obtain permanent residency becomes structured around waiting for the application to process and, therefore, uncertainty regarding their future. This makes the transition to permanent residency a stressful, frustrating period for many. The transition period reflects on the student’s labour market integration and the social experience of international students. During the transition period, most international students having participated in the study said that they had to work at low paying jobs requiring few qualifications: “in the workplace, participants also had to socially negotiate unfamiliar class and cultural dynamics. [...] the social positioning as a low skilled worker was often difficult to accept, especially for those participants who had just achieved higher degrees” (p. 110). In relation to their qualifications, most of the respondents were underemployed (working part time or by contract). Others decided to pursue their studies in order to increase their employability. According to Robertson, this difficulty in entering the labour market is a result of the “liminal” situation in which international students find themselves (p. 111).

Integration into the university environment is also an element that attracts the attention of researchers. In a study carried out in nine postsecondary institutions in the Netherlands, Rienties and Tempelaar (2013) found significant, important differences in the academic and social integration process among the various student groups. Concerning academic adaptation, the European students obtained similar results to those of the Dutch students. The same can be said of the international students from Latin America and the Middle East. It was the South Asian students who obtained the lowest results in terms of academic and social adaptation, having to overcome major hurdles when studying in the Netherlands. Beyond activities that facilitate social integration (such as entrance parties, movie nights and tourist excursions) and university orientation, Rienties and Tempelaar encourage postsecondary institutions to develop activities that can help students adapt academically and even to initiate the experience in their home country prior to their departure. The goal is to allow students to experience the teaching methods in place in the host institution before starting the Bachelors’ program, which would allow students to measure and compare their learning style (cultural) with the learning style (expected but always clearly explained) in the host environment.

### **Obstacles to integration:**

Acculturation is always a key obstacle. Reynolds and Constantine (2007) state that when international students experience stress linked to acculturation, it is generally an indicator that



their career aspirations will be lower. They also determined that the concerns of African, Asian and South American international students concerning their level of competence in social, university and professional contexts were indicators of greater difficulty in identifying career aspirations and maintaining a positive view of the possible results of their professional future. They suggest that guidance counselors should pay special attention to the problem of acculturation-related stress, notably the effect on feelings/perceptions held by international students regarding their social, academic and cultural skills. They need help to develop appropriate professional aspirations and expectations. The authors argue that guidance counselors should also develop outreach programs and establish a rapport with international students, since they do not always seek out help when in need. Reynolds and Constantine recognize the benefits that come with services like mentoring, peer counseling, support groups, etc.

As for the decision-making and job search process, one of the key obstacles identified was that of cultural differences between the international students' culture of origin and the Canadian environment. An insufficient command of English was the most disconcerting cultural barrier to professional integration. Students also expressed a need for services on campus, providing specific information for international and graduate students. International students would like to receive practical information to help them navigate the application process for a work permit or network with Canadian employers (Arthur & Flynn, 2011; Chira, 2013).

Moores and Popadiuk (2011) addressed the challenges related to cultural adaptation. They identified four key themes that impact this process. The first theme is that of connecting with others. Study participants emphasized the importance of knowing that they were not alone, and that others found it difficult to adapt and integrate as well. However, the students also clearly noted that the connection needed to be more than just setting up a social support network to build a meaningful sense of community. The second theme relates to maintaining a certain cultural foundation. The students mentioned that it was important to use aspects that were part of their life prior to their studies, in order to facilitate their transition to the host society culture. The participants were able to maintain a solid foundation that was an important stabilizing factor throughout the intercultural transition, by preserving their identity and ties to their culture, by preparing for their studies abroad, by using their experience in order to explore and develop a new cultural reality and by creating a life for themselves outside their studies. The third theme is that of embracing the process. Several students advanced that it was important to be flexible and open to achieve a good transition and be receptive to new ideas and perspectives. The last theme explored is that of discovering one's own strengths. Every student participating in the Moores and Popadiuk study recognized that a growing awareness and understanding of oneself was a very important aspect that emerged from their intercultural transition/integration process. In other words, taking up the challenge, discovering who they were and doing something that, once, they did not think they would be able to do were all part of the positive experiences they took away from the cultural adaptation process.

Moores and Popadiuk (2011) went on to say that social support plays an important role with respect to facilitating the intercultural transition. Many postsecondary institutions try, in a variety of ways, to encourage contact between international students and people from the host country. However, the different expectations and cultural standards surrounding the concept of relationship are a roadblock to the success of such initiatives. Improving the university community's multicultural skills is an objective that could be fostered by encouraging cultural

exchanges and providing international students with the possibilities of sharing their points of view and cultural knowledge.

#### **4. Best practices**

The development of best diversity integration and management practices has grown in recent years in Canada. The reason for this is the involvement of a host of new players in the field of immigration, such as medium-sized cities, rural communities and civil society. Consequently, immigration stakeholders develop strategies and means aimed at better integrating and including newcomers within the framework of the “welcoming community” (Biles, Burstein & Frideres, 2008). A good illustration of this is all the work that has been done around the welcoming communities’ initiative in 17 Ontario cities that has led to the identification of good reception practices in smaller cities (Esses et al., 2010).

It should be noted that best practices in terms of international student reception, integration and retention are particularly present at the micro level, since the ways they are being developed and the strategies vary considerably in the field. However, there are similar issues that can be transposed to other environments. The practices are distributed over three levels: what the educational institution does as an institution, what takes place between the university and community, notably the degree of involvement of immigration service providers and, lastly, what takes place in terms of employer awareness.

##### The University’s role:

Given that international students often find it difficult to develop meaningful relationships with the people from the host country, Gresham and Clayton (2011) examined the *Community Connections* program implemented at University of Newcastle’s Callaghan campus, in Australia. The Newcastle area is not considered to be culturally diverse, but the college receives international students coming from some 80 countries from around the world. With the exception of a paid coordinator, who manages the program, the resources to support the program’s success are primarily volunteer-based. The goal of the program is that of facilitating transcultural friendship development between international students and members (students) of the host community. The university promotes the program during orientation sessions at the beginning of the school year, in its various publications and through academic faculty and administrative staff. As part of this pilot project, thirty Australian students agreed to volunteer. Each student was required to take two training sessions and agree to an interview with the coordinator before being matched with an international student. Notable reasons expressed by international students who chose to take part in the program were the desire to learn more about the host country, the ability to share their own culture and develop friendships that could help them during their community integration process.

Some of the benefits of the program mentioned by the host students were the increase in their cultural adaptability, improved intercultural communication and a better appreciation of what it means to be an international student. Several also emphasized the fact that the program allowed them to make new friends, friends they would most likely not have met had they not taken part in the program. The host students felt that they had contributed to the experience of the

international students by helping them to better understand the Australian language and culture and by providing them with a greater sense of belonging. For the international students, the program allowed them to gain a better understanding of local history and knowledge, build friendships that they would most likely not have created outside the program, receive support in developing their knowledge of the language, increase their sense of personal well-being and create connections with locals who were ready and able to offer support.

As part of a study carried out in a major Canadian university, University of British Columbia, Guo and Chase (2011) examined the *Professional Development Program for International Teaching Assistants* designed to help international graduate students in the process of adapting to an academic environment to which they were unfamiliar. The research results demonstrate that the program succeeded in creating a space for transnational learning, where international students felt comfortable sharing their challenges and experiences and were able to develop a sense of belonging. Consequently, the mutual support provided by this space helped students integrate a Canadian learning environment more easily. Moreover, by focusing on intercultural content, the program's international curriculum also helped participants develop a greater respect for cultural diversity, while increasing their cultural awareness and ability to analyze and understand the world based on different perspectives.

According to Guo and Chase (2011) the program's success has important implications for host institutions by providing the appropriate levels of support to help international students in their transition and adaptation to studies in Canada. However, the programmatic responses must go beyond the traditional welcome activities upon arrival. It is important to address the combined academic, social and cultural needs. The integration of international students should not require their participation, but that of the other members of the university community (professors, administrative staff and students). With this type of approach, dealing with matters such as stereotypes and discrimination together should be a priority. Guo and Chase stress that in order to build an inclusive international campus where intercultural learning is encouraged and world citizenship shaped, it must be a collective effort.

### Beyond the campus walls:

The presence of small universities and lesser known destinations in the international student marketplace is perceived by some as a factor for meeting demographic and economic challenges (Eskelä, 2013; Walton-Roberts, 2008). In small communities, the university plays an important role in economic development and the establishment of connections with the other immigration stakeholders: governments, municipalities and economic players. Furthermore, the university campus is the ideal place for understanding new identity dynamics in environments characterized by small numbers of immigrants and a more homogenous local population than that of big urban centres. The university campus can be presented as a diversity laboratory that is interesting to understand and analyze from a theoretical and applied perspective (Wade & Belkhdja, 2012).

In light of the growth of international education in Australia, several responsibilities, with regard to international students, were transferred to universities. However, it turns out that some of the problems encountered by international students took place off campus, where the university can only offer limited support. Local governments, because of their contact with the

population and their increasingly important role in the delivery of services, need to play a bigger role to limit this gap (Paltridge, Mayson & Schapper, 2012).

According to Paltridge, Mayson and Schapper (2012), we need to establish social programs to encourage and facilitate network building and interaction between international students and local residents. Moreover, these programs should include services that provide support (for instance, information concerning their housing and employment rights) and promote multiculturalism at the community level. Some municipalities already offer several types of services that are useful to international students, but they are not always aware of their existence. They go on to suggest the establishment of advisory committees that would involve international students in discussion and decisionmaking around the provision of services that are relevant to their needs. The authors state that they are aware that the delivery of other services would involve additional costs for municipalities (that do not always possess the necessary resources), but that the use of volunteers (including international students), for instance, could be a means for reducing costs.

#### Employer awareness:

As highlighted in a report by the firm Deloitte published in 2011, the time has come for employers to take the risk of giving qualified immigrants an opportunity and embrace diversity in the workplace (Deloitte, 2011).

According to Gates-Gasse (2012), although many universities provide employers with information on the hiring of international students, few universities or municipalities target employers for the purpose of making them aware of or educating them on the benefits of hiring international students. The active promotion of international students as potential qualified employees by federal, provincial and municipal governments is an important element that should be part of an immigration strategy, in order to increase employer confidence in international students. She stresses three practices that have been implemented recently. First, in 2006, in Alberta, a collaborative campaign including the provincial and municipal governments, the Edmonton Economic Development Corporation (EEDC) and postsecondary institutions was launched in order to promote international students as prime candidates for employers. The campaign included a page on the EEDC website providing information (brochures, press releases), resources, event listings (breakfasts with employers, for instance). Next, New Brunswick's SolutionsNB website endorses immigration as a solution for meeting labour market demands and highlights the promotion of international students. The website provides information on the hiring of international graduate students, co-op students and students who are still studying. Lastly, as part of its immigration strategy launched in 2007, the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador created the *Employer's Guide to Hiring Immigrants and International Students*. This guide includes suggestions for employers on how to broaden their recruitment process in order to target international students, on how to conduct interviews with candidates for whom the mother tongue is not one of the two official languages of Canada, and how to assess the language skills and abilities of international students. In addition to the guide, a staff member of the Office of Immigration and Multiculturalism is in charge of educating/informing employers about the Provincial Nominee Program and promoting international students as ideal employees. The project is based on active, direct awareness

building aimed at dispelling myths surrounding the perceived difficulties of hiring international students and providing employers with accurate information on the recruitment of these students.

In 2010, the Greater Halifax Partnership (GHP) launched a campaign to welcome international students to their new city and better meet their needs. A welcome banner was hoisted onto the McDonald Bridge and the municipality held a meet and greet where the new international students were invited. Just like ISIS, the GHP catered to the settlement needs of international students by creating targeted programs and educating the area's employers. In 2011, a winning advertising campaign, with the telling title, *Immigration Works in Halifax*, invaded the city's advertising spaces and – according to those consulted as part of our study – was a big hit with employers, who were encouraged to hire immigrants and international students. On the campaign's website, *The Connector* program is one of the resources available for learning more about the benefits of hiring international graduates. Largely developed through funding from the Nova Scotia Office of Immigration, this program is a simplified version of the mentorship program run by ISIS. As stipulated by the *The Connector* program, Halifax business leaders must meet with international students who are about to finish their studies just one time “for a coffee” and to provide three other resources in their field of interest. The meetings between the business leaders and international students are of an informal nature and are aimed at reducing the pressure associated with job interviews for both the students and employers. However, according to the testimonies received, these meetings often end with a job offer. In the case where there is no employment offer, the international students and graduates will still have the possibility of establishing a professional network in the area. This program was launched two year ago and reached its objective of recruiting 50 business leaders over a period of a few months. It succeeded in highlighting the benefits of hiring international students and graduates for Nova Scotia's businesses. Approximately 350 business leaders currently take part in this program. *The Connector* program has been so successful that it was adopted in ten other Canadian cities, including Charlottetown, PEI and, recently, Sydney, NS<sup>8</sup>.

In Saint John's, two Memorial University initiatives, the Professional Skills Development Program (PSDP) and International Student Work Experience Program (ISWEP) were designed to increase the employability of students during and after their studies. The PSDP offers a six-month seminar where all the practical aspects of employment integration are explained. Each semester, approximately 100 students participate in the program. The PSDP is largely funded by tuition fees. In recent years, the university has increased its tuition fees, which vary between \$8,000 and \$10,000 for international students (prior, tuition fees were approximately \$6,000). The increase was not the result of provincial funding cuts, but rather a calculated decision by the University to offer international students additional programs.

## 5. Research needs

Some authors identified research needs as follows:

- One interesting matter is that of gaining a greater understanding of the difference between an international student and a highly qualified immigrant. According to Eskelä (2013, p.

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<sup>8</sup> <http://www.greaterhalifax.com/en/home/ourprograms/connectorprogram/default.aspx>

145): “there are few studies on the education levels and work experience of international students. It is, therefore, relevant to ask whether international students are any different from skilled labour migrants.”

- The relationships of international students and national students are often characterized by isolation, solitude and a pull-back toward one’s own ethnocultural community. This is seen in the classroom, but also the workplace. Few studies examine this phenomenon that goes beyond the issues of racism and racial discrimination (Guo & Chase, 2012).
- One finding from the literature review is that of noting the discrepancies that can exist between stakeholders when it comes time to find out who can offer student services (Mosneaga, 2013), notably between postsecondary institutions and settlement services. The integration path needs to be clearer for students and immigration stakeholders: the famous immigration continuum, from the intention to study abroad to the project to immigrate and settle post-graduation.
- Anxiety is something that receives little attention, but that is important to understand (Robertson, 2011b). The migrant’s temporariness in our societies reflects a different relationship to citizenship and inclusion (Rajkumar et al., 2012). The vulnerable situations of some students must not be dismissed, by thinking that all international students are the same. On the contrary, the level of education, country of origin, institutional choice (small campuses, geographical distance and low diversity) can all impact one’s ability to integrate.
- Are there differences between international students in different fields of study? Are international students studying particular fields of study more likely to remain and integrate? Moreover, comparative research in a variety of countries and educational institutions could add to our knowledge base regarding matters of career development for international students attempting to move between countries (Arthur & Flynn, 2011; Mosneaga & Winther, 2013).
- Longitudinal studies must be carried out in order to follow international students. Most of the research deals with a specific point in their educational and personal development; a more holistic vision would greatly improve our understanding (Popadiuk & Arthur, 2013).
- Some studies use participants who are already identified as successful international students and, therefore, they already represent a self-selected group. There are probably several who are not included in this category, since they are unable to obtain documents for employment or immigration purposes and, therefore, this should be a future research consideration. However, the emphasis placed on successful international students (the “good students”) provides positive and best practice examples to be followed (Popadiuk & Arthur, 2013; Moores & Popadiuk, 2011). Research should focus on international students who are considered “at-risk” (Rienties & Tempelaar, 2013).
- Some studies use small samples and homogenous groups of international students. The use of a homogenous sample provides a relatively limited range of answers that does not

necessarily take the diversity of the international student population into account (Nunes & Arthur, 2013).

## **Conclusion and recommendations**

This literature review has allowed us to observe the scope of academic research on international students here and elsewhere. It has also allowed us to look at diversity and differences between international students and the environments capable of receiving them. The true contribution of students to Canadian prosperity will depend on an analysis that can take plurality into account and not one based on a profile of the ideal international student.

In an economic context where finding the right talents and skills is a challenge for the prosperity and innovation of a knowledge-based economy like Canada, international students with a degree from a Canadian university or college are valued by many stakeholders who can contribute to the more specific needs of the labour market. One thing is clear: Canada wants to increase its reception capacity for international students. To achieve this, it has developed promotion and recruitment strategies involving the country's postsecondary institutions. It has adjusted its immigration policies in order to make the transition process a more fluid one. Lastly, it would like to involve economic players in a selection process that targets short-term market demands more closely. The economic contribution of international students in the Canadian labour market depends on its ability to develop the skills and conditions that promote the professional integration of highly qualified individuals.

In the new reality of major reforms to the Canadian immigration system, a critical eye must also guide research.

First, it is important to understand the reasons pushing universities and colleges to intensify their international recruitment efforts. It is obvious that – due to differential tuition fees – international students are an additional source of income for postsecondary institutions, and that these institutions try their luck in the lucrative international student recruitment market. There is then a danger of wanting to develop customized training aimed at very specific client groups, at the risk of neglecting the quality of university education (Alboim & Cohl, 2012). It is also important to understand the distinction between student recruitment that targets undergraduate programs and that aimed at graduate students. This dimension can then later come into play in integration and retention outcomes.

Second, the successful integration of international students requires a broad range of services, including settlement, integration and a project to remain post-graduation. In the context of internationalization, some universities focus primarily on promotion and recruitment, but less on monitoring international students during their studies and post-graduation. Several studies emphasize the importance of not overlooking certain elements of integration into Canadian society: social integration, friendships with Canadian students and classroom dynamics.

Third, in order to facilitate the student's transition towards permanent residency, settlement and welcoming structures receive a temporary clientele, but they are not able to adequately meet its needs. Since 2008, major reforms to the Canadian immigration system have affected the delivery of services for different categories of immigrants. Increasingly, the

temporality of the immigrant status in Canada is a reflection of a complex, hierarchical system (Hari, McGrath & Preston, 2013; Rajkumar et al. 2012).

Lastly, the involvement of economic players remains problematic and requires considerable work in terms of employee awareness in small and medium-sized businesses. A homogenous population and highly hermetic business environment can lead to problems for international graduates who find it difficult to develop a professional network. However, there are many interesting initiatives, such as mentoring, volunteering and training for the context of the Canadian market. It is also important to examine the quality of the integration of international students into Canadian society. With respect to this, the involvement of municipalities and civil society players must translate into concrete actions beyond advisory committees and round tables on the welcoming of newcomers. The local level is a place for developing innovative welcoming and integration strategies (CMF, 2011).

## **Recommendations**

A series of more practical recommendations emerge from the literature and are consistent with the 5 key research questions:

- Research shows that it has become essential to better inform international students of the existence of programs that could lead to permanent residency (Chira & Belkhodja, 2012). From the point of view of educational institutions, this matter remains, however, delicate. On the one hand, the international students are not all committed to this direction: some express their desire to return to their country of origin (Soon, 2010, 2012). On the other, postsecondary institutions are affected by the recent Bill C-35 to amend the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act that prohibits any person other than an accredited representative from carrying out immigration activities.
- Accessibility to settlement services must reach international students and temporary workers (Gates-Gasse, 2012). This issue is increasingly decisive in Canada, due to reforms brought to the immigration system since 2008.
- When appropriate, university counselors should explore the possibilities that could allow international students to increase their language fluency and develop practical strategies for reducing their level of anxiety tied to having to talk in a second language. New students can learn a lot about strategies used for improving their English or French and learn more about the elements and subtleties of Canadian culture. As for students approaching the end of their studies, they could benefit from vocational counseling services to help them explore their new identities and new educational and professional options (Arthur & Flynn, 2011).
- Employers need to be made aware of the benefits of hiring international students and therefore need to be better informed about employment policies and standards. As for international students, they need contacts in order to find work or pursue employment opportunities. During their studies, they need to try their hand at a number of employment experiences, take advantage of co-op programs or internships, receive the assistance of



mentors and acquire references through the relationships built in these working environments. Postsecondary institutions can act as intermediary with the labour market, by helping international students to better understand the advantages of completing internships and facilitating their placement (Popadiuk & Arthur, 2013).

- It is important for guidance counselors to be able to evaluate the degree to which the family and other connections are a priority in their career choice. The influence of collectivist visions or values is an important consideration that guidance counselors must take into consideration, which means that, consequently, they must avoid emphasizing individualism and autonomous decisionmaking. Counselors must be aware of the underlying assumptions in the theories and models of professional guidance services that are used to guide their practices, otherwise, they may impose ideas about how to make decisions and ignore the primary considerations of people for whom decisionmaking is a more relational process. Counselors are encouraged to explore the strengths of international students and avoid labeling them as having deficits because of their preference for interdependence. The career choice of many international students is often limited by their cultural orientation, and guidance counselors are encouraged to be open to multiple world views (Popadiuk & Arthur, 2013).
- It is important to improve the quality of career development services offered to international students (for instance, experienced staff with adequate knowledge of immigration policies). Guidance counselors should also evaluate the acculturation level of international students and provide interventions accordingly (for instance, make international students aware of the cultural values and encourage them to socialize with national students). Moreover, international students can benefit from support groups or peer mentorship programs, including other international students who have had similar experiences (Sangganjanavanich, Lenz, & Cavazos, 2011).
- Employment services must target and invite experienced employers sponsoring the international student work permits. Working with the alumni association in order to follow up on the residence location and employment of international graduates can provide staff working in international student services with useful information. Former internationals working in the labour market domestically or abroad may have connections to senior positions and might act as mentors with current students. When qualified employers, in other words employers who can hire international students, are absent from various activities, the great majority of students without work authorization are discouraged from participating. Career services should strive to broaden its community awareness program with international students, by developing brochures in several different languages (describing services) that could be circulated in international student associations and campus facilities where international students are most often found. Channels for communicating information must be diversified to include online services, with links to websites where legislation information on foreign workers can be found (Shen & Herr, 2004).
- On-campus guidance services must be proactive in helping students sell their unique international experience to potential employers. Guidance services must truly act as a

liaison officer between organizations like the CIC and Canadian employers and provide these stakeholders with up-to-date information on the ways to hire international students. It is also important for postsecondary institutions to seek Government of Canada funding to increase staffing levels and strengthen services, programs and activities intended for international students. Professional guidance services staff could look at developing resources for international students at the international level, like a database of companies interested in hiring individuals with a university degree. Moreover, guidance services could organize workshops dealing with the techniques that students can use to promote the skills they've acquired through a university education. These workshops could also support students in their efforts to develop their networking skills, which could be carried out in a group setting where counselors explain what a professional network is and organize opportunities for students to develop a network (for instance, volunteer work and job fairs) (Nunes & Arthur, 2013).

- Consider the possibility of establishing a survey method like the one used in Australia, where a sample of visitors leaving the country would be interviewed about their experience in Canada. This should take place in key international airports and should be done in a certain number of languages (Kunin & Associates, 2012).
- Work with stakeholders (including CIC, Statistics Canada and universities, colleges and other educational institutions) to develop a coherent archiving system for following the expenditures of international students when they are in Canada (Kunin & Associates, 2012).
- Work with Statistics Canada to develop a national survey on public and private education institutions, in order to determine student enrollment numbers, tuition fees and other study program expenses as well as other training programs for adults or continuing education that are less than six months (Kunin & Associates, 2012).
- Coordinate with provincial government and national organizations in order to develop questions, in view of obtaining coherent surveys on international students. (Kunin & Associates, 2012).

