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# Canada in the World

Results of the CBIE Learning Abroad Survey Initiative

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Canadian Bureau for  
International Education

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## **The Canadian Bureau for International Education**

The Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE) is a global leader in international education, dedicated to equity, quality, inclusiveness, and partnership. CBIE is the national voice advancing Canadian international education by creating and mobilizing expertise, knowledge, opportunity, and leadership.

CBIE's pan-Canadian membership comprises all levels of education, including school boards, cégeps, colleges, institutes, language schools, polytechnics, and universities, which enrol almost two million students from coast to coast to coast

CBIE's activities comprise advocacy, research, training programs, scholarship management, and engaging in cooperative projects in capacity building, institutional strengthening, and human resource development.

This report, prepared by CBIE, summarizes the results of the Learning Abroad Survey, which was administered in collaboration with CBIE's participating member institutions.

### **Suggested citation**

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# Introduction

I am very pleased to share the results of CBIE's 2023 Learning Abroad Survey. As the only organization in Canada dedicated to international education across all levels, CBIE is committed to playing a leadership role in collecting and disseminating timely and relevant data to inform important policy and program decision-making in our sector.

CBIE previously collected data on learning abroad in 2009 and 2016. The 2023 Learning Abroad Survey initiative was expanded to include both a Student and Alumni Survey and an Institutional Survey to better understand current trends in learning abroad experiences. Now that this important contribution to data collection has been established, we have a solid foundation from which to amass robust and standardized longitudinal data on outbound mobility activities in Canada in future iterations of the survey. This data will enable evidence-based decision-making around future policies and programming that ensure outbound mobility opportunities facilitate global skills development for greater numbers of students and advance Canada's long-term global engagement interests.

The results of this survey initiative provide valuable insights into the current state of Canadian efforts to increase the number and diversity of students pursuing international experiences as part of their Canadian education — where there has been improvement and innovation and where there is still more work to be done to facilitate greater access to opportunities and ensure greater impact.

It has been a challenging number of years in the international education sector, with a global pandemic and geopolitical disruptions to business as usual. Against this backdrop of heightened geopolitical volatility and a global rise in acts of hatred and intolerance, the imperative for intercultural understanding is greater than ever. The results of this survey demonstrate a very strong commitment on the part of both students and institutions to pursue and facilitate international learning in recognition of the value that such experiences bring.

The design and timing of this survey have allowed us to capture what outbound mobility looked like over three distinct periods: pre-pandemic, during the pandemic, and coming out of the pandemic (not quite one full school year following the lifting of most travel restrictions). These results allow us to analyze not only how the sector is recovering in terms of the numbers of students pursuing learning abroad experiences but also how the opportunities available to and being sought after by students have evolved and changed over this period.

I am confident that international education leaders and practitioners alike will find the results of this survey to be informative, engaging, and instructional for the path forward in positioning learning abroad as a critical tool to equip youth for their future and the future of Canada.



Larissa Bezo  
President and CEO

# Executive Summary

The CBIE 2023 Learning Abroad Survey initiative encompasses responses from two questionnaires: the Institutional Survey, which includes contributions from 49 institutions (17 colleges, polytechnics, and institutes, and 32 universities), and the Student and Alumni Survey, which was administered by 38 institutions (9 colleges and 29 universities) and resulted in responses from 3,175 students and alumni who participated in learning abroad. Prior to 2023, CBIE collected data on Canadian students' learning abroad experiences in 2016 and 2009.

This report provides an important overview of the state of participation in learning abroad initiatives in Canada. The sector is at a key juncture as it continues to rebound from the COVID-19 pandemic. Students, institutions, and governments today are grappling with daunting and unprecedented financial challenges and geopolitical factors. The findings provide valuable insights for policy and program planning. These range from changes in learning abroad experience offerings and identifying emerging barriers to participation, to the personal and professional impacts of learning abroad experiences, and opportunities to further shape, target, and scale up initiatives to facilitate greater access and impact.

The survey instruments have now been established and provide a strong foundation for collecting robust and standardized data on outbound student mobility activities in Canada. Future iterations will provide longitudinal data that supports informed decision-making and clearer accountability for developing outbound student mobility

programs that are effective, representative, and responsive to the evolving needs of Canada and Canadians in a globalized world.

## **The Institutional Context**

Since 2020, institutions have significantly expanded their strategic initiatives for learning abroad for under-represented students, almost doubling them in the college sector and increasing even more in the university sector. Many institutions cited Global Skills Opportunity (GSO), the Government of Canada's outbound student mobility pilot program, as a catalyst for this work.

Climate action at universities and colleges is also gaining traction. Some institutions are already taking proactive steps to measure and mitigate their carbon emissions- a key consideration in learning abroad programming- and more are planning to implement similar initiatives within the next two years.

Colleges and universities are offering a high level range of supports for participants learning abroad, including safety briefings, intercultural training, academic counselling, and student wellness services.

For academic recognition, most reporting institutions offer academic credits for exchange programs, faculty-led learning abroad experiences, and work-integrated learning. Only 58% of universities offer academic credits for research/fieldwork abroad.

## Participation Trends

At the time of the Institutional Survey (spring 2023), participation in study abroad had not fully reached pre-pandemic levels. During the pandemic, virtual learning emerged as a dominant modality with 69% of activities recorded being conducted virtually. Even as in-person learning opportunities resume, slightly more than one in ten learning abroad experiences are still virtual.

When looking at physical mobility, the data demonstrate that undergraduate programs have the highest participation rate of students embracing learning abroad opportunities both pre- and post-COVID. Notably, undergraduate students primarily engage in exchange and faculty-led programs, indicating a diverse range of international experiences.

Of all the reported learning abroad activities by duration, approximately half of the physical learning abroad experiences are less than five weeks long. Another third are between five and 16 weeks long, and one-fifth are longer than 16 weeks. This remained consistent throughout all three time periods.

When comparing overall data (physical and virtual learning abroad), business was the most popular field of study.

While the data doesn't consistently capture the full picture, the UK, the US, and France consistently ranked among the top five destinations for reporting institutions before, during, and after COVID-19. Italy, China, Japan, Germany, Australia, and Spain also frequently appeared as top destinations across these three periods.

It is worth noting that even in the absence of strong participation from Quebec institutions in the survey, France remains a top destination. From the data that was collected, it is evident that the type of learning abroad experience had an impact on destination choices.

## Student and Alumni Voices

The demographics of the student and alumni respondents who participated in learning abroad provide valuable insights into the diversity and impact of learning abroad experiences. These insights enable a better understanding of the range of participants' experiences and where barriers to access remain the strongest.

Notably, over 40% of survey respondents identified themselves as being members of racialized groups, and 14% of respondents who took part in physical learning abroad identified themselves as having a disability. In terms of gender distribution, 73% of respondents were women, 24% were men, and 4% identified as gender-diverse. In terms of language of study, 83% of English speakers choose to go abroad to study in English.

Twenty percent of respondents were the first in their families to pursue post-secondary education, with 75% indicating that they were the first in their families to participate in a learning abroad experience during their studies.

A quarter of all survey respondents had had an international experience in their primary or secondary schooling years, a significant increase when compared to the 6% reported in the CBIE's A World of Learning report in 2016.

Eight percent of respondents were international students, of whom 24% completed a learning abroad experience in a country where they hold citizenship. In addition, 12% of Canadian citizens who hold citizenship in a second country and 12% of permanent residents travelled to their country of citizenship to learn abroad.

During the pandemic, a quarter of respondents opted not to travel due to safety concerns (26%), while 23% postponed or deferred. Amidst these challenges, 16% participated in virtual learning abroad experiences instead, and 8% travelled abroad to a different host country than they originally planned.

Over one-third of students learned about international opportunities from friends or other students. Home institutions' websites also played a crucial role, with half of students accessing information through these online platforms.

Students travelling abroad were provided pre-departure intercultural, language, and safety training from their home institutions. Satisfaction levels with this training showed considerable variance. Overall, students' experiences learning abroad at their host institutions were generally very positive.

When looking at access to learning abroad experiences, students encountered various barriers that impacted their ability to participate. A small subset of students (480) who did not participate in learning abroad answered questions about barriers for comparison purposes.

Financial barriers emerged as a widespread issue, impacting 65% of respondents who participated in learning abroad and 78% of non-participants who considered this a major deterrent. Other challenges included leaving family and friends; unsupportive family members; family commitments or responsibility for dependents; work commitments; visas, permits and immigration requirements; and safety or discrimination concerns.

Financial barriers were a significant barrier for a higher proportion of racialized groups (except East Asian) than for White respondents. Concerns about experiences of lack of safety, racism, and discrimination abroad were substantially more common for Black students, 47% of whom noted this as a moderate or significant barrier, compared to 19% of White respondents.

To fund learning abroad experiences, students rely on a significant portion of their personal savings and support from their parents or relatives. They also rely on funding from their home institutions, work income, or funding from a Canadian government source (federal or provincial). Of those respondents who indicated receiving some or all funding from their institution or a Canadian government source, 43% indicated that they would not have been able to participate without it.

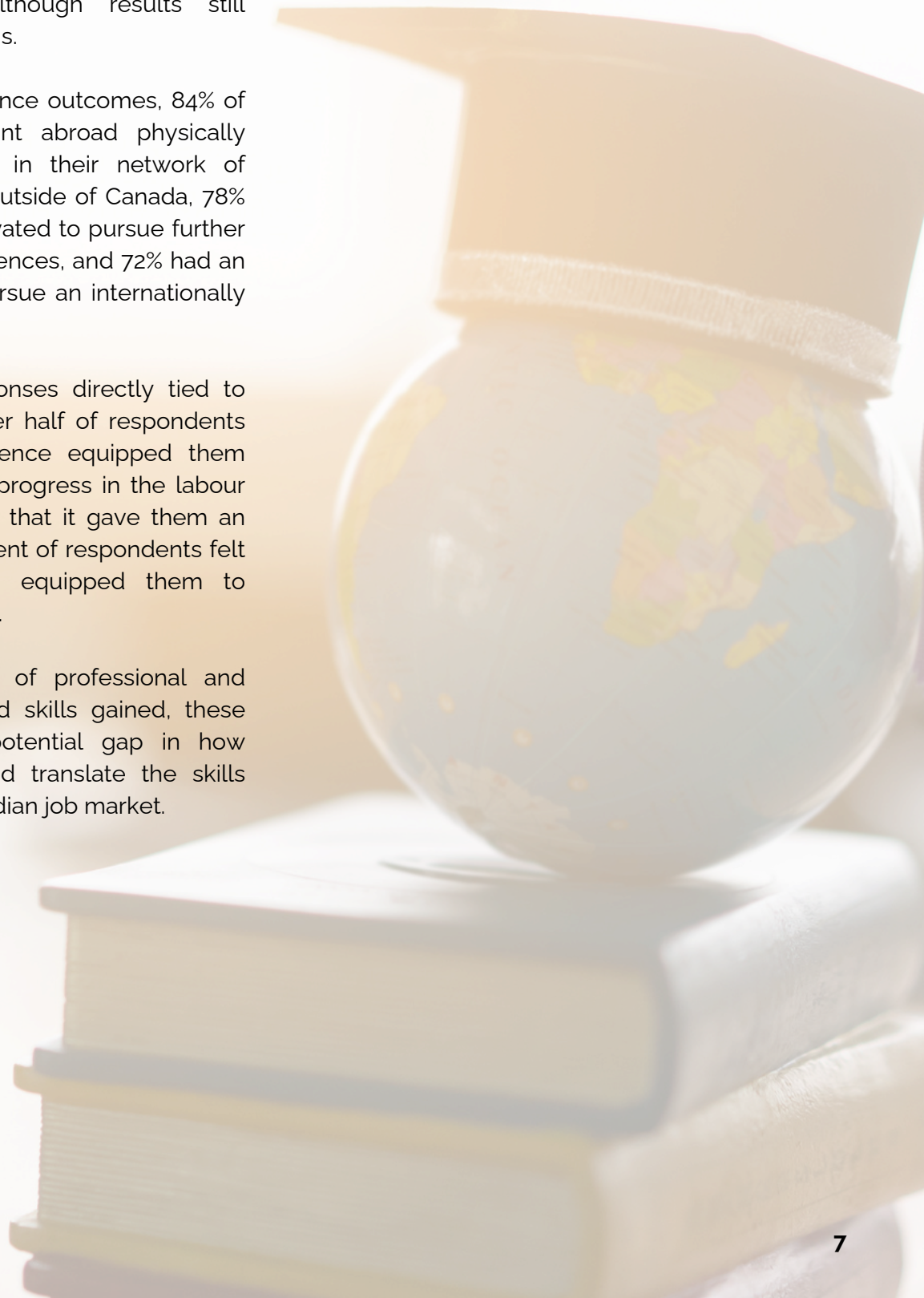
Notably, 19% of students turn to personal debt to fund their learning abroad experience, with higher levels of reliance on personal debt for most racialized groups than for White and East Asian students.

Students and alumni generally reported high levels of self-assessed skill acquisition from their physical learning abroad experience, with the top skills gained including adaptability (92%), interpersonal relations (90%), communication (89%), resiliency (89%), and self-confidence (89%). The rates of skill acquisition were lower for virtual learning abroad programs, although results still showed significant gains.

Finally, in post-experience outcomes, 84% of respondents who went abroad physically reported an increase in their network of contacts in countries outside of Canada, 78% of students were motivated to pursue further learning abroad experiences, and 72% had an increased desire to pursue an internationally focused career.

When reviewing responses directly tied to professional gains, over half of respondents said that their experience equipped them with skills to enter or progress in the labour market, while 62% felt that it gave them an advantage. Thirty percent of respondents felt that their experience equipped them to become entrepreneurs.

Given the high rates of professional and personal networks and skills gained, these findings suggest a potential gap in how students articulate and translate the skills acquired into the Canadian job market.



# About This Initiative

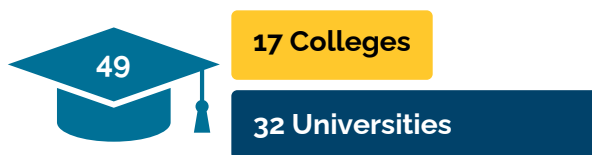
In the spring of 2023, CBIE implemented a large-scale survey initiative to gather data on learning abroad from both an institutional and student/alumni perspective. This initiative aimed to deepen understanding of the Canadian outbound student mobility landscape. Using a multi-pronged approach, the survey initiative surfaced insights and trends to inform evidence-based decision-making and foster an inclusive and supportive ecosystem for future learners going abroad.

The CBIE 2023 Learning Abroad Survey initiative consisted of two questionnaires: the Institutional Survey and the Student and Alumni Survey. Surveying was conducted from May through July of 2023. Overall, 52 institutions participated in the initiative with most completing both surveys but some responding to only the Institutional Survey, and others only the Student and Alumni Survey.

This report presents the key findings from each survey and highlights the impact, value, and outcomes of these learning abroad experiences. It aims to bridge silos and provide a comprehensive snapshot of both in-person and virtual learning abroad experiences offered by Canada's post-secondary institutions at three distinct moments in time.

## The Institutional Survey

The Institutional Survey offers insight into the data institutions capture to quantify participation in learning abroad. Institutions were asked to report on relevant and available data; thus, not all participating institutions provided numbers for all questions. A total of 49 post-secondary institutions responded to the Institutional Survey — 17 colleges, polytechnics, and institutes and 32 universities. From this point on, references to colleges are broadly understood to encompass colleges, polytechnics, and institutions.



Due to timing constraints, participation in the Institutional Survey within the college sector was limited to five provinces: Alberta, British Columbia, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Ontario. However, the colleges that did participate represent a significant proportion of college students in the responding provinces, ranging from 50% of college enrolments in Ontario to between two-thirds and three-quarters for New Brunswick, British Columbia, and Alberta, to 100% in Nova Scotia.

## ..... Sampling Periods



**Pre-COVID Pandemic**  
Sep 2018 - Aug 2019



**During COVID Pandemic**  
Sep 2020 - Aug 2021



**Post-COVID Pandemic**  
Sep 2022 - Aug 2023

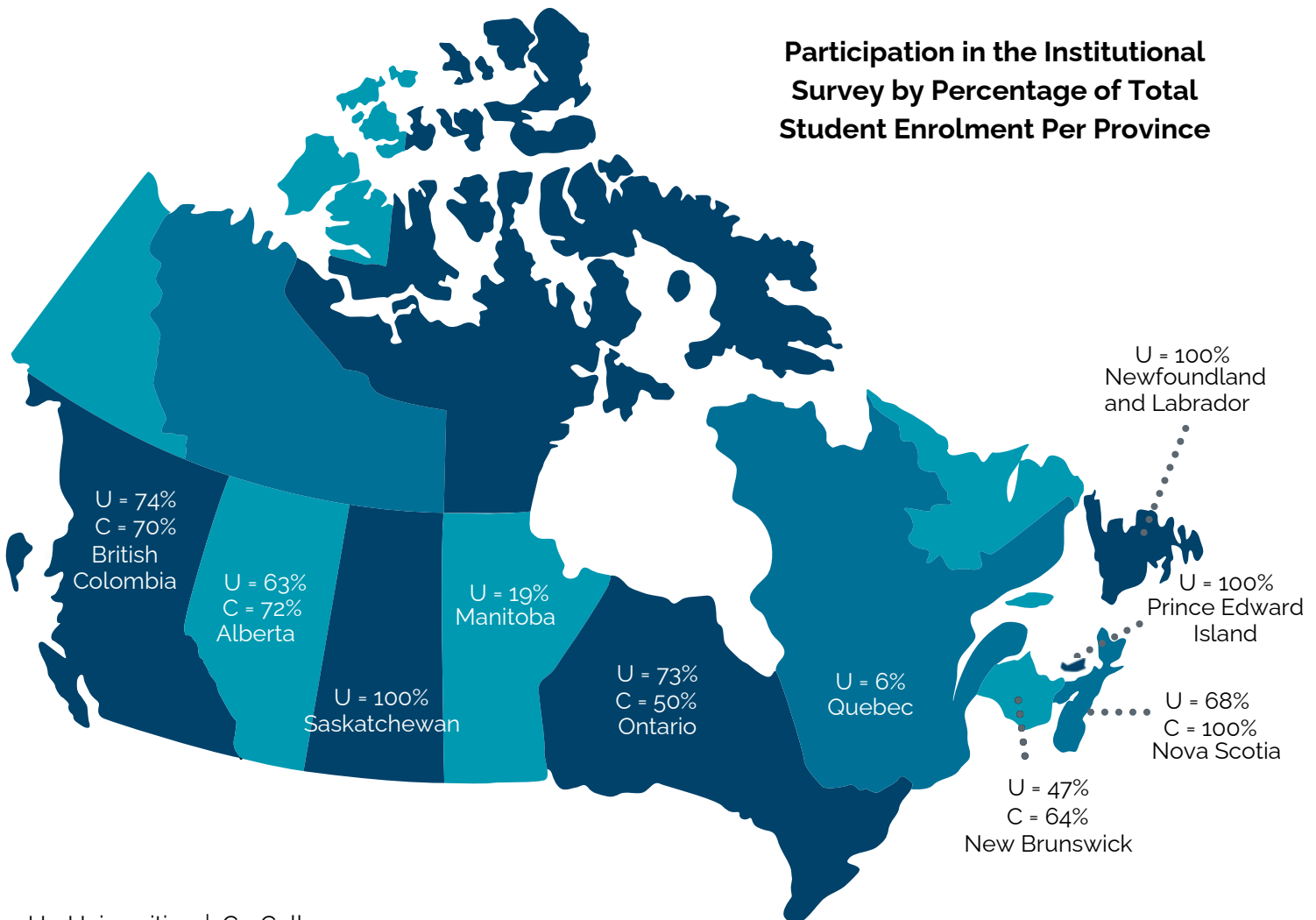
Universities from all ten provinces completed the Institutional Survey. The 32 responding universities represent a strong distribution of institutions from across Canada. Additionally, one-third of the responding universities are members of the U15 Group of Canadian Research Universities.

Importantly, in terms of enrolments, the universities that responded to the Institutional Survey account for between half of all university enrolments in each province (with the exceptions of Quebec and Manitoba).

These responses, therefore, provide important insight into the learning abroad services and support offered to the majority of university students in each province (except Quebec and Manitoba).

Findings from the Institutional Survey are presented in aggregate (i.e., not by institution). Whenever possible, they are disaggregated by post-secondary sector (college and university) and type of experience to meet the needs of CBIE's diverse audiences.

**Participation in the Institutional Survey by Percentage of Total Student Enrolment Per Province**



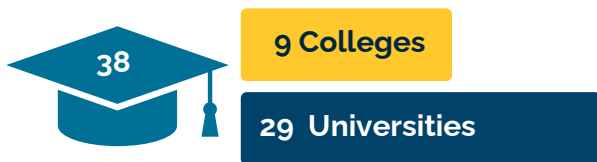
U = Universities | C = Colleges

% = Percentage of total student enrolment per province captured through institutional responses

## The Student and Alumni Survey

Together with the Institutional Survey, the Student and Alumni Survey aims to build a nuanced understanding of the learning abroad landscape in Canada and establish a methodology for gathering metrics on the overall impact of learning abroad for participants.

Of the 52 institutions that participated in this initiative, 38 distributed the Student and Alumni Survey.



In total, 3,175 students and alumni who participated in learning abroad responded. An additional 480 students and alumni indicated they did not have a learning abroad experience. The survey captured responses from this group about barriers to learning abroad only, which is outlined later in this report.

For the Student and Alumni Survey, respondents from British Columbia are most represented in the sample, with 38%. Ontario respondents represent 37% of the sample. This high representation reflects population distribution and the presence of major educational institutions.



### Total Participants

# 3,175



### 2,005 Students



### 1,170 Alumni



## Notes on the Data

There are limits to both the Institutional Survey and Student and Alumni Survey data that suggest caution in drawing generalizations for the country and point to the importance of continued research in this area. For example, smaller institutions and those with immature data and surveying infrastructure were less equipped to participate in the Institutional Survey or distribute the Student and Alumni Survey. The students at these institutions may have different experiences of learning abroad because of those institutional characteristics.



# Defining Learning Abroad

Defining learning abroad is challenging due to the lack of standardized definitions, varying timelines for what counts as learning abroad, and diverse counting methodologies employed by different institutions. To establish definitions for this research, CBIE identified common themes, consensus points, and consistent definitions across international resources.

The focus in creating the project lexicon was on utilizing elements that were generally accepted within the field and then adapting and categorizing them so that data collection could be robust and widely applicable. The standardized definitions were then clearly documented within the survey. This approach facilitated consistency, comparability, and accuracy in the data collected.

## *Learning Abroad Definition*

*An institution-sanctioned learning experience that occurs outside Canada and the participant's Canadian institution, either physically or virtually, during their studies. Examples include (but are not limited to) for-credit and not-for-credit exchange programs, work abroad, volunteering, or international research driven by learning outcomes and officially sanctioned by the participant's Canadian academic institution.*

## Type of Experience Definitions

### Exchange Program

A program of study whereby partner institutions establish a reciprocal agreement that enables students to pay tuition at their home institution and to register and study (physically or virtually) at the host/partner institution outside Canada, typically with (but not limited to) credit transferred back to the home institution in Canada.

### Faculty-Led Program

Learning abroad activities that involve groups of students under the supervision of a home institution instructor and/or faculty member. Such experiences (physical or virtual) can include (but are not limited to) international field schools, study trips, or collaborative online intercultural/international learning (COIL).

### Research/Fieldwork Abroad

Experiences (physical or virtual) include various types of research projects or fieldwork carried out by students. Such research normally contributes to or results in the writing of an academic paper or article to fulfill academic credit or other degree requirements. The research/fieldwork may be undertaken as part of a research-based course or independent project, or in a completely independent manner outside the structure of a program, but still approved by the student's post-secondary educational institution.

### Other Programs

Any learning abroad activity (physical or virtual) that an institution tracks but does not fit in the categories listed prior. Activities could include non-credit-granting programs, independent study abroad (letter of permission), volunteer or service learning, learning abroad through an approved third-party, student case competitions, conference participation or study tours.

### Work-Integrated Learning (WIL)

A form of curricular experiential education that formally integrates a student's academic studies with quality experiences within a workplace or practice setting. Such experiences (physical or virtual) can include and are not limited to activities abroad such as co-ops, internships, practicums, clinical placements, service learning, or field placements.



# Section 1

## The Institutional Context

### Data Collection

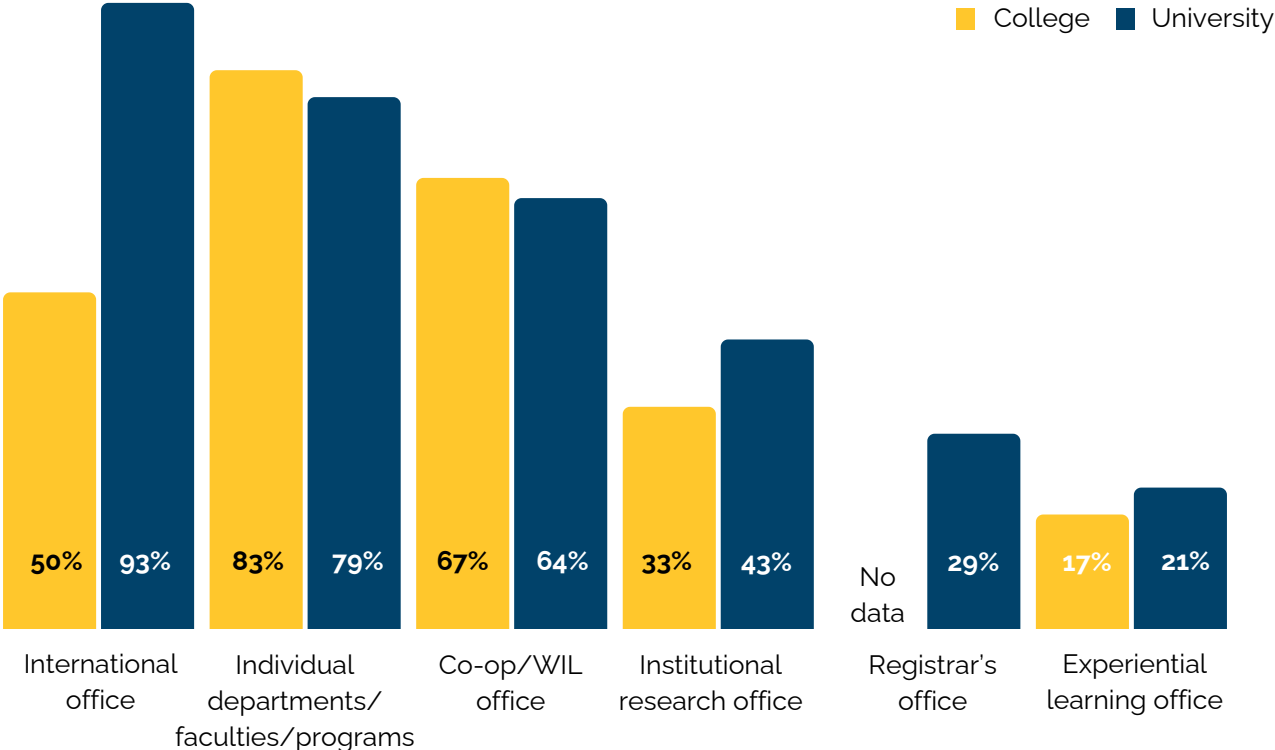
Internal data ecosystems vary by institution, with two-thirds of colleges and half of universities reporting centralized learning abroad data. The remaining institutions reported needing to collect data from multiple sources to respond to this survey.

This pattern is consistent with the 2016 CBIE report,<sup>1</sup> which stated that approximately half of the data-collecting institutions housed learning abroad data in more than one office, with 24% of institutions housing this data in three or more places across the educational institution.

Approximately 80% of data collected through a centralized office is housed in university and college international offices.

Institutions with a decentralized data collection process have identified that a significant portion of their data is collected at the department, faculty, or program level.

Where Data is Collected in a Decentralized Model



<sup>1</sup> A World of Learning: Canada's Performance and Potential in International Education: <https://cbie.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/awol-2016-en.pdf>

## Counting Learning Abroad

Counting learning abroad is dependent on each institution's operational framework. The diversity in variables is vast, ranging from how long a study period lasts to the nature of the academic programs and the eligibility of the students involved.

To aid understanding of participation in learning abroad, the Institutional Survey requested data on participants by type of experience and mode of delivery (physical or virtual) and asked institutions to identify how participation is counted. According to the responses, institutions count learning abroad experiences in one of three ways:

### **By Experience**

Students who have more than one experience during their degree/diploma are counted multiple times.

### **By Semester/Term**

Students who participate in two semesters/terms are counted twice.

### **By Student**

Students who have more than one experience during their degree/diploma are only counted once.

It is evident that colleges and universities do not count participation in the same way. The data collected from respondent institutions show that across all types and modes of learning abroad experiences, universities most often count by the number of experiences, while colleges most often count by the number of students.

The data also showed that including virtual experiences in the counting further complicates the scenario, with 'no data' being cited most often in response to this question.

This difference in units counted can be especially problematic if questions about learning abroad participation are not posed clearly. On the one hand, it may seem that universities are either overreporting or inflating their participation numbers, while on the other, it may seem that colleges are underreporting them. Until counting methods are harmonized, it will be particularly important to specify clearly what is being asked when requesting information about learning abroad participation in Canada. As the data show, the answer will vary greatly depending on the question.

On a broader scale, should decision-makers at institutional and governmental levels (provincial and federal) wish to standardize how Canada measures up to other countries in its global engagement via learning abroad, it will be important to discuss aligning Canada's counting methods with those used internationally.

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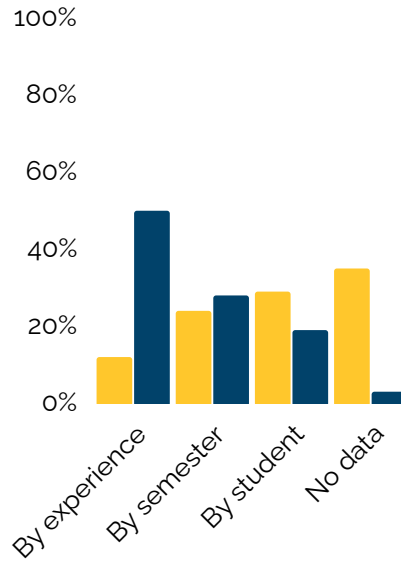
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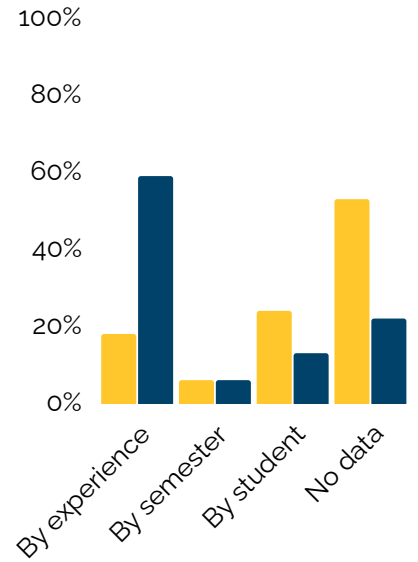
## Counting Physical Learning Abroad

College University

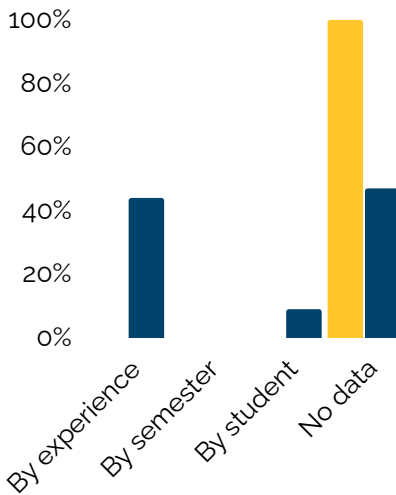
### Student Exchanges



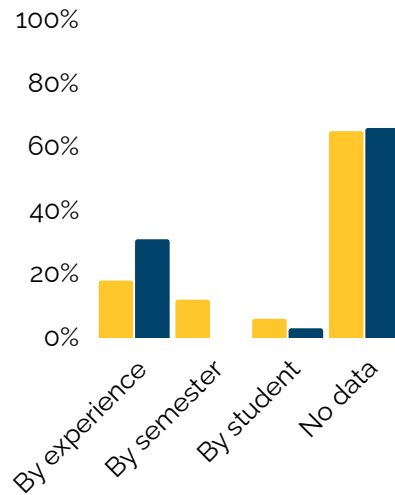
### Faculty-led Programs



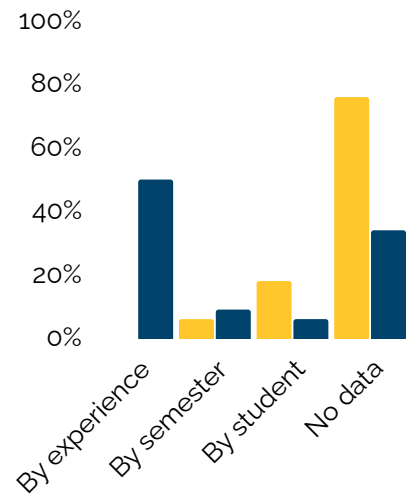
### Research/Fieldwork



### Other Programs



### Work-integrated Learning



## Collecting Demographic Information

Institutions are actively demonstrating their commitment to data-driven decision-making. Notably, they are collecting information on seven socio-demographic characteristics of participants in all or some of their learning abroad programs: citizenship, disability, first-generation status, gender, income level, Indigenous identity, and racial identity.

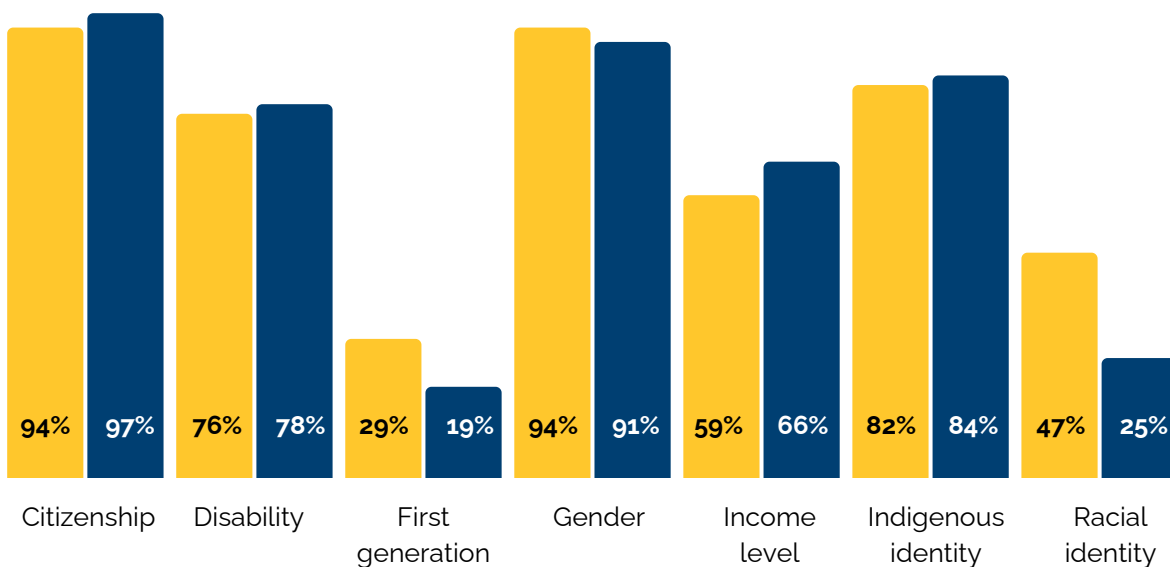
These data points provide not only a comprehensive understanding of the diverse backgrounds and characteristics of the students participating in learning abroad but

also offer important insight into barriers that may affect certain populations differently.

While over 90% of colleges and universities collect data on citizenship and gender, and encouragingly, more than three-quarters of institutions collect information on disability, data collection on racial identity drops to below 50% for colleges and to only one-quarter for universities, and drops even further for first-generation students, whose data are collected by only 29% of colleges and 19% of universities.

**Collecting Demographic Information**

■ College ■ University





## Strategic Initiatives for Underrepresented Populations

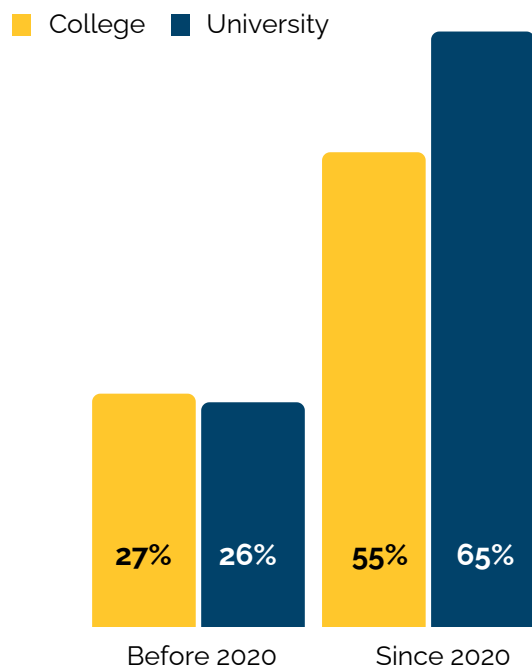
A majority of colleges (65%) and almost all universities (91%) reported having implemented strategic initiatives to encourage or facilitate the participation of underrepresented students in learning abroad experiences.

### Institutions with Strategic Initiatives

College **65%**

University **91%**

### Timing of Strategic Initiatives



\*Others responded unsure

When asked about the timing of these strategic initiatives, the data show that both colleges and universities significantly increased their strategic initiatives for underrepresented students after 2020, doubling them in the college sector and increasing even more in the university sector. Such results suggest a strong, positive, institutional response to the federal-level public policy goal for more inclusive learning abroad experiences.

In open-ended responses, many institutions referred to Global Skills Opportunity (GSO), the Government of Canada's outbound student mobility pilot program, as a catalyst for designing and implementing customized approaches to attract, fund, and support student groups in Canada who typically do not participate in learning abroad experiences.

## Commitment to Climate Action

Climate action at universities and colleges is gaining traction, with some institutions already taking proactive steps to measure and mitigate their carbon emissions. Currently, two reporting institutions (one college and one university) are actively measuring travel-related carbon emissions, indicating a growing awareness of the environmental impact of academic mobility. Encouragingly, 18% of colleges and 34% of universities have plans to implement similar carbon emission measurements within the next two years.

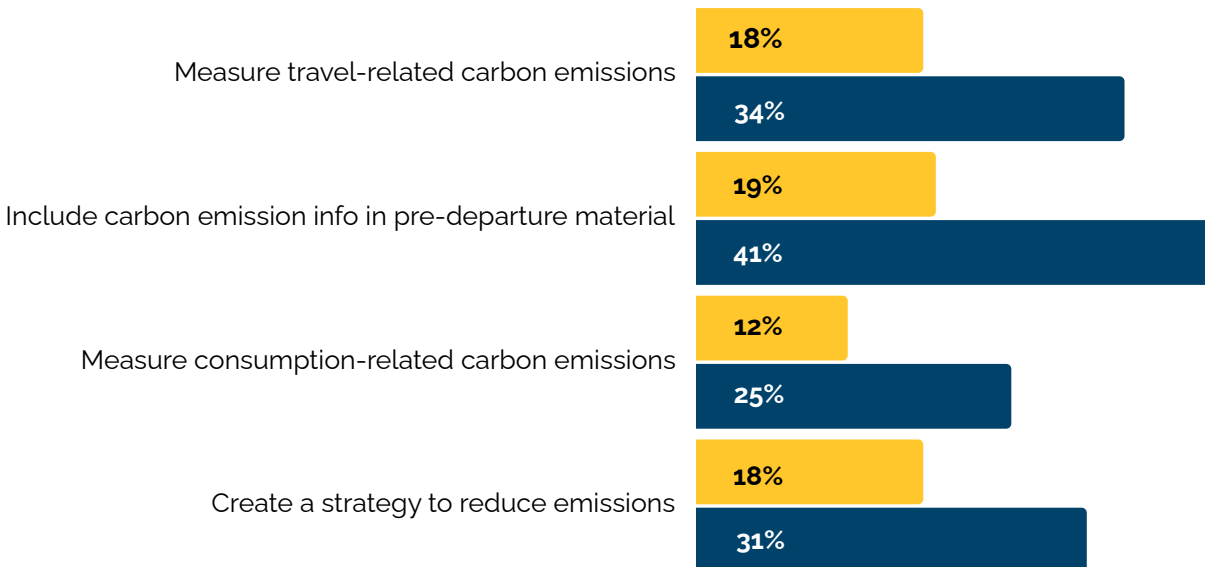
Three institutions (one college and two universities) already include information related to carbon emissions in their pre-departure materials, with 19% of colleges and 41% of universities planning to adopt this in the next two years.

Another aspect of climate action relates to measuring consumption-related carbon emissions. Currently, two reporting institutions (one college and one university) are actively measuring these emissions, with an additional 12% of colleges and 25% of universities indicating that they have plans to begin tracking consumption-related carbon emissions in the coming two years.

Finally, three reporting institutions (one college and two universities) have already developed climate action strategies, and 18% of colleges and 31% of universities are actively working on implementing them within the next two years.

### Intentions to Implement Climate Actions in the Next Two Years

■ College ■ University



## Institutional Supports

Colleges and universities offer a wide range of support for their learning-abroad participants, from academic counselling to intercultural training to student wellness services.

Institutions were asked to indicate if specific support was offered to students before, during, and/or after their learning abroad experience. Encouragingly, the data show that all colleges and universities offer support services in all areas and during three key time periods (pre-departure, during the learning abroad experience, and upon the student's return). However, the proportion of institutions that offer each varies by sector and timing.

The frontloading of most services is evident, indicating a greater emphasis on preparations in advance of departure than services during or after. An encouraging 98% of responding institutions (94% of colleges and 100% from universities) offer safety briefings to their students before departure. This is followed closely by intercultural training (offered by 82% of colleges and 97% of universities), academic counselling (76% and 97%, respectively), and student wellness services (71% and 97%).

Support services drop across the board in both the college and university sectors while students are away on their learning abroad experience. The notable exception, however, is professional networking in the college sector where it actually increased. This is a new trend that is worth tracking over time as more colleges participate in future institutional surveys.

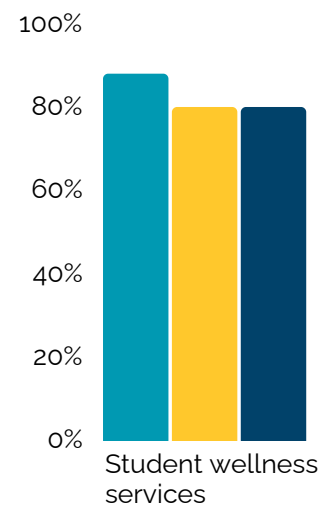
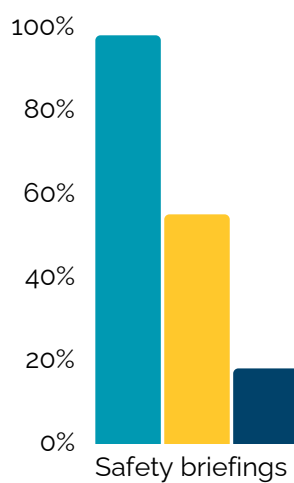
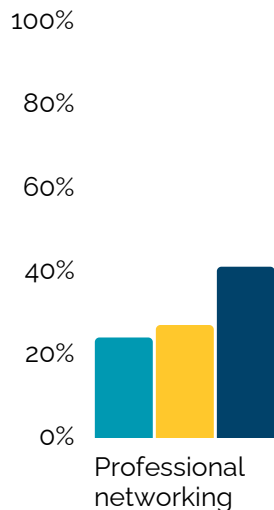
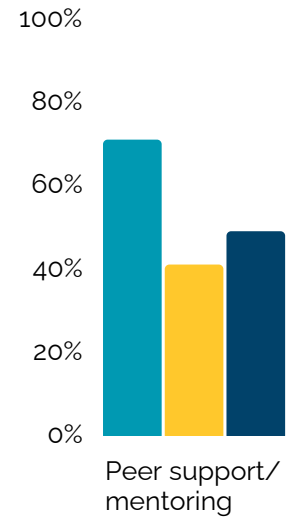
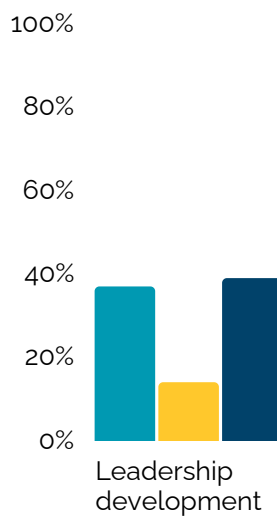
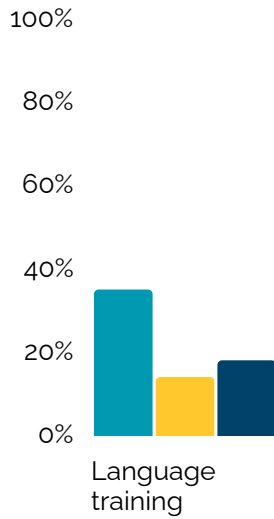
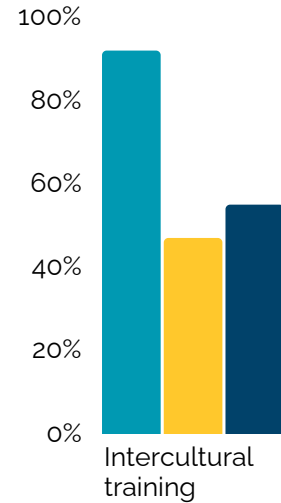
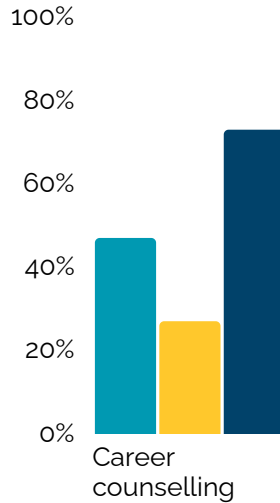
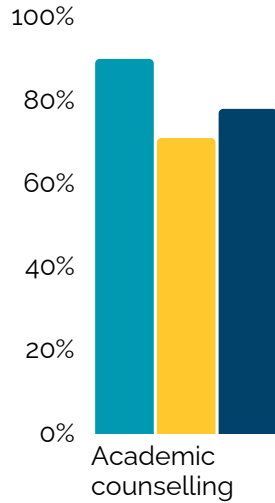
While support drops during the learning abroad experience, most institutions are nonetheless striving to maintain high levels of core services when students are away, such as student wellness (offered by 71% of colleges and 84% of universities) and academic counselling (offered by 59% of colleges and 78% of universities).

Finally, all service offerings increase again when students return to their home institution, but none surpass pre-departure levels except career counselling, rising 22 percentage points in the university sector (from 53% to 75%) and 36 percentage points in the college sector (from 35% to 71%), and professional networking, again rising 22 percentage points in the university sector (from 28% to 50%) and six percentage points in the college sector (from 18% to 24%).



## Supports Offered to Learning Abroad Participants

■ Pre-departure ■ During experience ■ Post-experience





## Academic Recognition

Academic recognition plays a crucial role in the learning abroad experience, and the Institutional Survey inquired about the types of recognition granted to students in these programs.

The majority of reporting institutions (93%) offer academic credits for experiences in learning abroad. The rate of academic credits awarded by universities drops to 58% for research/fieldwork abroad.

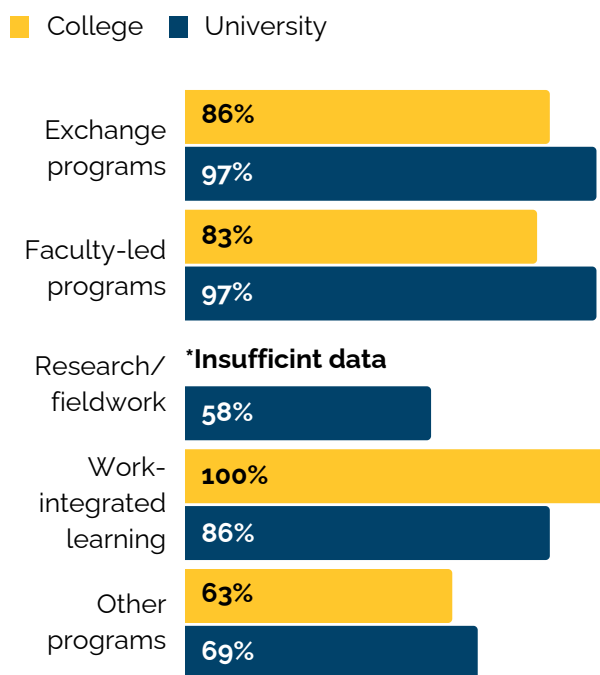
Of the colleges and universities who could report on academic recognition for exchange programs, the majority (86% and 97%, respectively) indicated that they provide academic credits for this type of learning abroad experience, with an additional 11% providing co-curricular credits (14% of colleges and 9% of universities).

For faculty-led programs, colleges and universities reported 83% and 97%, respectively, in terms of offering academic credits. For universities, 14% also offer certificates and 10% co-curricular credits. For colleges, 8% offer this type of non-academic recognition.

When it comes to research/fieldwork abroad, of the universities that could report, 58% provide academic credits, 42% offer other types of recognition, 21% have co-curricular credits, and 13% offer certificates. There were insufficient responses from the college sector to pull any meaningful data.

All responding colleges grant academic credit for work-integrated learning (WIL). As for the reporting universities, 86% offer academic credits, 31% offer co-curricular credits, and 28% indicated "other" for WIL abroad.

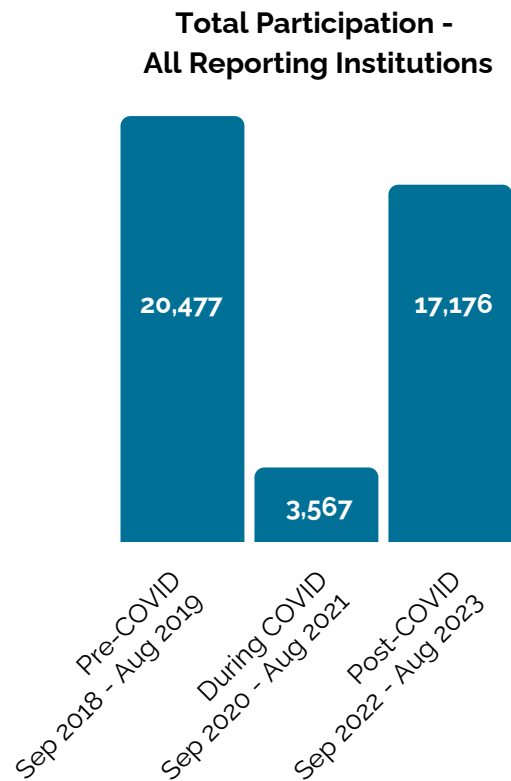
### Academic Credit by Type of Experience



## Participation Trends

The impact of the global pandemic was immediate and widespread in the postsecondary sector, with travel restrictions, campus closures, and the wholesale shift to virtual learning. In the learning abroad community, resilience and adaptability were the watchwords, with programs creatively pivoting to online platforms and students finding new ways to engage globally.

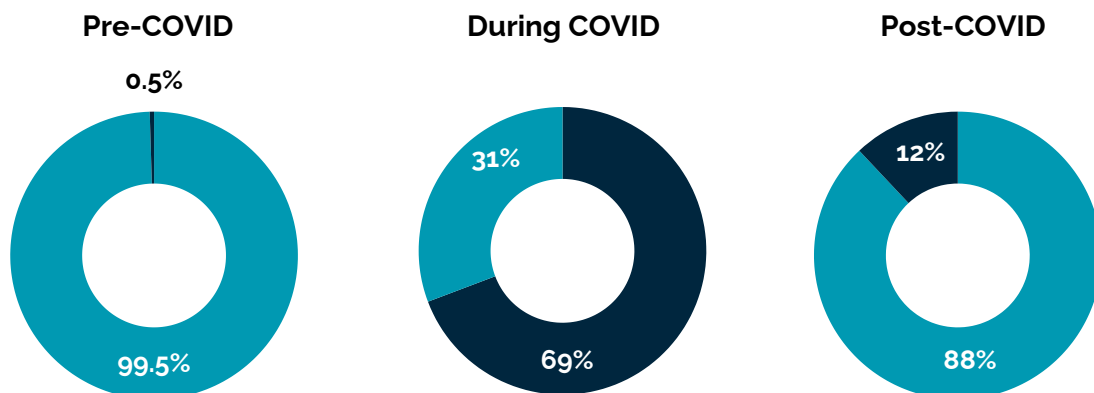
Participating institutions provided data for three distinct periods. For the pre-pandemic year, 20,477 experiences were captured. During the pandemic, 3,567 experiences were recorded, rising to 17,176 recorded in the post-pandemic period.



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### Total Experiences at Participating Institutions

■ Physical ■ Virtual



## Virtual Experiences

As in-person learning opportunities resumed in the post-pandemic environment, slightly more than one in ten learning abroad experiences were taking place virtually.

During the pandemic, 26% of experiences were attributed to virtual work-integrated learning, followed by faculty-led programs (19%), other programs (12%), and exchange programs (11%). The COVID-19 pandemic period captures experiences between September 2020 and August 2021.

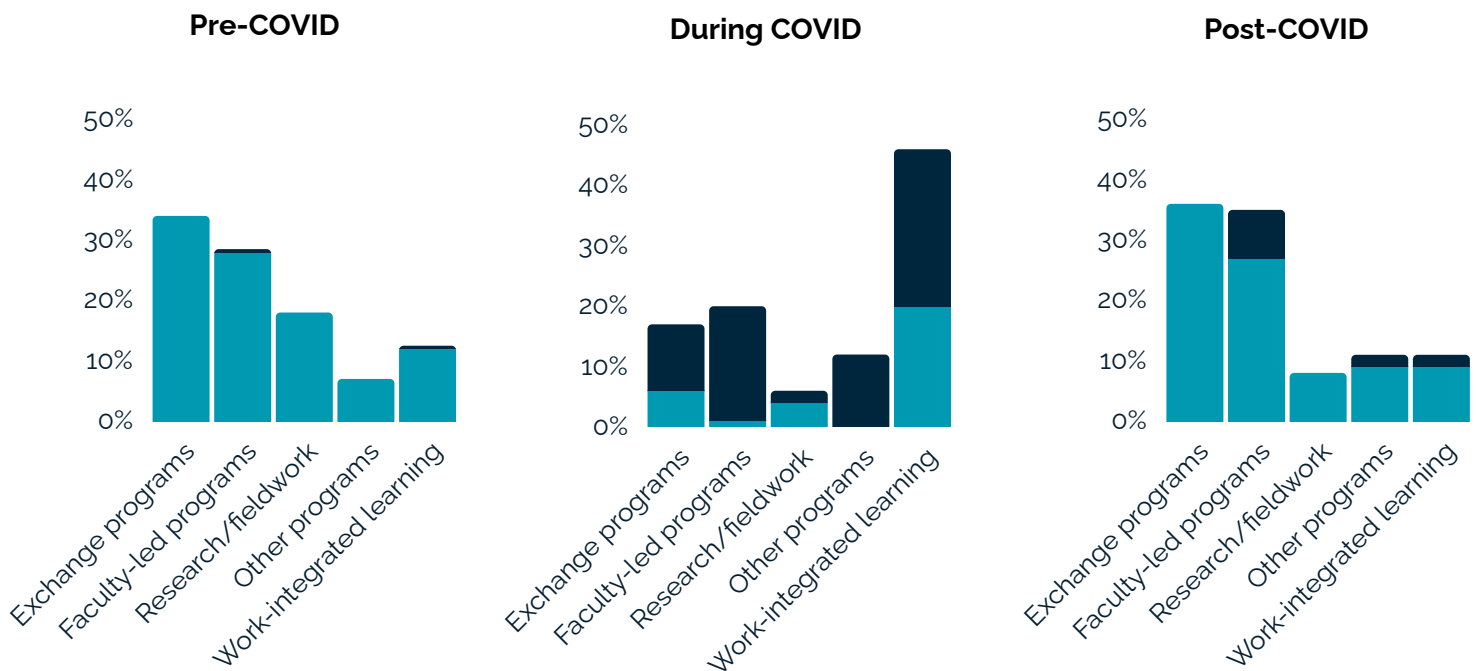
Post-pandemic, 8% of experiences continued to be in virtual faculty-led programs, and 9% of experiences continued to be virtual work-integrated learning (WIL). In contrast, almost all exchange programs returned to in-person learning.

With virtual learning, undergraduate programs continue to lead with an 80% participation rate. Certificates and diplomas also display noteworthy engagement (12%), primarily through exchanges and faculty-led programs, showcasing the adaptability of shorter-term programs to virtual formats.

Virtual learning during the pandemic took place in one semester or less. A little over half of experiences (53%) were less than five weeks in length, and another 45% were between five and 16 weeks long. This shifted post-COVID, with over three-quarters of virtual experiences taking place between five to sixteen weeks, mainly in faculty-led programs.

Physical vs. Virtual Type of Experiences by Time Period

■ Physical ■ Virtual



## Level of Study

When participation data were disaggregated by level of study, 70% of all learning abroad participants post-pandemic were at the undergraduate level, 16% were at the graduate level, 9% were pursuing a post-graduate degree, and 5% were in diploma programs. This breakdown remained generally consistent with pre-pandemic experiences.

Post-COVID pandemic data demonstrate that undergraduate students primarily engage in exchange (50%) and faculty-led programs (30%).

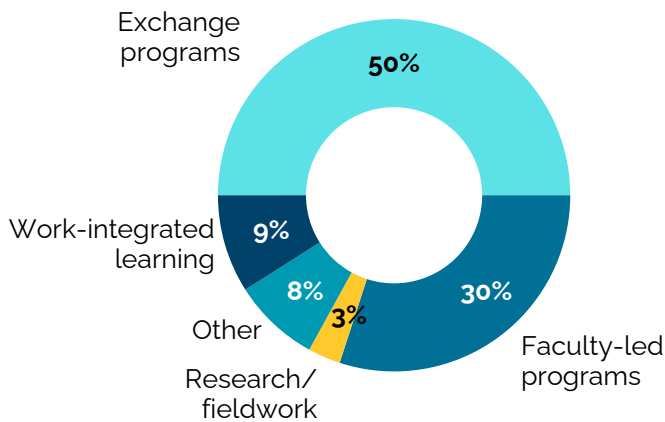
Graduate students also demonstrate interest in international experiences through faculty-led programs (38%) and research/fieldwork (23%).

PhD and postgraduate programs have the highest participation rates in research and fieldwork (45%) and other learning abroad experiences (42%).

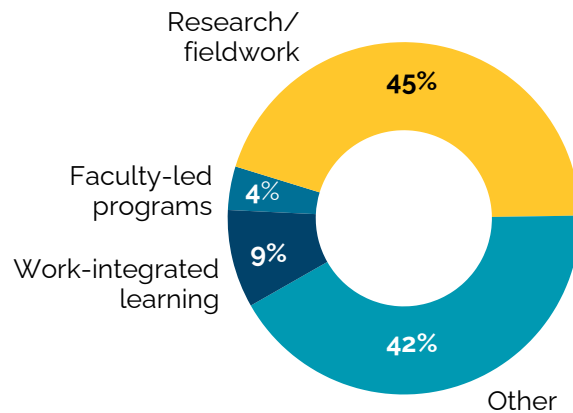
Half of certificate and diploma students participate in exchange programs.

### Level of Study by Experience Type Post-COVID

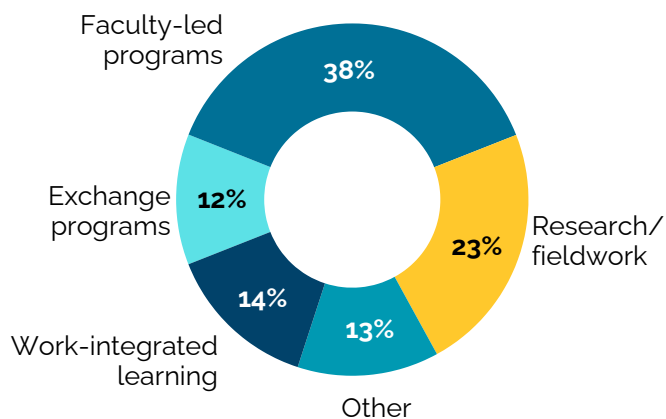
#### Undergraduate Programs



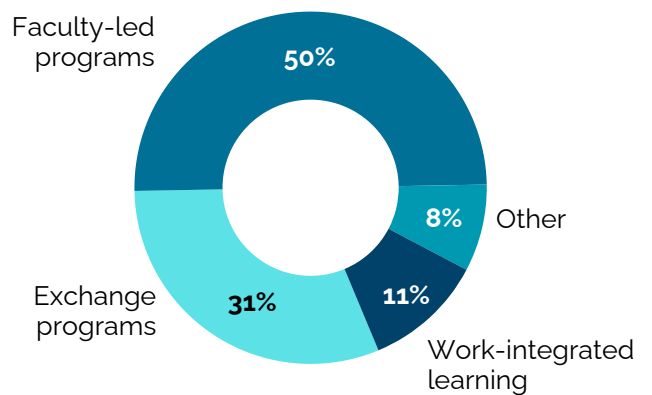
#### PhD and Post-Graduate



#### Graduate Programs



#### Certificates and Diplomas



## Duration and Timing

The data for physical mobility show that approximately half of learning abroad experiences are less than five weeks long. Another third of physical experiences are between five and 16 weeks long, and 20% of physical experiences are longer than 16 weeks. This remained consistent throughout all three time periods.

While universities see students going abroad for more than 16 weeks, there is almost no learning abroad of this duration reported at the college level. Exchange programs accounted for the majority of experiences more than 16 weeks in all three time periods.

Faculty-led programs made up the majority of experiences lasting five weeks or less during and post-COVID and by far were the most likely form of experience for less than five weeks.

Research/fieldwork also most often cited as five weeks or less.

Work-integrated learning activities are reported mostly between the five- and 16-week range.



### Most Common Months to Begin Learning Abroad

Exchange programs

**January and September**



Faculty-led programs

**April or May**



Research/fieldwork

**May**



Work-integrated learning

**May**

## Field of Study

The overall trends in fields of study remain alike both pre- and post-pandemic, with business followed by social sciences and humanities as the most popular fields of study for participants of learning abroad experiences.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, numbers in the college sector were particularly small, given the vast range of fields selected. When combining college and university data, business remained the most popular field of study for learning abroad.

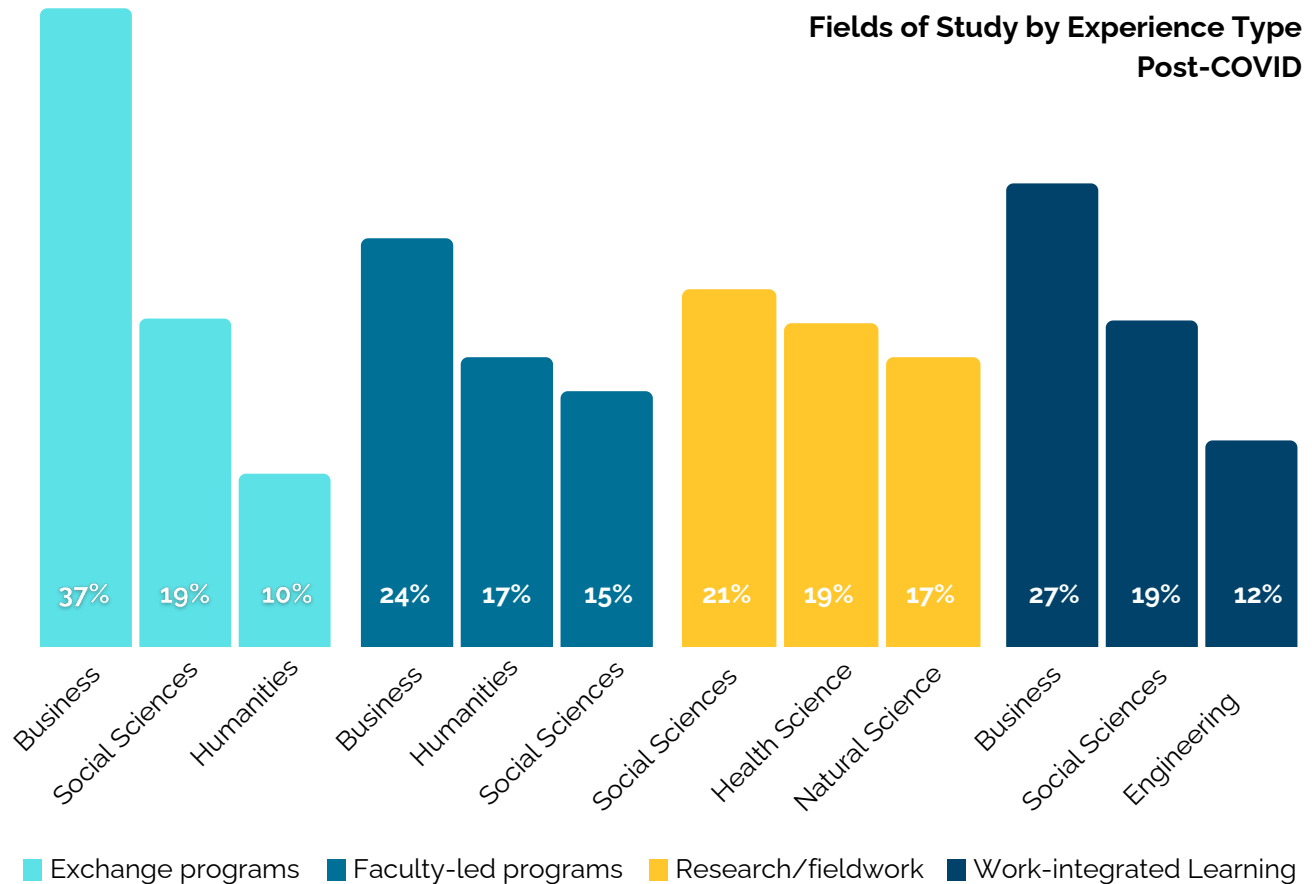
Focusing on the post-pandemic data for all fields of study reported — both physical and virtual learning — business and social sciences

are the most common fields of study for exchange programs, faculty-led programs and work-integrated learning.

Some differences appear in fields of study, with engineering (12%) identified as a top field for work-integrated learning.

Research/fieldwork was the only type of experience that did not include business. Instead, focused on the sciences, social (21%), health (19%), and natural (17%).

Skilled trades were cited in both faculty-led experiences (4%) and in work-integrated learning (11%) post-pandemic.



## Destinations

Institutions were asked to report on their top ten sending countries to capture destination data for learning abroad. Pre-pandemic and pandemic periods provide insight into trends, however, the data for the post-pandemic period exhibited significant variations. These discrepancies could be attributed to the ever-changing landscape of the COVID-19 pandemic during that time, with restrictions being enforced and lifted by different countries at different times around the globe.

While the data may not paint the entire picture consistently, although not always in this order, the UK, the US, and France are in the top five destinations for all reporting institutions pre-, during, and post-pandemic.

It is of note, that even in the absence of strong participation in the survey from Quebec institutions, France remains a top destination.

Italy, China, Japan, Germany, Australia, and Spain are also frequently reported as top destinations throughout all three time periods.

The pre-COVID pandemic data, which was the most robust in this survey, demonstrates the nuances when talking about countries of study and offers an important baseline to build on in the future. As demonstrated in the chart below, it is evident that the type of learning abroad experience has an impact on destination choices.

### Destination by Experience Type (Pre-Covid)

Exchange Programs	Faculty-Led Programs	Research/Fieldwork	Work-Integrated Learning
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United Kingdom	Italy	France	United States
France	China	China	China
Australia	Hong Kong	Germany	Germany
The Netherlands	United Kingdom	United Kingdom	Japan
Spain	France	United States	India



# Section 2

## Student and Alumni Voices

The Student and Alumni Survey aimed to provide deeper insights into the student perspective, shedding light on the experiences and profiles of those who have embarked on learning abroad.

It captured data from 3,175 individuals who participated in learning abroad programs within the last five years; 96% had a physical experience, and 4% had a virtual experience. Of those who responded, 91% were enrolled in universities, while the remaining 9% represented colleges.

As the survey collected data on experiences from the past five years, respondents were asked to identify themselves as students or alumni of their home institution; 63% of respondents identified as current full-time students, 4% of that group identified as part-time students, and 37% identified as alumni.

Additionally, 10% of survey respondents indicated having completed two learning abroad experiences in the past five years, and an additional 4% had three or more experiences (physical or virtual) in the past five years.

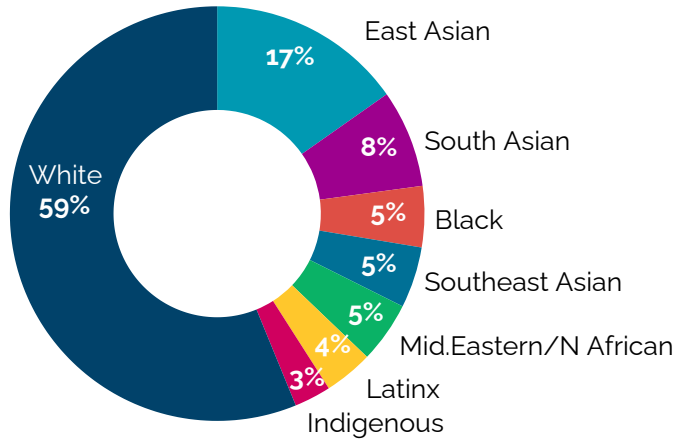
While the survey was aimed at learning abroad participants, it was anticipated that non-participants might choose to provide insight, so a subset of questions was included in the study for this non-participant group. In total, 480 individuals who did not participate in learning abroad responded to questions related to barriers, which are outlined later in this section.

The survey sample was sufficiently large to offer meaningful insights. However, it is important to note that the findings cannot be generalized to encompass all students participating in learning abroad programs.



# Respondent Demographic Profile

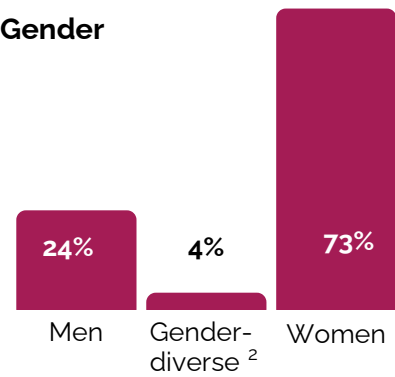
## Racial Identity



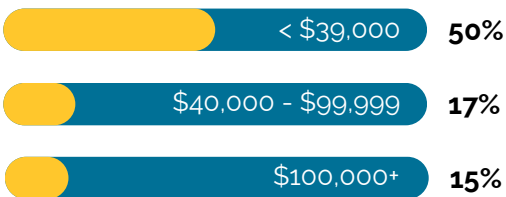
# 14%

Identify as having a disability

## Gender

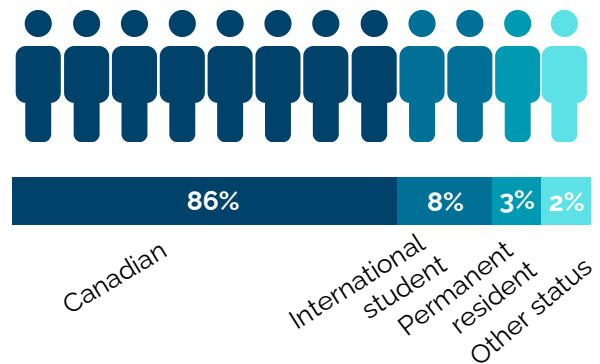


## Household Income



\*18% prefer not to answer

## Citizenship + Status



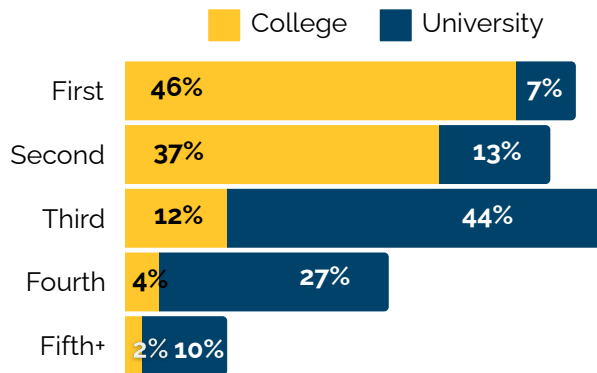
# 16%

Hold dual citizenship

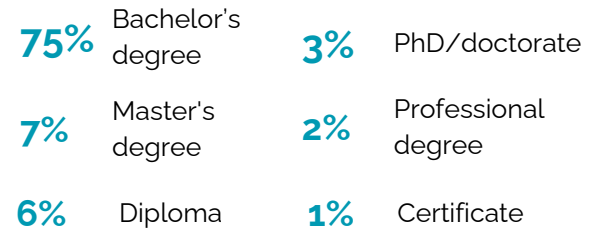
<sup>2</sup> Gender-diverse includes respondents who identified as agender or gender neutral, demigender, gender fluid, gender queer, non-binary, or gender non-conforming, transgender, and/or two-spirit.

# Respondent Education Profile

## Year of Learning Abroad

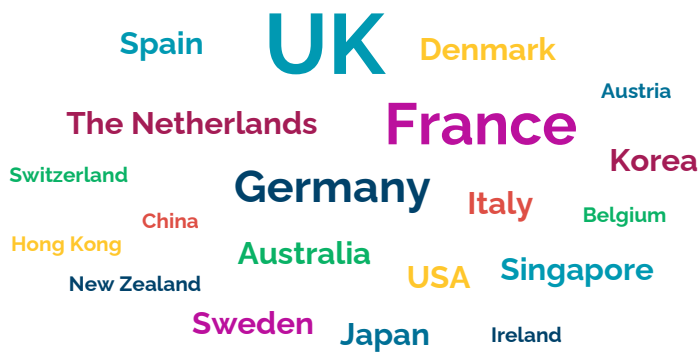


## Level of Study

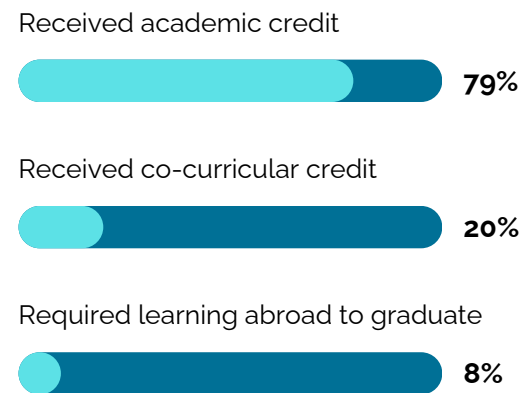


\*5% identified multiple credentials

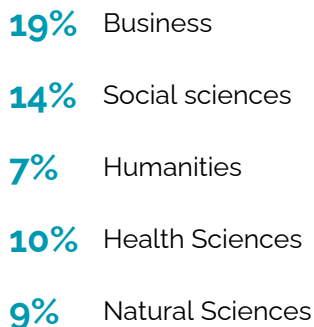
## Top Destinations



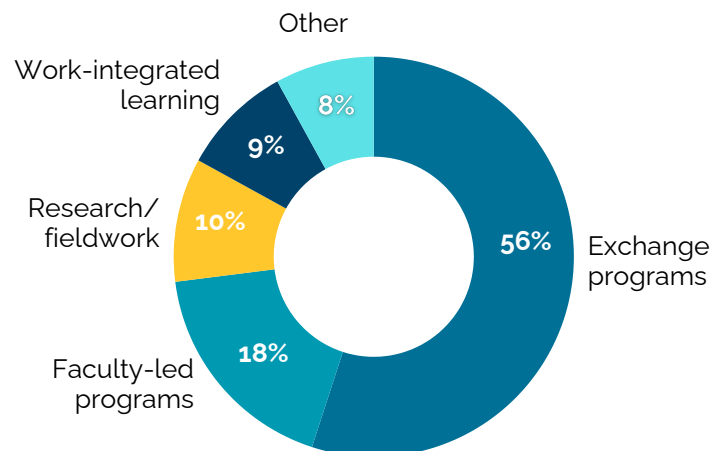
## Recognition



## Top Fields of Study



## Type of Experience





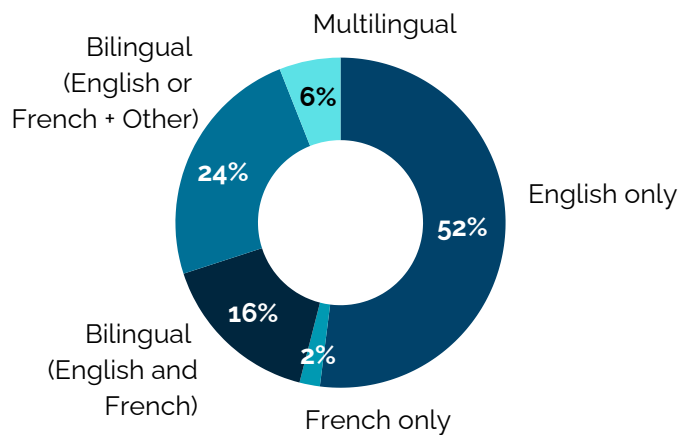
## Language

Of the respondents, 54% identified as unilingual (English 52% and French 2%). Regarding bilingual respondents, 16% indicated fluency in French and English, and 24% stated fluency in English and another language. The remaining 6% indicated fluency in more than two languages.

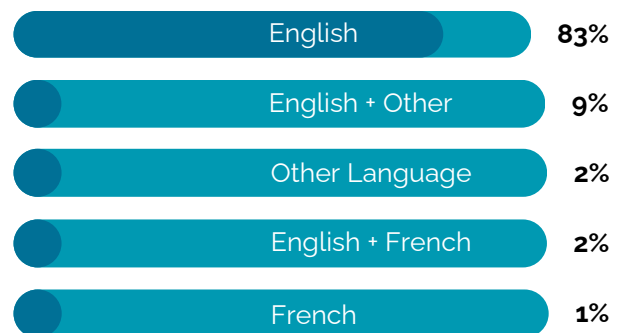
In terms of language of study, 83% of English speakers chose to go abroad to study in English. A small percentage (2%) opted for programs that offered instruction in both English and French. Another 9% of participants selected programs that combined English with a language other than French. A minimal 1% pursued learning abroad programs in French only, while a slightly larger but still modest 2% chose programs conducted in languages other than English or French.

While the sample for French-speaking students was small (only 2%), the responses received indicated that over half chose to study in French, while almost one quarter studied in English.

**Language(s) of Respondents**



**Language of Study for English Speaking Respondents**





20% were first in their family to attend post-secondary education



75% were first in their family to participate in learning abroad



4% had dependents while learning abroad



25% had an early learning abroad experience

## Family Matters

Of the participants learning abroad, 20% (30% of college and 19% of university respondents) identified as being the first in their families to pursue post-secondary education. Indigenous (35%) and Black (33%) respondents more often identified themselves as the first in their family to attend post-secondary, compared with 19% of East Asian and 18% of White respondents.

Furthermore, 75% of both college and university respondents indicated that they were the first in their families to participate in a learning abroad experience during their studies.

Additionally, 4% of students navigated their learning abroad journey with dependents.

## Early Learning

When students and alumni were asked whether they had undertaken a learning abroad activity during their primary or secondary school years, the survey data indicated that 25% of respondents (29% of college respondents and 24% of university respondents) had had a previous international experience in their formative schooling years. This represents a significant increase when compared to the 6% reported in the 2016 CBIE report.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> A World of Learning: Canada's Performance and Potential in International Education: <https://cbie.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/awol-2016-en.pdf>



## International Students

Notably, 8% of respondents who participated in learning abroad were international students. While this sample is not large enough to generalize findings, from the data collected, there are interesting correlations that could warrant further study.

For example, looking at the relationship between country of citizenship and destinations for learning abroad for international students, 24% of respondents completed a learning abroad experience in a country where they hold citizenship. In contrast, 12% of Canadian citizen respondents who hold citizenship in a second country travelled to that country for their learning abroad experience, and 12% of respondents who hold Canadian permanent residency travelled to their country of citizenship for learning abroad.

Furthermore, the data show that 30% of international student respondents were concentrated in business fields of study, with 21% pursuing graduate or postgraduate studies at Canadian institutions during their learning abroad experience.

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*Almost half of international student respondents studying in Canada completed a learning abroad experience in a country where they hold citizenship.*

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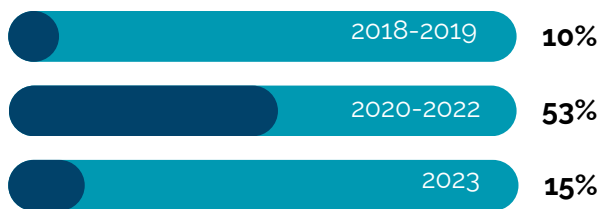
## The Impact of the COVID Pandemic

During the pandemic, COVID-19 impacted the learning-abroad landscape in Canada, with notable changes in students' plans and experiences. Overall, 27% of respondents who took part in a learning abroad experience indicated that the COVID-19 pandemic was either somewhat of or a significant barrier to pursuing their experience.

The pandemic was either somewhat or significantly a barrier for 53% of respondents who began their experience between 2020 and 2022. Of those who went abroad between 2018 and 2019, 10% felt the impacts of the pandemic, and 15% felt the impacts post-COVID-19 pandemic (2023).

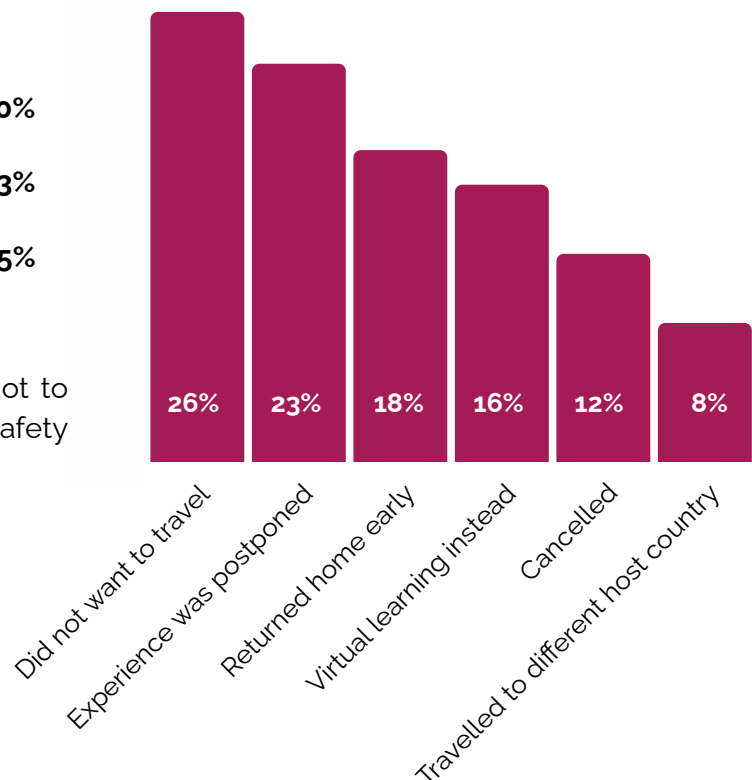
An additional 23% had their learning abroad experiences postponed or deferred to a later date because of the ongoing global health crisis, and 18% had their learning abroad journeys abruptly cut short, necessitating an early return to Canada. Amidst these challenges, 16% of students adapted to the situation and participated in virtual learning abroad experiences instead of physical mobility, while 12% of students had their learning abroad plans cancelled entirely. Nevertheless, some students persevered, with 8% opting to travel abroad to a different host country than they had originally planned.

### Somewhat or Significantly Impacted by COVID-19 by Year of Experience



According to respondents, 26% opted not to travel during the pandemic due to safety concerns.

### Changes in Plans and Experience



## Awareness of Opportunities

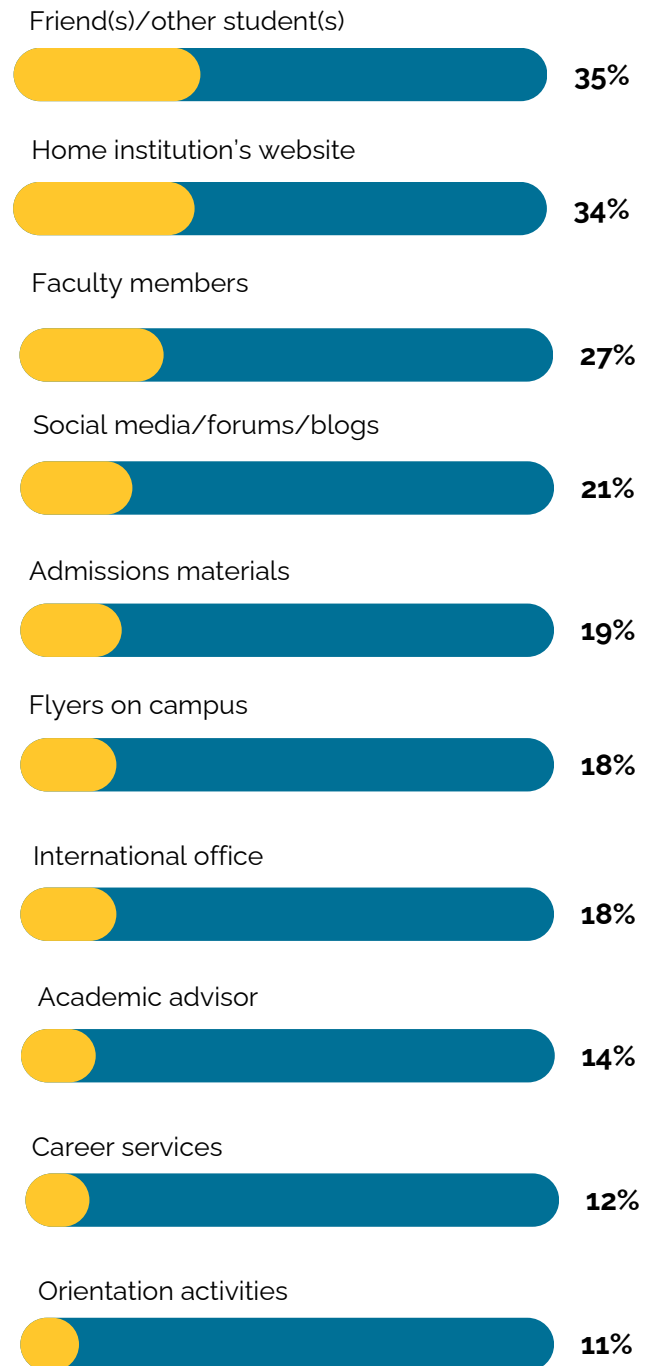
Students discover learning abroad experiences through a diverse array of channels. A significant 35% of students learned about these opportunities from friends or other students. Home institutions' websites also played a crucial role, with 34% of students accessing information through these online platforms.

Faculty members served as valuable resources, as just over a quarter of students relied on their guidance and expertise to explore learning abroad options. According to open-ended responses, students and alumni reported that professors and faculty members actively promoted learning abroad opportunities, incorporating them into their curriculum and sharing relevant information with students.

21% of respondents used social media platforms to learn about overseas experiences. Admissions materials and campus flyers contributed to the dissemination of information by 19% and 18%, respectively, and 18% of respondents said they found information through the international office. Academic advisors (14%), career services (12%), and orientation activities (11%) also served as touchpoints for students in their pursuit of learning abroad experiences.

Of note, only 2% of students accessed the Global Affairs Canada website, suggesting a potential area of improvement in promoting awareness of government-sponsored opportunities.

### Top Information Source



## Wraparound Supports

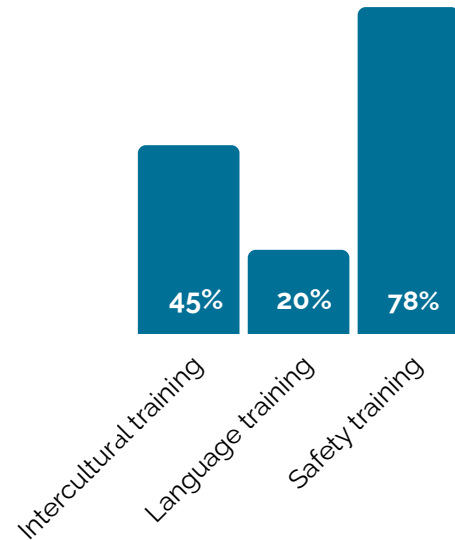
Student and alumni respondents were asked about the extent to which they agree with statements relevant to the institutional support received before and following their learning abroad experience.

Notably, 78% of students who physically travelled abroad agreed or strongly agreed that they received useful information regarding safety and security information and knew who to contact in case of an emergency while abroad.

Intercultural training was useful or very useful during their learning experience for 45% of participants who physically went abroad.

While physically abroad, 69% of respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with the support they received from their home institution.

### Pre-Departure Training Satisfaction for Physical Learning Abroad



# 69%

Satisfied with supports received from home institution while abroad



Upon returning home, 42% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they were satisfied with the support they received from their home institution post-experience.

Furthermore, upon their return from a physical experience, 43% of respondents stated they were given opportunities to help other students prepare to go abroad, and 56% were able to share their stories and experiences with others on campus. An interesting contrast appears when looking at these responses by gender. Responses by men who said they agreed or strongly agreed were consistently higher when asked about their opportunities and support post-experience.

## Host Institutions

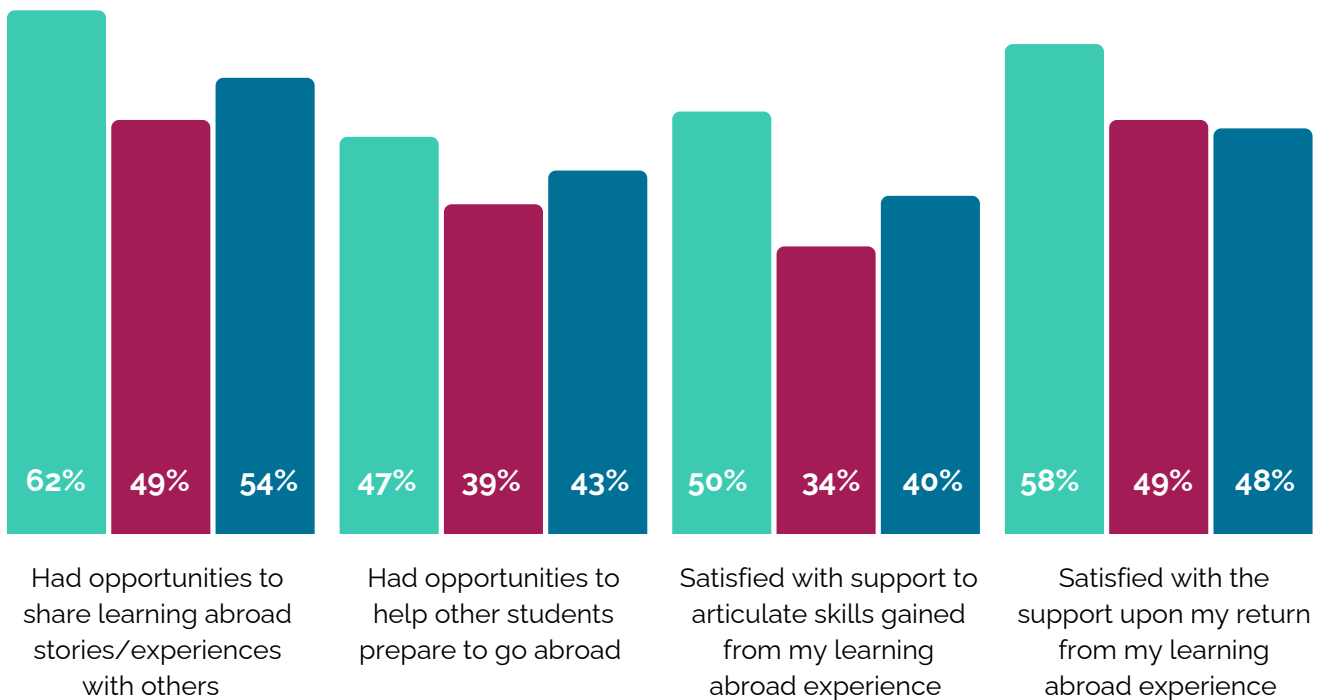
The experiences of students learning abroad at their host institutions are overwhelmingly positive.

A significant 89% of students reported feeling welcomed at their host institution. This is complemented by the 79% who expressed satisfaction with the support they received from their host institution.

The Student and Alumni Survey also asked about safety abroad. Encouragingly, 94% of students felt safe on their host campus or at their host workplace, while 91% felt safe in their host community.

### Post-Experience Opportunity and Satisfaction at Home Institution by Gender

■ Men ■ Gender-diverse ■ Women



## Barriers to Participation

The Student and Alumni Survey was open to all individuals at the participating institutions, and as such, a total of 480 respondents who did not participate in learning abroad still responded to the survey and were directed to answer a subset of questions relating to barriers. Respondents (both participants and non-participants) were asked about the nature and significance of barriers faced in participation in learning abroad.

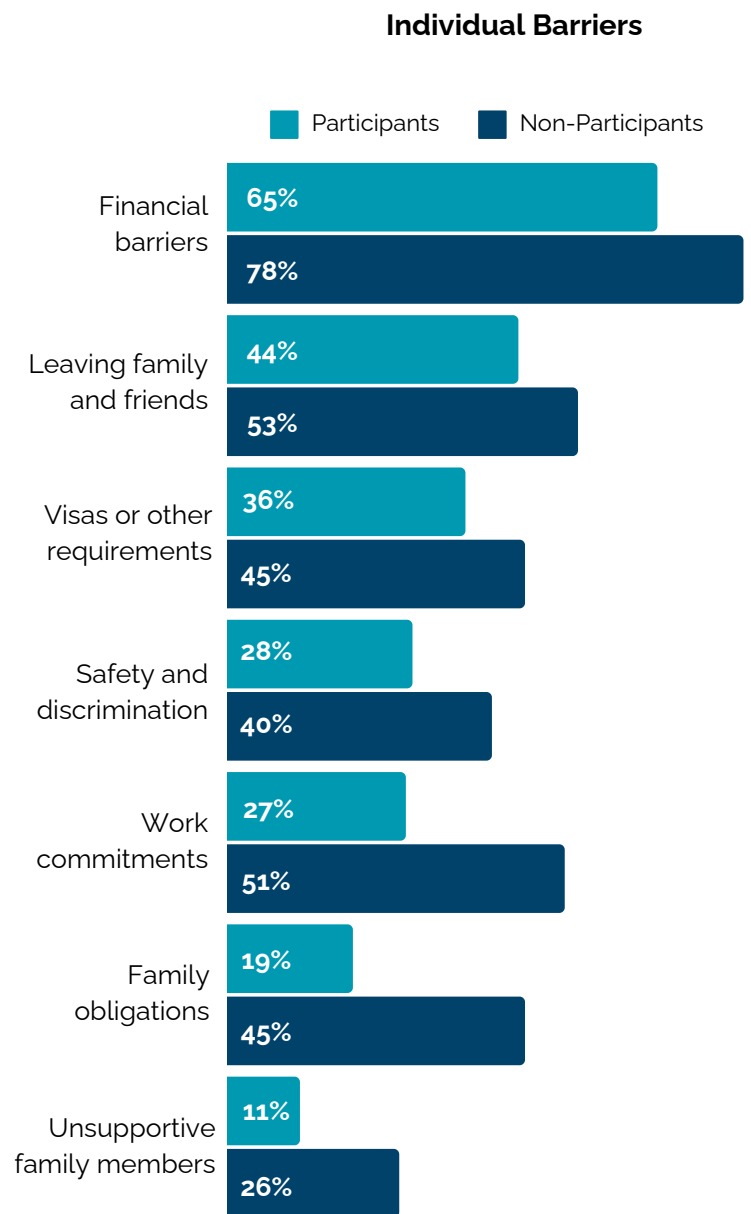
For respondents who participated in a learning abroad opportunity, barriers they identified were considered challenges that complicated the experience, making it difficult but not inaccessible. Conversely, for non-participants, identified barriers were viewed as challenges that rendered the experience seemingly impossible, effectively deterring their participation.

### Individual Barriers

The data from respondents of both groups highlight a striking difference in the perception of financial barriers. 65% of participants acknowledged this obstacle compared to 78% among non-participants, who identified financial considerations as a major deterrent.

Moreover, a higher percentage of non-participants reported anxiety about leaving family and friends (53%), work commitments (51%), family obligations (45%), visa requirements (45%), and concerns related to safety and discrimination (40%), emphasizing the emotional and logistical complexities that deter potential participants.

This data not only provides valuable insights into the challenges faced by those who did not engage in learning abroad but also underscores the importance of addressing these perceived barriers to promote greater participation in international educational opportunities.



## Institutional Barriers

When looking at institutional barriers to participation in learning abroad, the contrast in the perception of barriers related to information availability stands out. While 34% of participants acknowledge a lack of information about learning abroad activities was a barrier, a significantly higher 50% of non-participants cite this as a perceived barrier, indicating a potential gap in communication and outreach efforts.

Similarly, the data reveals a substantial difference in the perception of flexibility issues, with only 32% of participants reporting this as an actual barrier compared to a much higher 45% among non-participants.

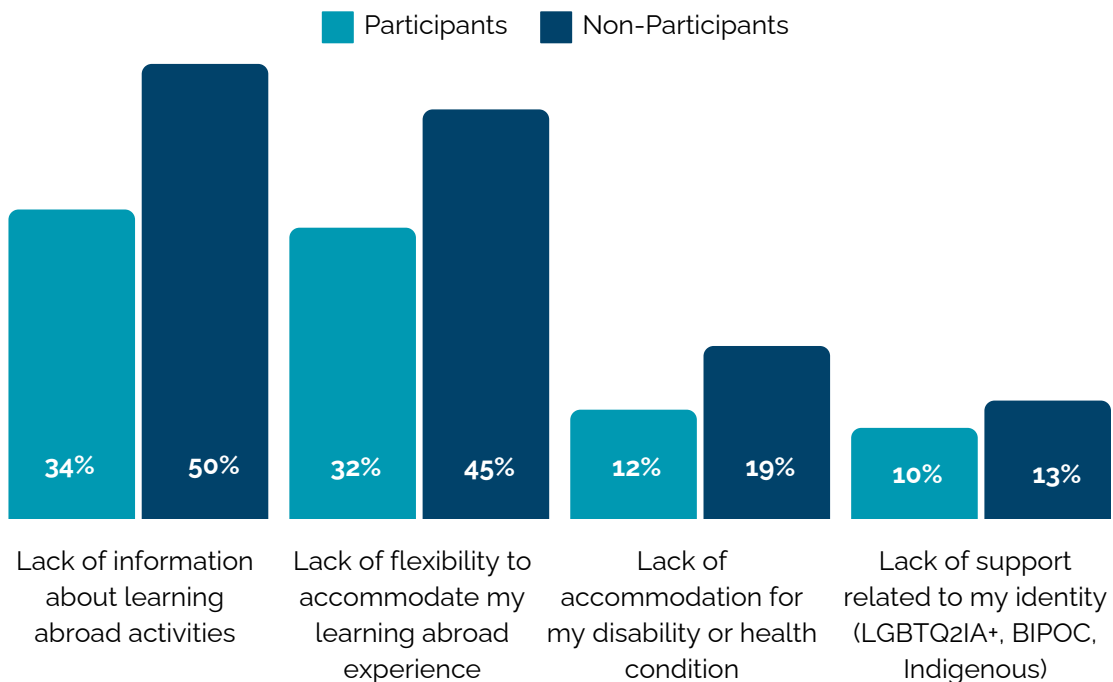
The data indicated that 10% of all participants found a lack of support related to their identity (LGBTQ2IA+, BIPOC, Indigenous)

compared to 13% among non-participants who perceived there to be a lack of support.

While these percentages may appear relatively small, when compared by gender, 37% of gender-diverse respondents identified this as a barrier, compared to 11% and 10% for men and women, respectively.

Similarly, the data on accommodations for disability or health conditions, with 12% of participants citing this as an actual barrier, underscores the importance of recognizing the distinct challenges that this group may encounter. Again, when compared by gender, 32% of gender-diverse respondents identified this as a barrier compared to 10% for men and 13% for women.

### Institutional Barriers to Learning Abroad





## Gender and Barriers

When looking at responses by gender, barriers were felt more significantly by gender-diverse more consistently than by male or female respondents. However, when combining responses that identified moderate and significant barriers, patterns emerged in three areas.

Women (67%) felt they faced financial barriers more so than men (63%), while gender-diverse respondents cited financial barriers 73% of the time.

Feelings of anxiety about leaving family and friends were felt most acutely by women (48%) and gender-diverse respondents (45%), more so than men (37%).

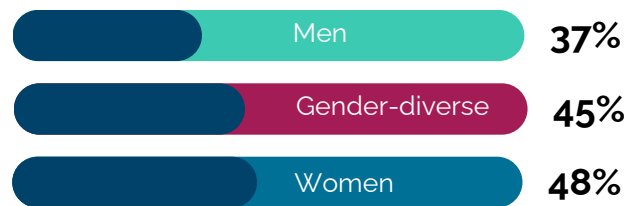
Women (31%) more than men (24%) were concerned about racism and discrimination; however, gender-diverse respondents cite this as a barrier 45% of the time.

## Barriers of Note by Gender

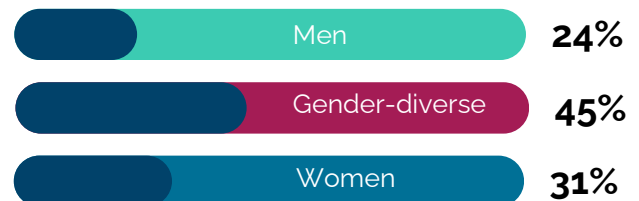
### Financial barriers



### Feelings of anxiety about leaving



### Concerns about racism and discrimination

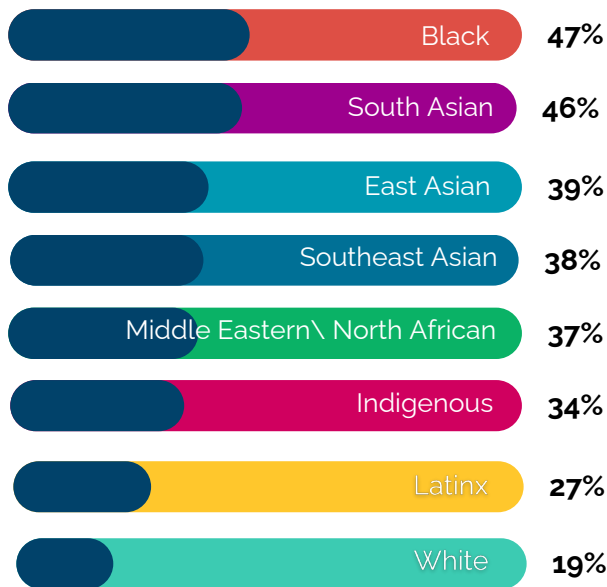


## Racial Identity and Barriers

When looking at barriers by racial identity, there were several areas that demonstrated differences.

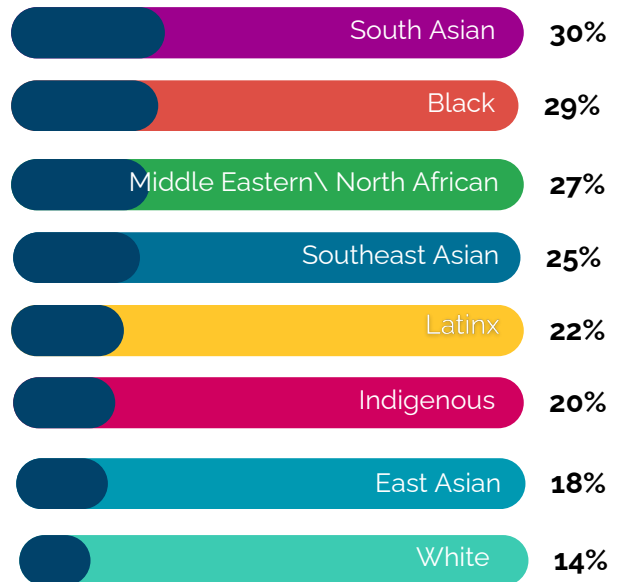
Concerns about safety, racism, and discrimination abroad were substantially more common for Black (47%) and South Asian (46%) respondents, who noted this as a moderate or significant barrier, compared to 19% of White respondents.

### Racism and Discrimination as a Barrier by Racial Identity



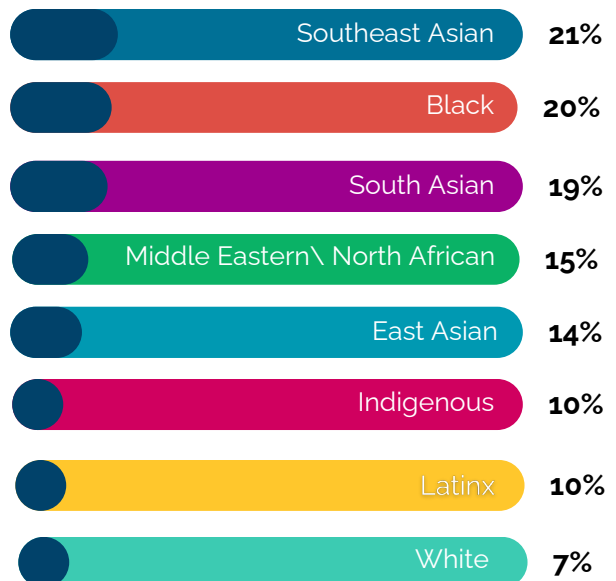
Challenges with family commitments and/or needing to support dependents while abroad what cited as a moderate and significant barrier most often by South Asian (30%), Black (29%), and Middle Eastern or North African (27% respondents, with East Asian (18%) and White (14%) respondents identifying this barrier least often.

### Family Commitments as a Barrier by Racial Identity



Southeast Asian (21%), Black (20%) and South Asian (19%) respondents identified unsupportive family members most often as a barrier, with White respondents citing this 7% of the time.

### Unsupportive Family Members as a Barrier by Racial Identity

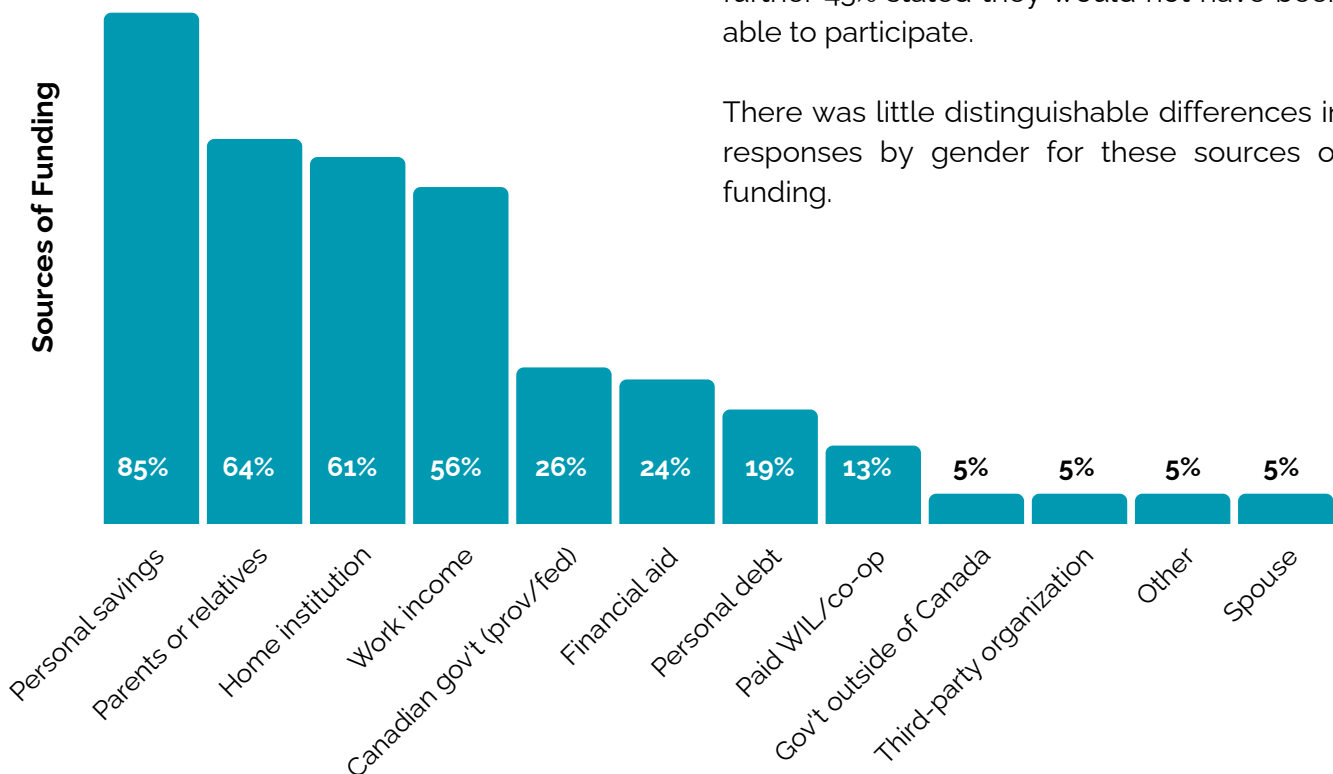


## Funding and Finances

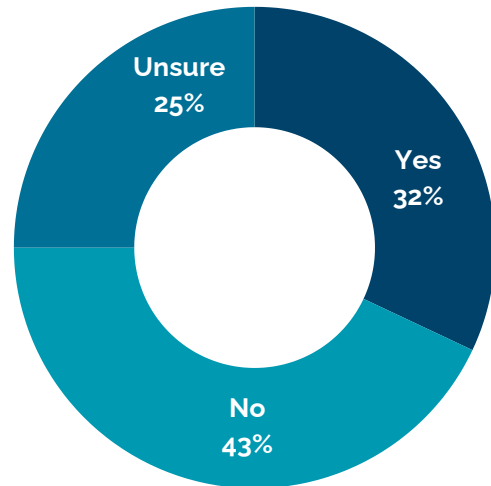
A significant 85% of students finance learning abroad through personal savings. The second most cited source of funding by respondents was parents or relatives (64%). Notably, 19% of students turned to personal debt (i.e., credit card, loan, line of credit, etc.) as a funding source.

Respondents reported using funding directly from Canadian government sources (provincial or federal) at 26%. However, the third most used funding source at 61% was resources received from the student's home institution.

Given that all but three responding institutions were recipients of Global Skills Opportunity (GSO) funding, this finding indicates that supporting institutions with their financial disbursement mechanisms can be an effective means of aiding students in their learning abroad aspirations.



## Learning Abroad Participation without Government or Institutional Funding



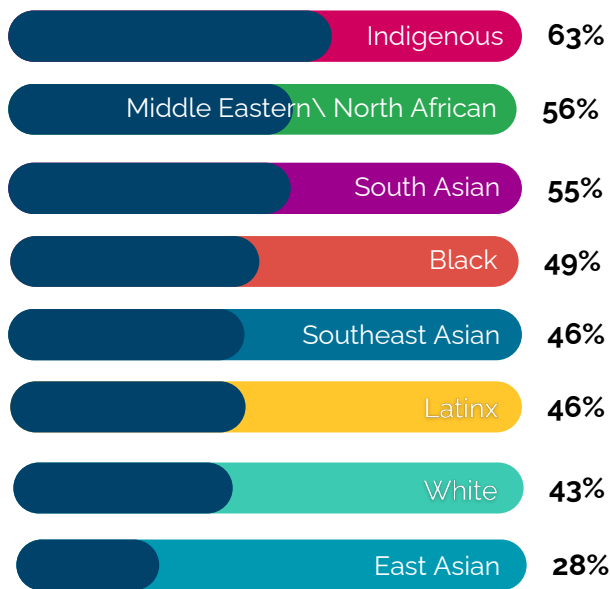
Of the respondents who indicated receiving some or all funding from their institution or a Canadian government source (provincial or federal), 25% indicated they were unsure if they could have participated in learning abroad opportunities without this funding. A further 43% stated they would not have been able to participate.

There was little distinguishable differences in responses by gender for these sources of funding.

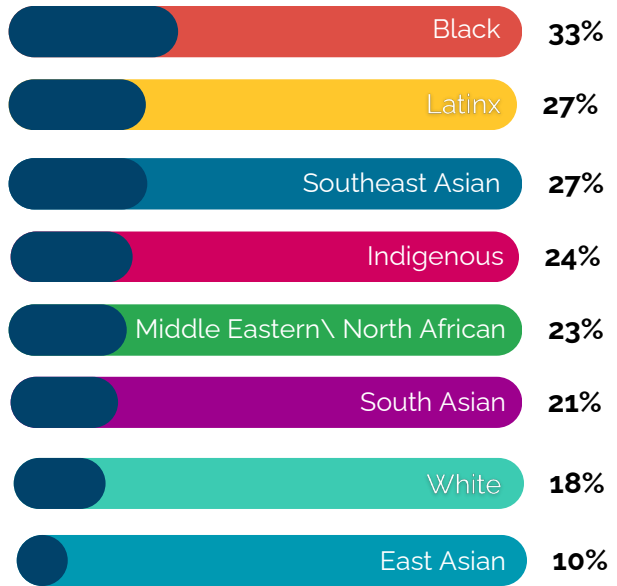
### Racialized Students and Funding Sources

The survey data suggests that institutional and government funding sources are vital for students from underrepresented backgrounds to physically go abroad. Of respondents that selected this as a funding option, 63% of Indigenous respondents, 56% of Middle Eastern and North African respondents, 55% of South Asian respondents, 49% of Black respondents, 46% of Latinx respondents, and 46% of Southeast Asian respondents reported they would not have been able to travel abroad absent this type of funding. White students were indistinguishable from the mean of 43%, and 28% of East Asian students reported that the funding enabled their travel.

### Government and Institutional Funding Sources by Racial Identity



### Personal Debt as Funding Source by Racial Identity



Survey respondents who identified as Black (33%) were most likely to report using personal debt to fund part or all of their learning abroad experience, as were Latinx (27%), Southeast Asian (27%), Indigenous (24%), Middle Eastern or North African (23%), and South Asian (21%) respondents. Comparatively, 18% of White students and 10% of East Asian students used personal debt to finance their learning abroad.

## Skills Acquisition

### Professional/Personal Skills

When asked, "To what extent do you believe your learning abroad experience has helped to improve your personal and/or professional skills?" students and alumni generally reported high levels of self-assessed skill acquisition.

A remarkable 92% of participants who had participated in physical learning abroad reported increased adaptability versus 77% of those who had had a virtual experience. Close behind, interpersonal skills were reported as improved for 90% of participants of physical learning abroad, followed by communication skills, resiliency, and self-confidence, each reported as improved for 89% of physical participants.

The only area that saw skill improvement more so in the virtual experience than the physical was in the acquisition of technical skills, which the survey listed as "skills relevant to your field of study and intended/current area of employment."

By type of program, there are distinct patterns in how many students reported that learning abroad significantly helped their skill acquisition. Students pursuing work-integrated learning, research/fieldwork, and faculty-led programs were less likely to report that learning abroad significantly helped their technical, leadership, and analytical skills.

### Self-identified Professional/Personal Skills



## Intercultural Skills

Respondents were asked how much they believe their learning abroad experience has helped them improve their intercultural skills in several areas.

Physically mobile respondents showed the most notable gains, with 93% reporting an enhanced understanding of similar and different cultures. Close behind, 92% gained knowledge of their host countries' culture, traditions, and norms.

An increase in confidence to engage interculturally and an increase in

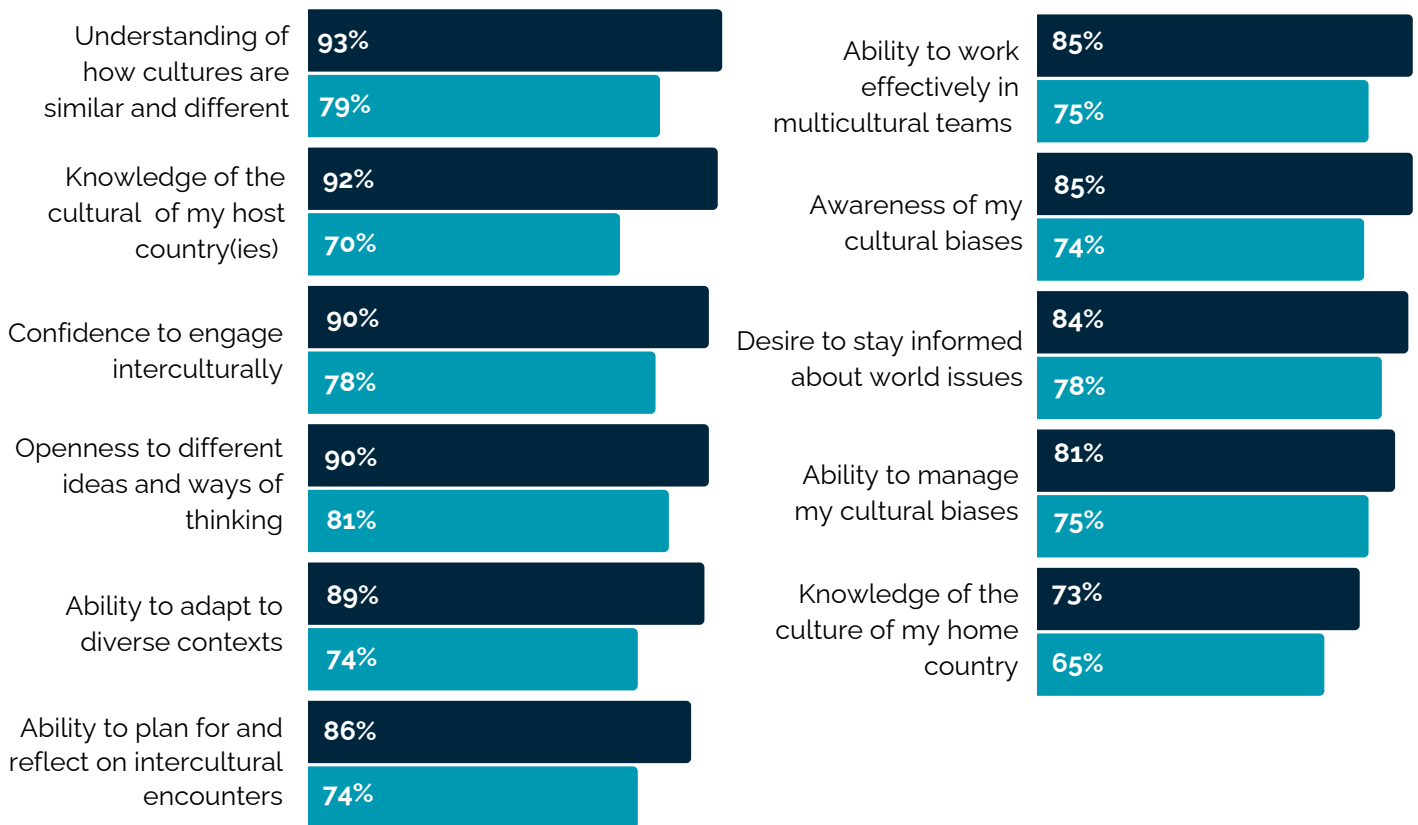
openness to different ideas and ways of thinking was reported by 90% of those who were physically mobile.

Virtual programs also made significant contributions with between two-thirds and over three-quarters of respondents reporting improvements in these skills.

These findings suggest that even without a physical presence in a different country, virtual learning abroad can greatly enhance intercultural competencies.

### Self-Identified Increase in Intercultural Skills

■ Physical ■ Virtual



## Post-Experience Outcomes

Respondents were asked if they felt their learning abroad experience would or has contributed to their post-graduation plans and future career path.

There were several notable differences between physically mobile and virtual respondents. Physically mobile (84%) respondents were more likely to report an expanded network of contacts in countries outside of Canada than those who participated virtually (70%).

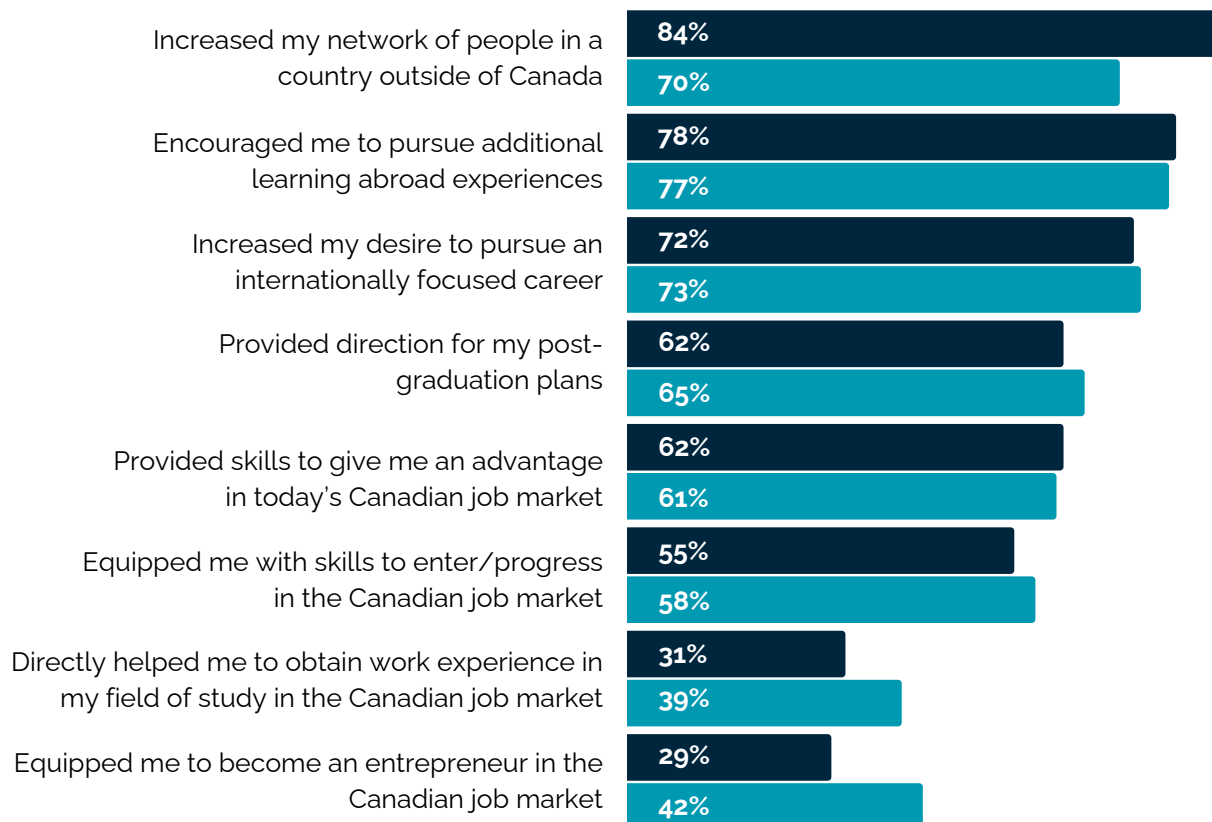
On the other hand, virtual participants gave higher ratings to the responses directly tied to professional gains

in obtaining work experience (39%) compared to physically mobile respondents (31%) and equipping them to become entrepreneurs (42%), compared to 29% for physically mobile participants. All respondents noted that their learning abroad experience encouraged them to pursue additional experiences abroad over three-quarters of the time.

These findings highlight the need for better mechanisms to bridge the gap between the rich learning experiences abroad and their practical application in a professional context, ensuring that the full value of these global experiences is recognized and utilized in the workforce in the future.

### Contribution to Future Plans and Career Path

■ Physical ■ Virtual



# Conclusion

The 2023 Learning Abroad Survey clearly demonstrates the transformative potential of learning abroad for Canadians and Canada. This potential cannot be understated. As the Canadian government and Canadian educational institutions consider the direction of future programming and policy intended to cultivate globally competent youth, the following key themes deserve special consideration.

## **Climate Action**

Canada has a unique opportunity to demonstrate leadership on climate action through learning abroad initiatives as part of a nationwide effort to move toward net zero. Climate action at universities and colleges is gaining traction, with some institutions already taking proactive steps to measure and mitigate their carbon emissions. However, this is presently at a nascent stage of development. Further investments and efforts to incentivize climate action planning for learning abroad are required to achieve impact through the implementation of environmentally responsible programs on a national scale.

## **Facilitating Access and Participation**

It is important that the sector continues to build non-traditional learning abroad programs in addition to ongoing opportunities for academic exchanges, offering a variety of durations and experiences to respond to the diverse student populations and their unique needs.

Virtual experiences necessarily need to be an important part of a portfolio of learning abroad opportunities in the post-pandemic context. They offer accessible, flexible, and cost-effective modalities that can be a game changer for many students. Canada developed significant innovations in virtual learning abroad opportunities during the pandemic. Presently, in the post-COVID-19 pandemic environment, slightly more than one in ten learning abroad opportunities are virtual.

The Canadian international education sector needs to determine the appropriate balance for learning abroad when considering both virtual and physical options so that a maximum number of Canadian students can take up these opportunities. Virtual learning is an important option, as a first or only learning abroad experience, to facilitate greater access—particularly for underrepresented students (especially racialized students) and therefore warrants intentional investment.

Beyond virtual mobility, there has been considerable innovation in the outbound mobility space across Canadian institutions. The Global Skills Opportunity (GSO) program has been a key catalyst for institutions to design and implement customized approaches to attract, fund, and support groups who typically do not participate in learning abroad experiences in Canada: Indigenous students, students with disabilities, and low-income students. Ongoing funding of this nature is imperative for facilitating access to learning abroad opportunities for underrepresented groups.

Furthermore, programming that considers the needs of diverse racial and gender identities, generational status, and family responsibilities will facilitate greater access to and participation in learning abroad opportunities.

This survey initiative underscores the strategic role of faculty in catalyzing opportunities for students and promoting their engagement in said activities. Further strategic investments in faculty-led programming should be prioritized to reach and incentivize more students to participate in learning abroad experiences.

Additionally, expanding the scope of learning abroad programs beyond academic disciplines to include skilled trades, for example, is a promising development that will enable students to gain valuable cross-cultural experiences and practical skills in their respective fields.

### **Academic Recognition**

While academic recognition of exchange and faculty-led programming is high at both colleges and universities, more work needs to be done to give greater recognition to research/fieldwork and other kinds of programming.

### **Destinations**

Further effort is required to encourage students to pursue learning abroad opportunities in non-traditional destinations. The pre-COVID-19 pandemic data included in this report suggests that students are still largely pursuing learning abroad opportunities in traditional destinations.

It will be important to consider program types when diversifying destination countries, as different countries may have varying appeals to specific kinds of learning abroad programs.

Canada hosts a tremendous inbound flow of international students. From a reciprocity standpoint, Canada has work to do in ramping up the outflow of Canadian students into key countries and regions to achieve a balanced bilateral flow that relates to our relations with individual partner countries and to raise the visibility and profile of Canadian students abroad within key regions.

The Learning Abroad Survey highlighted that over 80% of respondents reported an increase in their network of contacts in countries outside of Canada as a direct result of their learning abroad experiences. As Canada seeks to position the country through new strategic alliances globally, with particular emphasis on key regional strategies, it is important for policymakers to recognize that Canadian youth have an important role to play in building out Canada's footprint and profile abroad. New networks forged abroad through meaningful people-to-people connections have the potential to be strategic in terms of Canada's future positioning and place in the world.

## **Policy/Programming Changes**

Given the Canadian government's current efforts in futureproofing Canada's immigration system, it will be important to consider the further expansion of eligibility for participation in learning abroad programming beyond Canadian students to include international students and permanent residents. There is an appetite among students from different backgrounds and statuses to expand learning abroad opportunities to all individuals learning at Canadian institutions, regardless of their citizenship or residency status. Embracing this inclusive approach aligns with providing enriching educational experiences to a wide range of students, fostering intercultural understanding, and promoting global engagement within the Canadian higher education landscape.

Given that a quarter of students surveyed had a previous international experience in their formative schooling years, there is clearly value in expanding access to learning abroad opportunities and promoting their benefits. This will support more students to engage in transformative international educational experiences from an early stage in their education journeys. More pilot learning abroad programs at the K-12 level would foster an early interest in global learning experiences and create a lifelong commitment to international education.

More work is required to incentivize both English- and French-speaking students to pursue learning abroad opportunities in another language, promoting the opportunities and benefits of language acquisition and greater cultural immersion.

## **Raising Awareness**

Comprehensive and multifaceted outreach strategies are needed to ensure that students are well-informed and empowered to explore the vast array of learning abroad opportunities available to them. This is especially true for government programming. Alumni play an important role in raising the profile of learning abroad opportunities within their respective institutions and communities.

## **Addressing Barriers**

Funding remains the top barrier to participation in learning abroad experiences. Funding for learning abroad from government and institutions is imperative for facilitating participation and access to learning abroad opportunities. Of the survey respondents who indicated receiving some or all funding from their institution or a Canadian government source, 43% indicated that they would not have been able to participate if they had not received the funding.

Given that all but three institutions (two universities and one college) that participated in this survey were recipients of Global Skills Opportunity (GSO) funding, this reinforces the notion that supporting institutions with their financial disbursement mechanisms is an effective means of aiding students in their learning abroad aspirations.

The fact that nearly one in five of surveyed students indicated that they turn to personal debt to finance their learning abroad underscores the need for further funding to support these endeavours and lighten the burden of participation.

## Expanding Impacts

The survey results show very strong professional and intercultural skills acquisition as a result of learning abroad experiences (physical and virtual to varying degrees). The results also indicate strong impacts in terms of how learning abroad experiences are shaping the professional futures of participants in an increasingly globalized environment.

However, it appears that more effort is required to support students upon re-entry in articulating and translating the skills and networks they acquired abroad into their personal, professional, and academic pursuits. Leveraging the unique skills and experience they acquire will help to ensure that the full value of these global educational experiences is recognized and utilized in the workforce.

## Comprehensive Longitudinal Data

Robust and routine national data collection on learning abroad experiences, including harmonization of data counting methods in alignment with international methods, will be essential for enhancing understanding of student engagement in learning abroad opportunities.

Further systemization of socio-demographic data collection will enable the development of more targeted and inclusive support services, scholarships, and program offerings by governments and institutions tailored to the specific needs and aspirations of diverse student cohorts. This is key to securing equitable access to learning abroad opportunities for all.

CBIE is committed to conducting future iterations of the Learning Abroad Survey to provide policy-relevant data and comprehensive analysis of short- and long-term trends. Being able to compare trends over time will inform the Canadian international education sector's approach to developing a globally connected and interculturally savvy future workforce. A longitudinal dataset will also support the sector in continuing to build and tailor policies and programming to facilitate access and participation in inclusive, environmentally conscious, and impactful learning abroad experiences for years to come.



# Appendix A

## Identity Definitions

### Racial Identity

Under the demographic section of the survey, respondents were asked the following question: “With which racial group(s) do you identify?” Respondents were able to select one, or more, of the following options:

- Black (i.e., African, African Canadian, African American, Latino/Afro-Caribbean descent)
- East Asian (i.e., Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Mongolian, Tibetan, Taiwanese)
- Indigenous (i.e., First Nations, Métis, Inuk/Inuit, Native American)
- Latino (i.e., Latin American, Hispanic)
- Middle Eastern or North African (i.e., Afghan, Egyptian, Iranian, Lebanese, Turkish, Kurdish)
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander (i.e., Hawaiian, Chamorro/Guam, Samoan, or other Pacific Islands)
- South Asian (i.e., Bangladeshi, Bhutanese, Indian, Nepali, Pakistani, Sri Lankan)
- Southeast Asian (i.e., Burmese, Cambodian, Filipino, Hmong, Indonesian, Laotian, Malaysian, Mien, Singaporean, Thai, Vietnamese)
- White (i.e., European)
- My identity is not represented in this list
- Prefer not to answer

### Gender Identity

Under the demographic section of the survey, respondents were asked the following question: “How do you define your gender identity at the time of your learning abroad experience?” Respondents were able to select one, or more, of the following options:

- Man
- Woman
- Agender or gender neutral
- Demigender
- Genderqueer, non-binary, or gender non-conforming
- Genderfluid
- Trans/transgender
- Two-spirit
- Questioning or unsure
- None of the above
- Prefer not to answer

# Appendix B

## Participating Institutions

### **Colleges, Institutes, Polytechnics**

Bow Valley College  
Centennial College  
Coast Mountain College  
Conestoga College  
Durham College  
George Brown College  
Justice Institute of British Columbia  
Loyalist College  
Medicine Hat College  
New Brunswick Community College  
Niagara College  
Northern Alberta Institute of Technology  
Nova Scotia Community College  
Okanagan College  
Olds College of Agriculture and Technology  
Seneca College  
St. Lawrence College

### **Universities**

Acadia University  
Carleton University  
Dalhousie University  
Kwantlen Polytechnic University  
Lakehead University  
MacEwan University  
McMaster University  
Memorial University of Newfoundland

Mount Allison University  
NSCAD University  
Ontario Tech University  
Queen's University  
Simon Fraser University  
St. Francis Xavier University  
Toronto Metropolitan University  
Université de Moncton  
Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières  
Université du Québec en Outaouais  
University of Alberta  
University of British Columbia  
University of Calgary  
University of Guelph  
University of New Brunswick  
University of Ottawa  
University of Prince Edward Island  
University of Regina  
University of Saskatchewan  
University of Toronto  
University of Victoria  
University of Windsor  
University of Winnipeg  
Vancouver Island University  
Western University  
Wilfrid Laurier University  
York University

# Acknowledgments

In September 2022, CBIE engaged with the international education community to seek their input in updating the Learning Abroad Survey instrument. A working group was formed that provided strategic and operational input in refining the two survey tools. CBIE would like to acknowledge with sincere gratitude the efforts of our Learning Abroad Survey Working Group.

Working group members included Diane Barbarič, Ph.D., Janna Ferguson, Ph.D., Vinitha Gengatharan, Kate Jennings, Janine Knight-Grofe, Lynne Mitchell, Ph.D., Colleen Packer, and Karima Ramji.

CBIE wishes to also thank our institutional partners for providing exceptional support in the administration of this survey. The breadth of institutional participation in this survey reflects the commitment of institutions to continuously improve their offerings and support for learning abroad in Canada.

We are tremendously grateful to the students and alumni who openly shared with us their experiences by lending their voices as part of this comprehensive report and undertaking.

A report of this scope requires the input of many individuals, including the efforts of the CBIE Secretariat team. Of special note, Melissa Payne and Melissa Toupin-Laforge were instrumental in mobilizing this initiative and in nurturing engagement with our international education practitioner community in the delivery of the survey.





Canadian Bureau for  
International Education

Canadian Bureau for International Education  
220 Laurier Avenue West, Suite 1550  
Ottawa, Ontario, Canada K1P 5Z9  
[www.cbie.ca](http://www.cbie.ca)

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