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Globe editorial

Let's take young Canadians to the world

Just 3 per cent of undergraduates head out into the world beyond this country's borders as part of their university studies.

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From Friday's Globe and Mail

Canadian university students are alarmingly provincial, in a globalized age. Just 3 per cent of undergraduates head out into the world beyond this country's borders as part of their university studies. This represents a lost opportunity of epic scope, to the students first and foremost, but also to Canada.

The area is ripe for innovation at both the federal and provincial levels, perhaps in partnership with the private sector, which would benefit from the language skills, international relationships, new perspectives and greater depth and maturity that study abroad may provide.

In the United States, whose students are no more likely than Canada's to step past their national borders for their studies, a bill before Congress aims at raising the number who do so to one million a year within 10 years, from the current 200,000. It would dedicate \$80-million a year to individual students, colleges and organizations that provide opportunities to study abroad. "Ignorance of the world is a national liability," say Tom Kean and Lee Hamilton, the heads of the U.S. commission that investigated the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001.

Canadian universities should aim to make study abroad a critical part of their programs. That will require money and vision. Institutions fund what they value, says a new study commissioned by the Canadian Bureau for International Education, a non-profit group. The report's first recommendation is for institution-wide policies on making study more international, rather than the current ad-hoc approach.

Some terrific foreign-study programs are happening. At the University of Alberta's faculty of education, 22 students are in Ghana for a month, along with student nurses and a student of agriculture. The faculty of education has contributed \$1,000 per student, and the Alberta government another \$750 per student (there's a provincial fund for foreign study); the overall cost is \$5,000 to \$6,000 a student. "In some cases the students have taken out loans, because they think the program is so valuable," says George Richardson, the faculty's associate dean, international.

Students will study in foreign countries if the opportunities are available. The culture of postsecondary education will change to incorporate a foreign component. Build it and they will come - or in this case, go.

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