



The Student's Voice: National Results of the 2018 CBIE International Student Survey

A U G U S T 2 0 1 8

The Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE) has been studying, interpreting and sharing the experience of international students in Canada since 1988. The CBIE International Student Survey is a unique, national dataset which provides critical, holistic insights on the international student experience in Canada's post-secondary institutions, from pre-arrival planning through study and post-study phases.

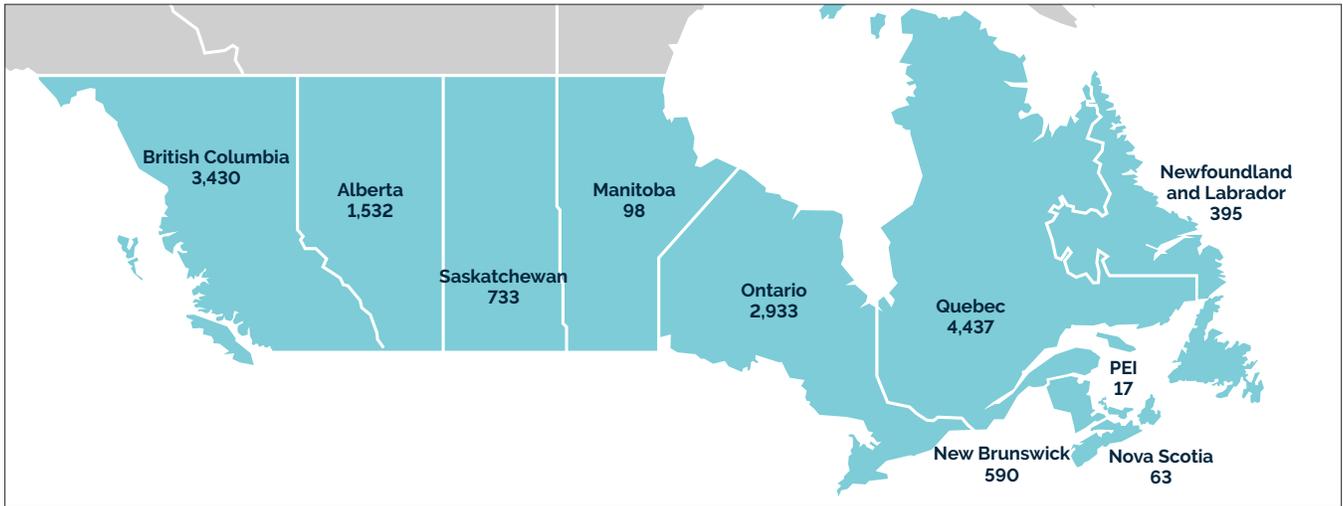
Since the inaugural edition of the annual International Student Survey for A World of Learning in 2012, the number of student respondents and the scope of knowledge and trends illuminated through the dataset have grown immensely. The survey increasingly supports the international education sector's capacity to drive informed, innovative practices through increased familiarity with international students who choose to study in Canada, and the stories they share with other prospective students.

As international student numbers in Canada reached record highs in 2017, trends in local and global student mobility, geopolitics and education generated greater waves of impact in our interconnected world. CBIE is pleased to amplify the voices of international students who choose Canada for their post-secondary studies, to celebrate their experiences and their aspirations, and to identify and support our sector in maintaining quality post-secondary education experiences for students in Canada.

THE 2018 CBIE INTERNATIONAL STUDENT SURVEY

The 2018 survey was live from March to May. In total, 46^{1,2} of CBIE's university (31), college (12) and polytechnic (3) member institutions surveyed their current international student populations. This group of institutions is diverse and representative of the Canadian post-secondary landscape, yielding data that are reliable and valid across the sector. As a national body CBIE strives for regional and linguistic representation in every data collection exercise. In the 2018 survey institutions from all ten provinces are represented: Seven institutions are francophone, two are officially bilingual, and the remainder operate in English. CBIE received 14,228 complete,

Figure 1: Surveys completed by province of study



useable responses. This sample is an extraordinary 253% increase over 2015, making it by far the most robust data source on the post-secondary international student experience in Canada to date.

As shown in Figure 1, the provincial representation of respondents is as follows: Alberta (1,532), British Columbia (3,430), Manitoba (98),

New Brunswick (590), Newfoundland and Labrador (395), Nova Scotia (63), Ontario (2,933), Prince Edward Island (17), Quebec (4,437) and Saskatchewan (733).

Characteristics

This sample of 14,228 post-secondary international students represents 4% of all post-secondary international students in Canada³.

As seen in Figure 2, approximately 35% of respondents are studying toward a bachelor’s degree, followed by 22% pursuing a master’s degree, 17% are enrolled in a doctoral program, and 13% are pursuing a diploma.

As shown in Figure 3, most respondents are in their first year (37%), second or third year of a multi-year

Figure 2: Degree, diploma or certificate sought

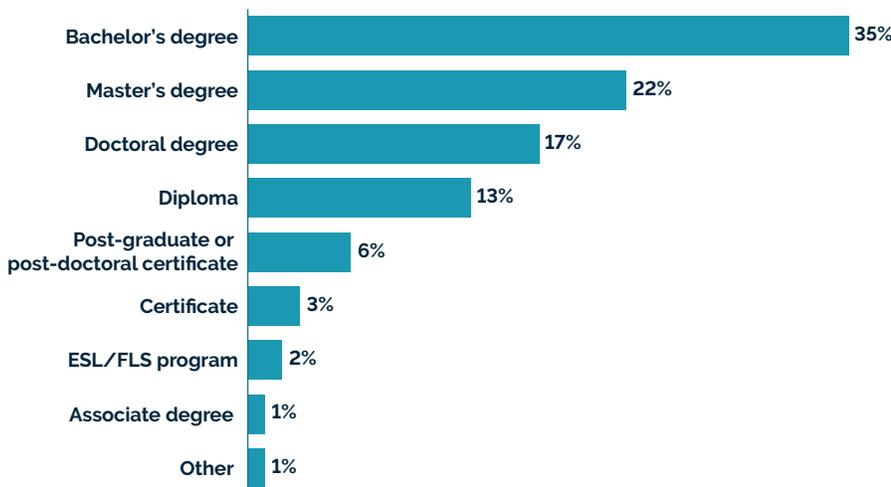


Figure 3: Year of study

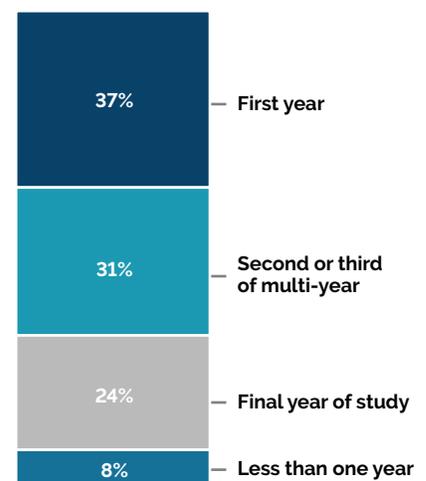
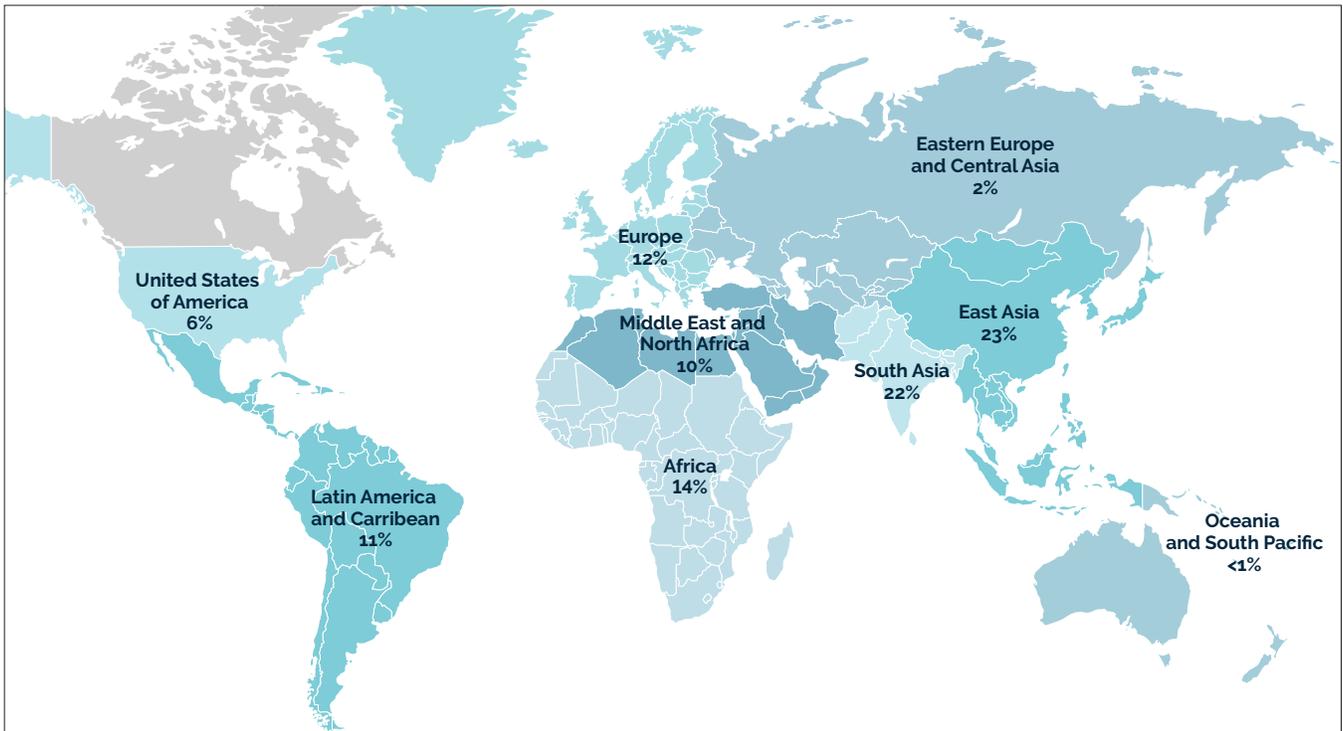


Figure 4: Region of origin

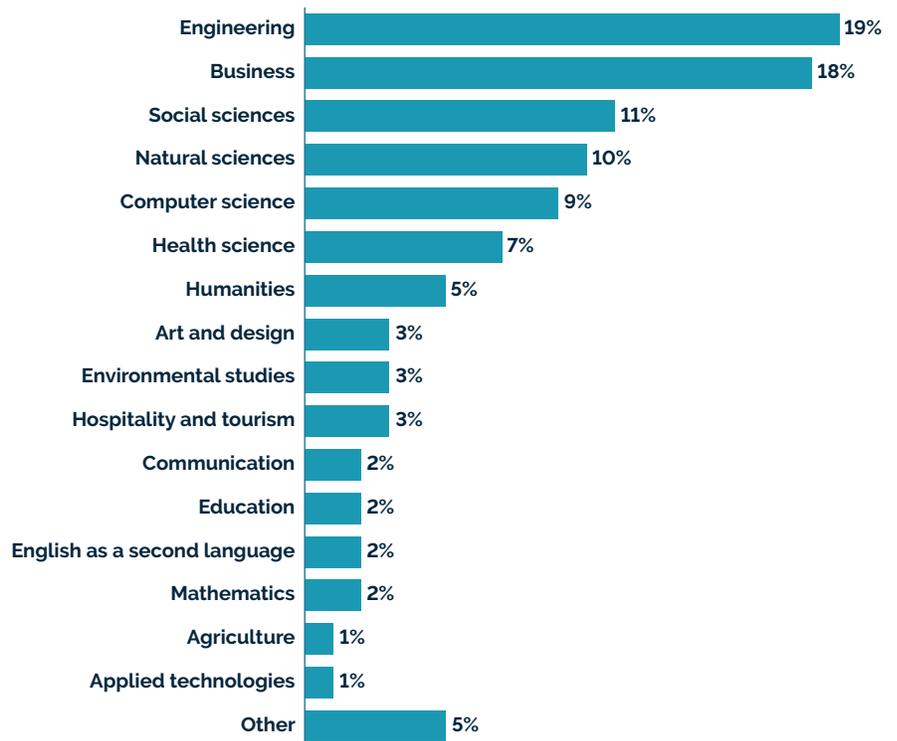


program (31%), or in their final year of studies (24%). A smaller proportion of respondents are studying in a program that is less than one year (8%).

Figure 4 depicts the region of origin of students in the 2018 survey sample. Students from East Asia comprise the largest regional group in the sample (23%), followed by South Asia (22%), Africa (14%), and Europe (12%).

As shown in Figure 5, respondents are studying in various fields, with the top fields being engineering (19%), business (18%), social sciences (11%) and natural sciences (10%).

Figure 5: Fields of study



Deciding to study in Canada

In the survey, 29% of respondents had applied to institutions in countries other than Canada before ultimately choosing their current Canadian institution.

Of the students who applied to study in another country, over half (54%) applied to the US, 22% applied to the UK, and 15% applied to Australia (see Figure 6). Adding to the analysis the 2017 Project Atlas figures detailing top study destinations of international students worldwide, Canada's

"I love the fact that we have so much more hands-on experience in all the classes. I love the way the professors challenge you and work on improving your cognitive skills. I love the way we are guided through a course. I love the fact that the professors are passionate about what they teach."

Natural sciences student from Moldova (F)

market position comes into clearer view (see Figure 7). For example, while Canada's top two competitors for international students are the top hosts of all international students (US and UK), Canada competes more directly with

Australia and France than China—the world's third top study destination. In 2017 for the first time Canada leapt ahead of both of these competitors (Australia and France) with regard to total market share.

Figure 6: Countries to which students applied before choosing Canada

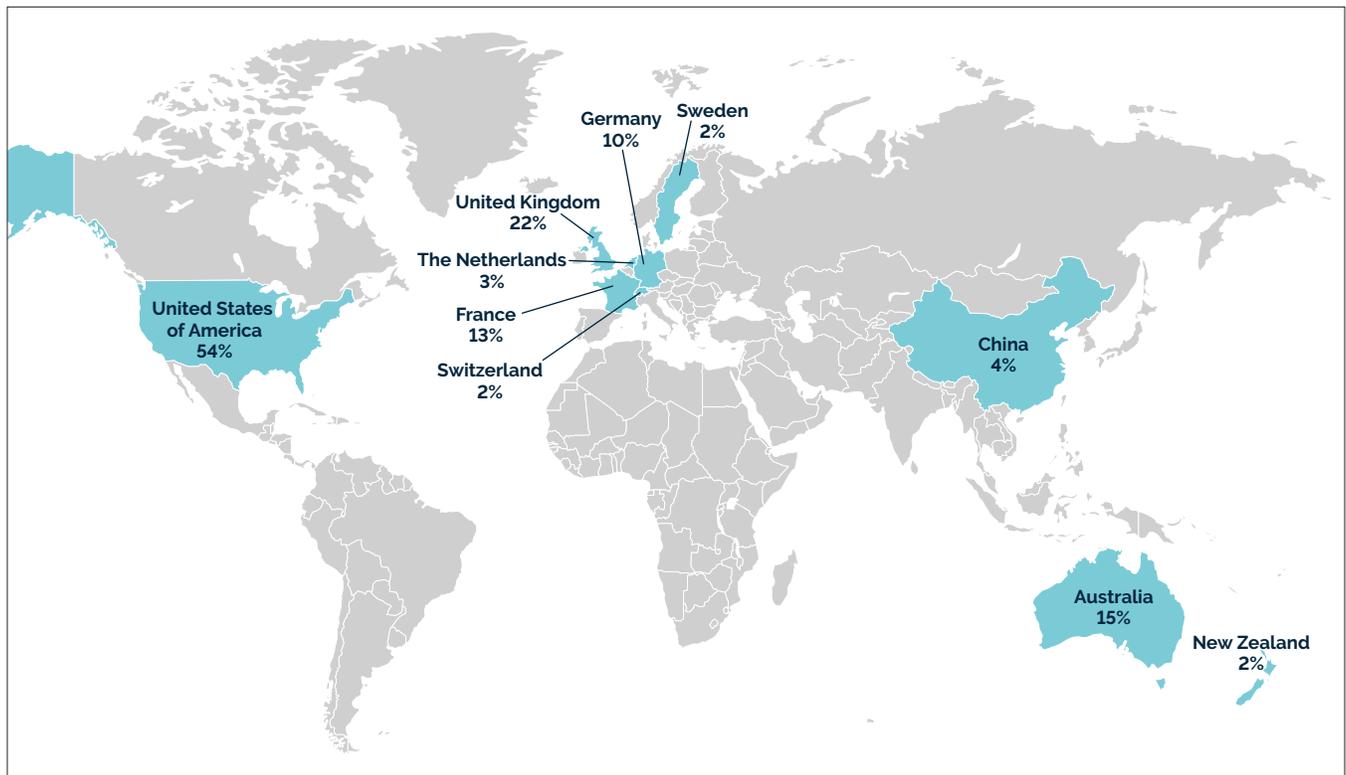
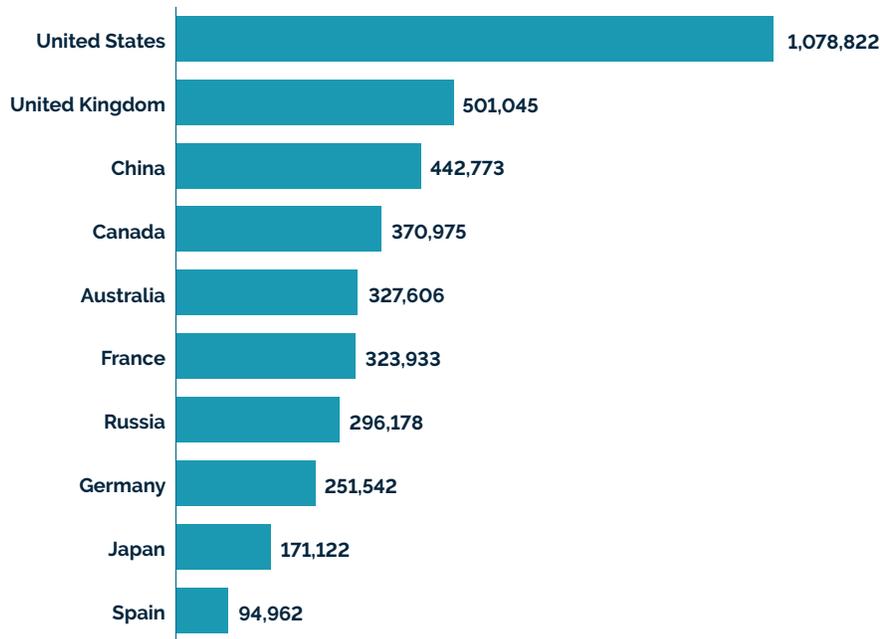


Figure 7: Top higher education host destinations



Source: Project Atlas, 2017

Students choose their study destination based on a variety of factors including academic reputation, flexibility and duration of programs, the international prestige of a qualification from a particular country/institution, admission policies, permanent migration and employment opportunities, cultural/linguistic links and

financial considerations. In the 2018 survey the top three reasons that international students chose to study in Canada were:

The reputation of the education system in Canada: 82% said this was either essential (36%) or very important (46%);

Canada offers a society that, in general, is tolerant and non-discriminatory: 79% said this was either essential (34%) or very important (45%); and

Canada's reputation as a safe country: 78% said this was either essential (36%) or very important (42%).

HOW DO INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS CHOOSE THEIR INSTITUTION?

When choosing an institution in Canada, international students again consider a multitude of factors. According to the survey, the top three reasons that international students choose to study at their institution are as follows:

The quality of education at this institution: 84% said this was either essential (37%) or very important (47%);

The prestige of a degree/ diploma from this institution: 75% said this was either essential (32%) or very important (43%); and

The availability of a particular program at this institution: 68% said this was either essential (29%) or very important (39%).

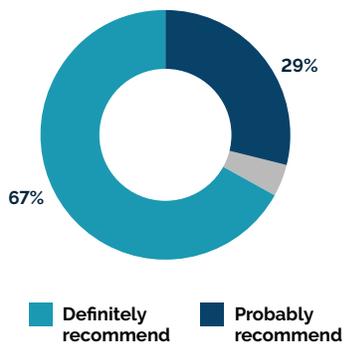
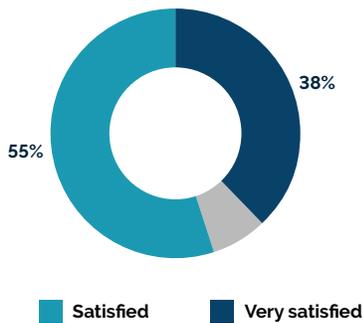
"The startup community and faculty members are incredibly kind, empathetic and supportive people... Professionals both inside and outside the university whom I have had the pleasure to interact with continue to encourage me and help me where they can to pursue my goals and improve every day and that means the world to me."

Student from Trinidad and Tobago (M)

ARE STUDENTS SATISFIED WITH THEIR DECISION TO STUDY IN CANADA?

As shown in Figure 8, the vast majority of international students are satisfied with their educational experience in Canada. Approximately 93% of students stated that they are either satisfied (55%) or very satisfied (38%), and 96% of students would definitely (67%) or probably (29%) recommend Canada as a study destination.

Figure 8:
Satisfaction with educational experience in Canada



Student success

Almost all students (95%) stated that they are succeeding in meeting the academic demands of their program, with 57% responding that they are having a lot of success and 38% responding that they are having some success (see Figure 9). Students were considerably less likely to report the same degree of success in becoming involved in campus activities, with just 73% responding that they are either having a lot of success (29%) or some success (44%) in this regard.

WHAT DO INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS PLAN TO DO AFTER THEIR STUDIES?

Future citizens

In the 2018 survey, 60% of all respondents indicated their intention to apply for permanent resident status in Canada in the future (see Figure 10). This is a marked jump from the 51% of respondents who indicated this intention in 2015.

Study and work plans

In the years immediately following their studies even more students intend to remain in Canada at least on a temporary basis to study and/or work. Almost half of

the students indicated their intention to remain in Canada in order to obtain further education. Students who wished to remain in Canada to study were most likely to pursue further education in a different institution (25%) while 21% indicated they would remain at their current institution (see Figure 11).

Over two-thirds (70%) of all students indicated their intention to find work in Canada following their studies. Working

Figure 9:
Success meeting academic demands

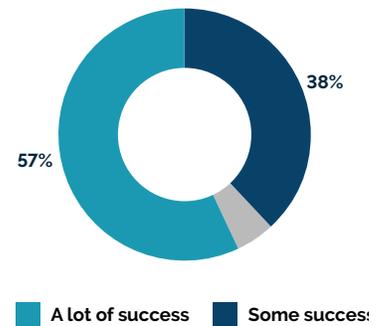


Figure 10:
Do you plan to apply for permanent resident status in Canada?

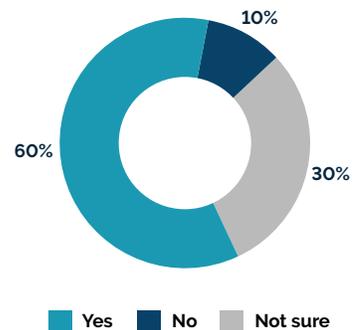


Figure 11: Study plans following current program of study

None, I do not have any plans to further my education	43%
Study for another degree/diploma at another Canadian educational institution	25%
Study for another degree/diploma at this institution	21%
Study for another degree/diploma in a country that is neither Canada nor my home country	7%
Study for another degree/diploma in my home country	4%

Figure 12: Employment plans following current program of study

Work permanently in Canada (become a permanent resident of Canada)	49%
Work for up to three years in Canada, before returning home	21%
None, I do not have any work-related plans	13%
Look for work in my home country	9%
Look for work in another country that is neither Canada nor my home country	5%
Return to previous job in my home country	3%

permanently in Canada was the more likely option, with 49% of all respondents indicating this intention, while an additional 21% expressed their intention to work on a temporary basis in Canada for up to three years, before returning to their home country (see Figure 12).

Dependents

A new feature in this year’s survey was an exploration of the experience of international students who have dependents (spouses and/or children) who may or may not also be in Canada during the respondent’s studies.

Marital status

Of all students surveyed, 82% of respondents indicated their marital status as single,

while 14% indicated that they were married and 4% identified as being in a common-law relationship (see Figure 13).

The number of married or common-law students was considerably higher for doctoral

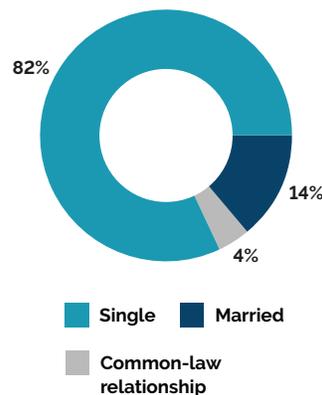
students where 31% indicated that they were married and 9% identified as being in a common-law relationship.

Of those students who indicated being married or having a common-law spouse, 64% indicated that their spouse had accompanied them to Canada for their studies and of those, 57% indicated satisfaction regarding the institutional support their spouse had received to settle and integrate into the community.

Children

A small number of students (7%) indicated that they had children, with almost half of these (49%) having one child, 33% having

Figure 13: Marital status of international students



two children and 18% having more than two.

The number of doctoral students with children was highest with 16% having at least one child.

Two-thirds (67%) of students with children were accompanied by their children in Canada for the duration of their studies and, of those, 58% indicated satisfaction regarding the institutional support their children had received to settle and integrate into the community.

Housing

Housing is one of the largest costs an international student in Canada will incur. In many housing markets during the past few years both affordability and accessibility have decreased, calling for close monitoring of the situation by stakeholders across the international education sector.

While almost all (97%) of respondents feel safe in their accommodation, 79% of respondents indicated feeling either somewhat (42%) or very concerned (37%) about being able to cover the cost of their accommodation.

That number climbs to 84% for students studying at institutions in Canada's five

hottest housing markets of Vancouver, Toronto, Victoria, Calgary and Hamilton/Burlington. In these cities 46% of students indicated feeling very concerned about being able to cover the cost of their accommodation.

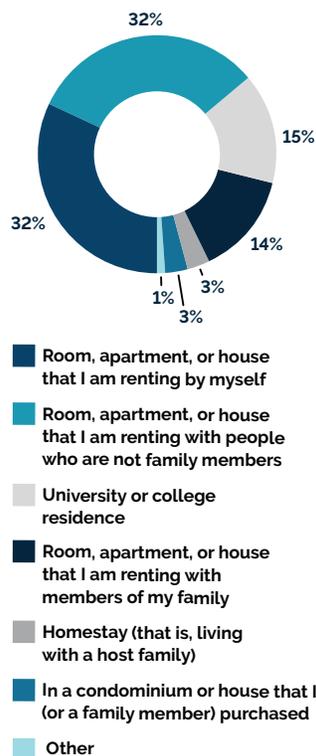
Just under half (48%) of students indicated that arranging for a place to live prior to arrival was problematic, with 15% indicating it was a big problem, and 33% indicating it was somewhat of a problem. When analysing the situation

for students in the more difficult housing markets the percentage of students citing problems grows to 55%, with 20% indicating that arranging accommodation for their studies was a big problem.

INDIGENOUS IDENTITY AND WAYS OF KNOWING

The CBIE International Student Survey is a tool which can indicate how international students experience themes at the fore of Canada's education sector. This year, at the request of CBIE members, the survey collected data relating to Indigenous identity and ways of knowing in order to deepen the education sector's appreciation of the intersectionality that many international students bring with their own Indigenous identities, and understand how international students experience Indigenous knowledge during their studies in Canada. CBIE and its members are deeply grateful to experts from the Assembly of First Nations (AFN), the Métis Nation and Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK) for lending their careful consideration and guidance in designing the questions relating to First Nations, Métis and Inuit knowledge and culture in Canada.

Figure 14: Types of accommodation



“The most positive aspect of my studies in Canada is that I had the opportunity not only in the academic field but personally too, getting to know people from many different cultures.”

Engineering student from El Salvador (M)

Indigenous identity

International students were asked if they identify as Indigenous to their home country. In the absence of a clear and universal definition of the term, many respondents (19%) indicated that they didn't understand the question. An additional 17% indicated that they were unsure, while 52% definitively answered 'no' and 12% did identify as Indigenous to their home country.

Of those respondents who identified as Indigenous to their home country, 46% (just under 800 respondents) were able to articulate the Indigenous group or groups that they identify with.

International student experience with Indigenous identity and ways of knowing

International students were asked if they had learned about Indigenous (First Nations, Inuit and Métis) knowledge

and cultures since arriving to study at their current Canadian institution. Just under half (46%) responded that they had learned about Indigenous history and cultures. Respondents studying at a university were slightly more likely (48%) to indicate that they had learned about Indigenous ways of knowing, cultures and history than their peers at the polytechnic and college level (36%).

Just over half of respondents who had learned about Indigenous ways of knowing and cultures indicated that this took place in the classroom (54%), followed by the media and fellow students (both 45%), campus events (36%) and local Indigenous organizations (on campus or in the community, 27%).

Among respondents who had learned about First Nations, Inuit and Métis ways of knowing and identity, 75% indicated that this learning had increased their

appreciation for Indigenous issues somewhat (41%) or very much (34%).

When asked to describe what they recalled learning about the knowledge and cultures of First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples, respondents' comments ranged from deeply troubling and negative, to neutral and indifferent, to constructive and positive. The following are curated comments demonstrating some promising practices at institutions and testimonials about their impact:

“I have learned about the people whose land my university resides on and how to mend the gap of knowledge.” *International student pursuing studies on the traditional and unceded territory of the Abenaki people and the Wabenaki confederacy (M)*

“... There have been several events where our university has invited the Chief and several other people from the Mi'kmaq tribe of First Nations. Through these events I learnt the history of Mi'kmaq and how they were the first civilization in Nova Scotia. Our university has a tradition of celebrating Mi'kmaq festivals and also, the traditional dance,

before several big university events.” *International student pursuing studies on the ancestral and unceded territory of the Mi’kmaq People (F)*

“We organized a workshop on Mi’kmaq language. Prior to that, we talked about Indigenous Knowledge in several different courses in the Bachelor of Education.” *International student pursuing studies on the ancestral and unceded territory of the Mi’kmaq People (F)*

“Many classes have focused on the colonization of the country and its negative effects on Indigenous peoples. During my second year, an office run by First Nations women was established as a means to better educate the campus in its entirety. Additionally, the past 2 years have been ‘year of Indigenous knowing’ and a ‘year of Indigenous study.’” *International student pursuing studies on the traditional unceded territory of the Wəlastəkwiyyik (Maliseet) and Mi’kmaq Peoples (M)*

“One day an Indigenous girl came to talk at a campus event about her culture and experiences and I learned a lot, I realized that most of

“The most positive part has been the student-centric, enquiry based approach to education in my institution. The instructors listen to opinions from all students and provide a safe space for everyone to speak up.”

Education student from India (F)

the things I heard from my friends wasn’t true at all.” *International student pursuing studies on the traditional unceded territory of the Wəlastəkwiyyik (Maliseet) and Mi’kmaq Peoples (M)*

“I’ve learned about how first nations peoples managed landscapes and ecosystems prior to colonization.” *International student pursuing natural sciences studies on the unceded territory of the Coast Salish peoples (M)*

EMPLOYMENT

For the majority of international post-secondary students in Canada the opportunity to work during and after their studies is a key driver for deciding to study in Canada. Almost two-thirds of respondents indicated that the opportunity to work while studying in Canada was either essential (29%) or very important (33%)

and 75% indicated that the opportunity to work in Canada following their studies was essential (42%) or very important (33%) in their calculation to choose Canada as a study destination.

As we saw earlier in this chapter, 21% of survey respondents intend to work for up to three years in Canada before returning home, while almost half intend to work permanently in Canada and become a permanent resident.

Growing and supporting employability

Students responded strongly that their Canadian education had been beneficial for preparing them for employment in Canada with 87% saying it has been somewhat (33%) or very (54%) beneficial.

Just over half (54%) of respondents indicated that they had accessed career services at their institution.

Figure 15: Challenges finding employment

I don't have enough work experience	52%
I have not found appropriate jobs to apply to	37%
I have no time to work	33%
I struggle to describe my skills and abilities	29%
Canadian employers don't understand that I can legally work in Canada	13%

Of those who had made use of such services, 19% were very satisfied and 60% indicated they were satisfied with the support they received.

Employment experience during studies

We asked students who indicated that working during studies was important to them if they had success in finding and maintaining employment. Just under half (43%) of this group were employed at the time of the survey. When asked about the top three financial supports that are helping respondents to pay for their education in Canada, 16% of all students surveyed indicated that on-campus work income was a top source.

Of those who were not working, 56% indicated that they were having difficulty finding work. When asked about the challenges in finding work, this group of respondents indicated their top challenges as: not having enough work experience (52%), not

“Canada is welcoming, friendly, and cheerful and that makes me feel good in spite of being thousands of miles away from home.”

Business student from India (F)

finding appropriate jobs to apply to (37%), and having no time to work (33%) (see Figure 15).

In addition to the challenges above many students offered their perspectives about different and often compounding challenges with regard to working as an international student during their studies. Some of these challenges included a sense of employer discrimination against international work experience, cultural differences, eligibility to work in Canada and the challenge of investing scarce time and energy into networking:

“Canadian employers are disregarding international work experience. They want references and Canadian work experience.” (M)

“One challenge is the difference of how to present my Resume, CV, Cover letter and the difference of work culture between my country and Canada.” (F)

“Upon receiving my study permit Immigration representatives stated that I am prohibited from work with no reason.” (F)

“Networking takes A LOT of time (and I don’t have this time during my studies) and we need to network a lot before having an opportunity.” (M)

CONCLUSION NOTES

As Canada’s international student population continues to grow and institutions prioritize internationalization,

data—quantitative and qualitative—become increasingly important.

CBIE provides analysis and mobilizes the International Student Survey data in order to grow understanding of the international student experience and to support institutions, organizations, governments and other

stakeholders to enhance this experience and, in so doing, realize their own objectives.

This year marked the fifth iteration of the CBIE International Student Survey and a major increase in institutional participation and student response. Through the expanding longitudinal

perspective and growing student sample over these five iterations, CBIE will delve into major trends over time and conduct more detailed analyses in order to increase the capacity of the international education sector to make informed decisions and develop even stronger policies and programs.

CBIE RESEARCH IN BRIEF

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ENDNOTES

- 1 Assiniboine Community College, Bishop's University, Bow Valley College, Camosun College, Collège communautaire de Nouveau Brunswick, College of New Caledonia, Concordia University, Fanshawe College, Institut national de la recherche scientifique, King's at Western University, Langara College, LaSalle College, Laurentian University, Loyalist College, MacEwan University, McGill University, McMaster University, Memorial University of Newfoundland, Mount Allison University, Mount Saint Vincent University, New Brunswick Community College, Niagara College, Nipissing University, Northern Alberta Institute of Technology, Royal Roads University, Saskatchewan Polytechnic, Simon Fraser University, Southern Alberta Institute of Technology, St. Thomas University, Thompson Rivers University, Université de Moncton, Université de Montréal, Université de Saint-Boniface, Université du Québec à Rimouski, Université Laval, University of Alberta, University of New Brunswick, University of Northern British Columbia, University of Ottawa, University of Prince Edward Island, University of Regina, University of Saskatchewan, University of Victoria, Vancouver Community College, Vancouver Island University, Western University
- 2 Participating institutions may access raw data, custom datasets and comparative analysis. For more information contact communication@cbie.ca.
- 3 This sample represents approximately 3.8% of all post-secondary international students in Canada according to 2017 data reported by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (370,975 study permit holders at the post-secondary level).