



Policy paper presented by

Value Beyond the
Dollars and Cents:

**International Students’
Contributions to Canada and
Their Need for Supports**

 **CASA | ACAE**

Canadian Alliance of Student Associations
Alliance canadienne des associations étudiantes

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CASA Principles

CASA advocates for a post-secondary education system that is accessible, affordable, innovative and of the highest quality. Students and post-secondary institutions are increasingly recognizing that a key component of an innovative and top quality education is interconnectedness with the world. One of the most widespread, immediate, and impactful means of enhancing interconnectedness is welcoming

international students to study in Canada. International students contribute in diverse and meaningful ways to the quality of education on their campuses, to the strength of the Canadian economy and to all aspects of Canadian culture and society. As such, it is imperative that, like other students, they too receive the supports they need to thrive during their studies.

CASA's Vision for International Students

CASA believes that international students are invaluable members of post-secondary communities. They directly contribute billions of dollars to the Canadian economy, and as highly skilled and educated individuals, many go on to become contributing members of the Canadian workforce across all sectors of the economy. They enrich dialogues on campus, offer essential cross-cultural perspectives, and encourage a wider awareness of pressing national and international issues. CASA would like to see concrete actions designed to ensure that international students experience a truly high quality education in a welcoming and inclusive environment.

CASA holds the following core beliefs about the international student experience in Canada:

- » International students add immeasurably to the campus experience of all students and to the quality of post-secondary education in Canada
- » International students contribute value to the Canadian economy and to Canada's diversity and culture as a whole
- » International students should be encouraged, supported and valued throughout their studies in Canada and should receive the highest quality educational experience possible
- » Supports should be available to ensure that qualified international students from diverse economic backgrounds can study in Canada
- » The procedures, paperwork and forms required to study in Canada should be consistent, accessible and straightforward to navigate
- » As potential permanent residents and citizens, post-secondary institutions and governments in Canada must fully value the skills and experiences international students bring to Canada, and gain while studying in Canada

Introduction

Context: A growing focus on attracting international students to Canada

The goal of attracting more international students is an increasingly common theme in discussions on the future of post-secondary education in Canada. The goal of making Canada a premiere destination for post-secondary students from around the world has been repeated throughout the past decade by provincial and federal levels of government and leaders in the post-secondary sector from coast-to-coast. “International students in Canada,” the Advisory Panel on Canada’s International Education Strategy noted, “provide immediate and significant economic benefits to Canadians in every region of the country.”¹ The panel advocates for a doubling of the number of international students studying in Canada over the span of a decade, from just under 240,000 in 2011 to over 450,000 in 2022.²

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Denoting widespread interest in the subject, a Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO) report found that between 2004 and 2012, annual reports published by Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) “mentioned ‘foreign student’ and ‘international student’ and average of 22 times

per report.”³ One CIC (now called Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada) report described international students as “a potential stream of highly skilled immigrants who, due to their investments in education and training in Canada, are able to integrate relatively quickly and easily into the Canadian labour market and society.”⁴ The Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC) published a plan in 2011, meanwhile, for which one of its stated objectives was to “[i]ncrease Canada’s competitiveness in the international marketplace through the promotion of the Education in Canada brand and the development of a global identity that reflects the value of educational opportunities in Canada.”⁵ The current federal government’s platform during the 2015 election promised to “make it easier for international students and other temporary residents to become Canadian citizens...”⁶ Following the election, the Liberal government’s then Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, John McCallum, described international students as “the cream of the crop, in terms of potential future Canadians.”⁷

Post-secondary institutions and provinces actively recruit international students. A study of Ontario colleges has found that “international students are compensating

1 Canada’s International Education Strategy: *Harnessing our Knowledge Advantage to Drive Innovation and Prosperity*. 2014. Accessed online: <http://international.gc.ca/global-markets-marches-mondiaux/assets/pdfs/overview-apercu-eng.pdf>

2 Canada’s International Education Strategy: *Harnessing our Knowledge Advantage to Drive Innovation and Prosperity*. 2014. Accessed online: <http://international.gc.ca/global-markets-marches-mondiaux/assets/pdfs/overview-apercu-eng.pdf>

3 Williams, Keegan, Gabriel Williams, Amy Arbuckle, Margaret Walton-Roberts and Jenna Hennebery, *International Students in Ontario’s Postsecondary Education System, 2000-2012: An evaluation of changing policies, populations and labour market entry processes* (Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, 2015), 11. Accessed online: <http://www.heqco.ca/SiteCollectionDocuments/International%20Students%20in%20Ontario%20ENG.pdf>

4 Monica Van Huystee, *A profile of foreign students who transition to permanent resident status in Atlantic Canada* (Ottawa: Citizenship and Immigration Canada, April 2011), iv. Accessed online: <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/pdf/research-stats/foreign-students.pdf>

5 *Bringing Education in Canada to the World, Bringing the World to Canada* (Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, June 2011), 6. Accessed online: http://www.cmec.ca/Publications/Lists/Publications/Attachments/264/COF_Bringing_Ed_to_Canada_Eng_final.pdf

6 *International Students and Temporary Residents*. Accessed online: <https://www.liberal.ca/realchange/international-students-and-temporary-residents/>

7 Susana Mas, “Express entry review to ease path to permanent residency for foreign students,” *CBC News*, March 15, 2016. Accessed online: <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/express-entry-international-students-1.3483347>

for a decline in domestic students and has allowed for the continual growth in student enrollment.”⁸ In 2010, Ontario’s provincial government articulated its goal of increasing by 50 per cent the number of international students attending the province’s post-secondary institutions.⁹ According to the Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission (MPHEC), the numbers of international students attending Maritime universities has doubled, while a simultaneous decrease in the numbers of domestic, local students was registered at the same institutions.¹⁰ A 2014 study from the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (now Universities Canada) found that for Canadian universities,

recruiting international students for undergraduate programs was their primary concern under the umbrella topic of international connectivity in post-secondary education.¹¹ More broadly, the same report noted that “[t]oday almost all institutions in Canada and around the world engage to some degree in activities aimed at forging global connections and building global competencies among their students, faculty and administrative units. Developing such activities at many levels within universities is now a central part of institutional planning, structures and programming – a phenomenon known as the internationalization of higher education.”¹²

8 Henry Decock, Ursula McCloy, Mitchell Steffler, and Julian Dicaire, *International Students at Ontario Colleges: A Profile* (Ottawa: Canadian Bureau for International Education, October 2016), 3. Accessed online: <http://cbie.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/FINAL-CBIE-Research-in-Brief-N6.pdf>

9 *Going Global: Supporting Ontario’s International Students* (Toronto: Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance, March 2011), 6. Accessed online: https://d3n8a8pro7vnm.cloudfront.net/ousa/pages/123/attachments/original/1473432438/2011-03_Submission_-_Going_Global_document.pdf?1473432438

10 “International Students in Maritime Universities,” *Trends in Maritime Higher Education* 9, no. 3 (May 2012): http://www.mphec.ca/resources/TrendsV9N3_2012.pdf

11 *Canada’s Universities in the World: AUCC Internationalization Survey* (Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, 2014), 10. Accessed online: <https://www.univcan.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/internationalization-survey-2014.pdf>

12 *Canada’s Universities in the World: AUCC Internationalization Survey*, 3. Accessed online: <https://www.univcan.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/internationalization-survey-2014.pdf>

The Benefits of International Students Studying in Canada

International students enrich the educational experiences of the entire student population on Canadian post-secondary campuses. We live in a world without borders that is becoming ever more interdependent, interconnected and complex. Canada must ensure that its citizens are highly educated and equipped with the skills and experiences necessary to contribute to and succeed in today's global realities. A diverse and cosmopolitan post-secondary experience is instrumental in preparing Canada's students to work in an increasingly interdependent global community.

“International students facilitate an international forum for the sharing of ideas, expertise, research, and scholarship, while bringing diverse perspective to the key issues of the day.”

International students facilitate an international forum for the sharing of ideas, expertise, research, and scholarship, while bringing diverse perspective to the key issues of the day. A study of domestic student responses to international students found majorities of those surveyed “reported that their perspective about the world had been enriched since making international friends (or in many cases, acquaintances) at school” and “that the growing international student presence has led to increased cross-cultural sensitivity and awareness among students on campus.”¹³

International students, moreover, are prospective ambassadors who can not

only be a voice for Canada abroad, sharing Canadian interests, culture and values, but also strengthen international collaboration in higher education, research, trade, and diplomacy. An Australian study on international students has recently observed that “there is now a network of 2.5 million international alumni from the Australian higher education sector. As they have risen to leadership positions in government and industry, they have become important long-term advocates for Australia.”¹⁴

Available data on the subject reveals broad economic benefits stemming directly from the presence of international students on Canadian campuses. A study conducted for Global Affairs Canada (GAC) found that “international students in Canada spent around \$11.4 billion on tuition, accommodation, and discretionary spending.” The same study estimated that this contribution to the economy “translates to 122,700 jobs... supported in the Canadian economy.”¹⁵ Such economic contributions are widely recognized in countries that attract large numbers of international students. In the United States, for example, international students represent an estimated \$30 billion economic contribution.¹⁶ In Australia the contribution is approximately \$18.8 billion, while in the United Kingdom it is estimated at £10.7 billion.¹⁷



13 Jacqueline Lambert and Alex Usher, “The Pros and Cons of Internationalization: How Domestic Students Experience the Globalizing Campus,” *Higher Education Strategy Associates Intelligence Brief 7* (October 2013): 9. Accessed online: <http://higherstrategy.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Intelligencebrief7-HESA-internationalization-FINAL-WEB.pdf>

14 The Value of International Education to Australia (Deloitte Access Economics, 2015), 54. Accessed online: <https://internationaleducation.gov.au/research/research-papers/Documents/ValueInternationalEd.pdf>

15 Economic Impact of International Education in Canada – An Update. Final Report (Vancouver: Roslyn Kunin & Associates, Inc., July 2016), iii. Accessed online: http://www.international.gc.ca/education/assets/pdfs/Economic_Impact_International_Education_in_Canada_2016_Update.pdf

16 Special Reports: Economic Impact of International Students (Institute of International Education). Accessed online: <http://www.iie.org/Research-and-Publications/Open-Doors/Data/Economic-Impact-of-International-Students#WlzhREZNTY>

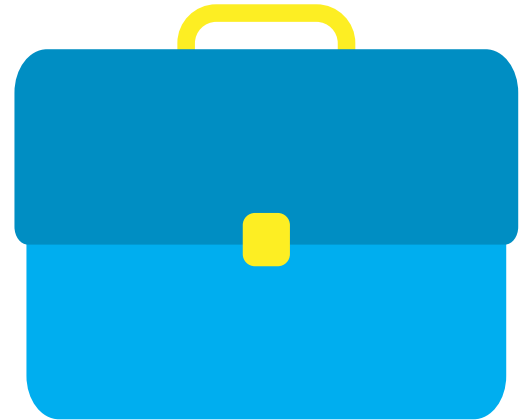
17 The Value of International Education to Australia (Deloitte Access Economics, 2015), 1. Accessed online: <https://internationaleducation.gov.au/research/research-papers/Documents/ValueInternationalEd.pdf>; *International Students in Higher Education: The UK and Its Competition* (Universities UK, 2014). Accessed online: <http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Documents/2014/international-students-in-higher-education.pdf>

International student contributions to the economy come in a variety of forms and benefit diverse sectors, from expenses directly related to education and purchasing consumer goods to the tourism dollars spent when family and friends visit.¹⁸

“International students who decide to stay in Canada after their studies are essential to addressing the ongoing, and increasingly imperative, issue of a skilled worker shortage in Canada.”

In addition to the money they inject into the Canadian economy, international students who decide to stay in Canada after their studies are essential to addressing the ongoing, and increasingly imperative, issue of a skilled worker shortage in Canada.

“Canada’s growing shortage of highly skilled labour is becoming desperate,” the Chamber of Commerce has argued, “threatening our ability to keep up in a global-knowledge-based economy.”¹⁹ This issue will only become more acute as baby boomers retire and as the number of retirees is predicted to surpass newcomers entering the workforce. Recognizing this, the Advisory Group on Canada’s International Education Strategy states that “International students also help address the shortage of skilled labour that diminish Canada’s long-term capacity for research and innovation...”²⁰ Indeed, over half of international students surveyed in Ontario indicated their intent to apply to become permanent residents. More than seventy per cent planned to look for work in Canada following the completion of their studies.²¹



¹⁸ *The Value of International Education to Australia* (Deloitte Access Economics, 2015), 1. Accessed online: <https://internationaleducation.gov.au/research/research-papers/Documents/ValueInternationalEd.pdf>

¹⁹ *Canada’s International Education Strategy: Harnessing our Knowledge Advantage to Drive Innovation and Prosperity*. 2014. Accessed online: <http://international.gc.ca/global-markets-marches-mondiaux/assets/pdfs/overview-apercu-eng.pdf>

²⁰ *Canada’s International Education Strategy: Harnessing our Knowledge Advantage to Drive Innovation and Prosperity* (2014), 9. Accessed online: <http://international.gc.ca/global-markets-marches-mondiaux/assets/pdfs/overview-apercu-eng.pdf>

²¹ *Going Global: Supporting Ontario’s International Students* (Toronto: Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance, March 2011), 17. Accessed online: https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/ousa/pages/123/attachments/original/1473432438/2011-03_Submission_-_Going_Global_document.pdf?1473432438

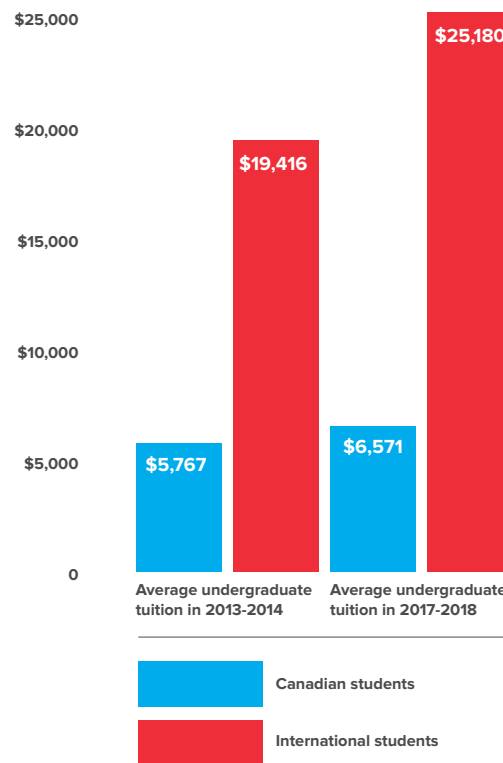
The Challenges Facing International Students

While an increasing emphasis is being placed on recruiting international students, and while the wide-ranging benefits of international students to Canada are clear, a significant gap separates this rhetoric from the actual experiences of international students. Canada sits behind several countries, including the United States, Australia, and various locations in Europe, in its popularity as a destination for international study. Attracting more international students, it is clear, is directly tied to the ability of Canadian post-secondary institutions, as well as provincial and federal levels of government, to make the case for Canada as an appealing, respected and top quality destination for academic pursuits and career development. “International education is a microcosm of the global competition for talent,” a recent Chamber of Commerce report argues. “It is a competition that is fought on the basis of a country’s educational reputation, the opportunity to immigrate and the timeliness of entry.”²²

“Post-secondary institutions have a responsibility to deliver a quality and innovative academic experience to all their students, including the significant numbers of international students pursuing studies on campuses across Canada.”

While branding campaigns are often the focus, there is a more straightforward way to appeal to international students: by ensuring that those who study in Canada truly experience an education of the highest quality in a welcoming, supportive and inclusive environment wherein they are fully appreciated and valued. Post-secondary institutions have a responsibility to deliver a quality and innovative academic experience

to all their students, including the significant numbers of international students pursuing studies on campuses across Canada. In 2015, there were 353,000 international students studying in Canada.²³ Despite these numbers, the tuition they pay, and the myriad contributions they make to their campuses and communities, international students encounter concerning problems while studying in Canada.



Canadian and international tuition fees by level of study. (Statistics Canada). Accessed online: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tb1/en/tv/action?pid=3710004501>

As the numbers of international students in Canada have grown, concerns have arisen that the goal of improving Canada’s rank as a destination for post-secondary education is less about the intrinsic value of attracting more diverse perspectives and improving connectivity than it is about the tuition international students pay. Tuition fees for all post-secondary students have risen in recent decades across the board, and this is particularly

22 Immigration for a Competitive Canada: Why Highly Skilled International Talent is at Risk (Chamber of Commerce, January 2016), 21. Accessed online: <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/2690578-Chamber-of-Commerce-Immigration-for-a.html>

23 Study: International Students, Immigration and Earnings Growth (Statistics Canada, August 2017). Accessed online: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/170822/dq170822c-eng.htm>

true for international students. The Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance (OUSA) has expressed its concern “that international students are being used to compensate for funding gaps in other areas.”²⁴ Federal funding for post-secondary education has declined in recent years, and post-secondary institutions have correspondingly increased the proportion of their revenues coming from tuition.²⁵

As a federally focused organization, CASA advocates for increasing and earmarking core funding for post-secondary institutions through the establishment of a dedicated, independent Canada Education Transfer from the federal to provincial governments. Post-secondary institutions depending increasingly on tuition while public funding declines, impacts the quality of education for all students. Other countries who attract a significant number of international students have voiced concerns about relying on the tuition they pay to cover broader institutional funding needs. As Universities UK reports, for example, “[t]he higher education sector as a whole now sources around one-eighth of its

which is a provincial jurisdiction, CASA is concerned by the significant increases to international student tuition year over year, and especially the unpredictability of these increases and without a matching focus on the quality of the educational experience.

Also concerning are the specific challenges international students face when seeking to obtain the documents necessary to begin their studies in Canada. Students encounter obstacles and a lack of clarity in the application process when obtaining visas for themselves and, in instances when they come to study in Canada as members of families, for spouses and common-law partners. Additionally, a lack of funding opportunities prevents the enrollment of international students who might have lots to offer the overall quality of post-secondary education in Canada, but who come from lower income backgrounds.

Once in Canada, international students face social and academic barriers.²⁷ Many international students encounter difficulties integrating into their campus and community environment. This is especially concerning in light of the fact that many international students will make decisions about whether to stay and work in Canada following graduation based on their study experiences. International students also encounter challenges when seeking to work while studying in Canada, and when aiming to stay and work in Canada following graduation.

CASA advocates for several policies aimed at improving quality of life and education for international students and recent graduates.

“CASA is concerned by the significant increases to international student tuition year over year, and especially the unpredictability of these increases and without a matching focus on the quality of the educational experience.”

income from international students’ tuition fees. Stagnating or fluctuating demand from prospective students overseas can therefore leave institutions vulnerable or affect their ability to plan strategically in the long-term.”²⁶ While CASA’s federal focus means we do not advocate specifically on tuition levels,

24 Going Global: Supporting Ontario’s International Students (Toronto: Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance, March 2011), 9. Accessed online: https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/ousa/pages/123/attachments/original/1473432438/2011-03_Submission_-_Going_Global_document.pdf?1473432438

25 Federal Spending on Postsecondary Education (Ottawa: Parliamentary Budget Office, 2016), 2. Accessed online: http://www.pbo-dpb.gc.ca/web/default/files/Documents/Reports/2016/PSE/PSE_EN.pdf

26 *International Students in Higher Education: The UK and Its Competition* (Universities UK, 2014), 1. Accessed online: <http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Documents/2014/international-students-in-higher-education.pdf>

27 Canadian Alliance of Student Associations. *Report on First-Year, International, and Non-Traditional Student Focus Groups*, 2005.

CASA Policies on International Students

Investing in the Quality of the International Student Experience

Principles:

The Canadian government and post-secondary institutions in Canada are increasingly focused on attracting international students to study in Canada. It is the responsibility of the government and post-secondary institutions to ensure that these same students have a positive and high quality experience, through the provision of appropriate programs and services and clear visa and study permit processes.

Concerns:

International students continue to face social and academic barriers while pursuing their education in Canada.²⁸ One recent study found that in addition to experiences of “culture shock” and challenges around language, “[m]any international students did not ‘feel at home’ in Canada because they not only faced difficulties making friends but in some cases they also encountered discrimination.”²⁹

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Too often, orientation programs and student services are inadequate in helping international students transition to their new environment and in facilitating their full participation in academic, social, and campus life. Support services, such

as academic writing centres, counseling services, and trained international student advisors, can considerably enrich the international student experience. Institutions and government have a responsibility to meet the needs of international students by providing services to ensure a positive integration into the Canadian academic landscape. While by many measures domestic students report positive experiences related to international students on their campuses, one study also noted “that the values of internationalization are still in many ways adopted only superficially by Canadian students, and require strengthening.”³⁰ Internationalization programming on campuses would therefore create a more welcoming and supportive environment and higher quality education for all students.

Many international students also encounter frustrating experiences while seeking to obtain necessary visas and study permits. This is particularly true for the numerous international students who come to study in Canada with families. The average age of international students is higher than domestic students in Canada.³¹ Spouses and common-law partners of international students are eligible to apply for “open work permits.” However, partners from countries which require a Temporary Residence Visa often encounter significant difficulties in obtaining these documents. For many spouses and partners, it is unclear

28 Canadian Alliance of Student Associations. *Report on First-Year, International, and Non-Traditional Student Focus Groups*, 2005.

29 Cary Wu and Rima Wilkes. “International students’ post-graduation migration plans and search for home.” *Geoforum* 80 (2017): 128.

30 Jacqueline Lambert and Alex Usher, “The Pros and Cons of Internationalization: How Domestic Students Experience the Globalizing Campus,” *Higher Education Strategy Associates Intelligence Brief* 7 (October 2013): 19. Accessed online: <http://higherstrategy.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Intelligencebrief7-HESA-internationalization-FINAL-WEB.pdf>

31 Henry Decock, Ursula McCloy, Mitchell Steffler, and Julian Dicaire, *International Students at Ontario Colleges: A Profile* (Ottawa: Canadian Bureau for International Education, October 2016), 4.

whether it is best to apply for a work permit prior to arriving in Canada, or after arriving in Canada as a visitor.

A lack of clarity in the application process creates anxiety and subsequent difficulty

“Many international students also encounter frustrating experiences while seeking to obtain necessary visas and study permits.”

for those international students who sometimes must study alone in Canada, without the support of their spouse or partner, as a result of this confusion. This is problematic for the many international students whose studies in Canada span multiple years. It is also an obstacle in the way of helping international students feel at home in Canada and therefore more likely to remain after graduation. For international students, as for many people, feeling at home is deeply tied to being with family. Amongst international students in a University of British Columbia study most interested in staying in Canada, a significant proportion “are living in Canada with their partner, with their children, or have plans to bring their families to Canada in the near future.”³²

Recommendations

The Canadian government and post-secondary institutions have a responsibility to respond to the needs of international students by providing quality services to ensure a positive integration into the Canadian academic landscape. This can be achieved through the following steps:

- » **Earmarked internationalization funding from the Government of Canada for international student support services and improved transition programs for international students**
- » **Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada clarify the application process to help spouses and partners of international students understand whether they are best served in applying for a work permit from outside or inside Canada**
- » **Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada prioritize Temporary Residence Visa and work permit applications of the spouses and partners of international students**

Recognizing International Student Excellence and Need

Principles:

CASA advocates for an accessible and affordable post-secondary education that is innovative and of the highest quality. Given that an innovative and high quality education depends on attracting talented students, embracing inclusivity and forging global linkages, it is essential that Canada take measures to recognize and support international student excellence and need.

Concerns:

The high cost and unpredictability of tuition increases, particularly when compared with domestic students, makes it difficult for international students to budget for the duration of their entire program of study. Canada has also fallen behind other countries in the support offered to international students. International student financial assistance is extremely limited. Government of Canada funding opportunities for international students are concentrated around graduate studies. Post-secondary institutions and student government organizations commonly offer a small handful of scholarships and bursaries to international students, but their value has negligible impacts on the ever-increasing costs associated with tuition and the growing number of international students.

“The high cost and unpredictability of tuition increases, particularly when compared with domestic students, makes it difficult for international students to budget for the duration of their entire program of study.”

The goal of attracting international students is surely linked to a desire to ensure that the best and brightest

international students study, and hopefully choose to continue to live and work, in Canada. However, as OUSA explains, “the vast majority of international students come from upper-middle and high-income backgrounds, indicating that studying in Canada is not an option for most international students from low-income backgrounds.”³³ HECQO, meanwhile, has reported on another way that diversity in the international student population is limited. In Ontario, HECQO finds, “[o]ver the last 10 years, gender parity in international student entries has shifted to male bias (60% male in 2012 compared to 52% in 2000).”³⁴

Around the world, refugees are denied the opportunity to pursue higher education. Canada has a proud history of welcoming refugees from around the world on humanitarian grounds through the Student Refugee Program of the World University Service of Canada (WUSC). An effective model for supporting access to higher education and refugee resettlement, WUSC has coordinated with Canadian universities and university students to sponsor over 1,200 student refugees since 1978.³⁵ More can be done to widen this program’s reach moving forward.

The lack of financial aid options is also a problem for competitiveness. Many other countries are also looking to attract international students, and their efforts often include scholarships that allow them to better showcase their institutions as centres of excellence in learning and research. The European Union, for example, established the

33 *Going Global: Supporting Ontario’s International Students* (Toronto: Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance, March 2011),13. Accessed online: https://d3n8a8pro7vhm.cloudfront.net/ousa/pages/123/attachments/original/1473432438/2011-03_Submission_-_Going_Global_document.pdf?1473432438

34 Williams, Keegan, Gabriel Williams, Amy Ar buckle, Margaret Walton-Roberts and Jenna Henneby, *International Students in Ontario’s Postsecondary Education System, 2000-2012: An evaluation of changing policies, populations and labour market entry processes* (Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, 2015), 4. Accessed online: <http://www.heqco.ca/SiteCollectionDocuments/International%20Students%20in%20Ontario%20ENG.pdf>

35 *Student Refugee Program* (World University Service of Canada,). Accessed online: <http://wusc.ca/en/srp>

Erasmus Mundus scholarship program for graduate students, with a budget of 460 million euros to draw in more than 10,000 highly qualified international students.³⁶ The Canadian government has begun to take some steps to better fund international graduate students. The Vanier scholarships program, targeted at top students in the world, supports up to 500 Canadian and international doctoral students each year, awarding \$50,000 per year for up to three years.³⁷ This program benefits only a small number of international students, however, and most go without this form of assistance.

“International student financial assistance is extremely limited.”

Recommendations:

Greater accessibility for international students from all economic backgrounds can be facilitated through the following measures:

- » **The introduction of a series of federal grants, bursaries, scholarships and fellowships of merit and need for international students**
- » **The Government of Canada provide financial support to help WUSC’s successful model of the student-refugee program expand to more post-secondary campuses across Canada**
- » **The Government of Canada provide financial support to help the expansion of the Student Refugee Program to include more graduate-level sponsorships**

³⁶ Commission of the European Communities, *Erasmus Mundus (2009-2013)*. July 2007. Accessed online : <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2007:0395:FIN:EN:PDF>.

³⁷ Scholarships.Gc.Ca. *Vanier Canada Graduate Scholarships Program*. January 17, 2013. Accessed online: <http://www.scholarships-bourses.gc.ca/scholarships-bourses/vanier.aspx?lang=eng&view=d>

Removing Barriers to Work for International Students

Principles:

Balancing work with study has long served a twofold purpose for students: it offers a means of covering some of the ever-growing costs of a post-secondary education, and it is an opportunity to develop workplace skills to complement one's studies.³⁸

For international students, the ability to work, whether on- or off-campus, is also an opportunity to adapt to a new community and make invaluable contacts and friendships. It is a vital means of enriching the international student experience in Canada, and of enriching the diversity of the communities that surround post-secondary campuses.

Concerns:

Until the turn of this century, Canada held the dubious distinction of being one of the very few international study destinations that prohibited international students from working off-campus.³⁹ Following a pilot program offering a work permit to international students at select institutions in Alberta, the Government of Canada formalized this work permit option in 2006. As a result, international students were allowed to work up to 20 hours per week while in-study and up to 40 hours per week during study breaks.⁴⁰ This initiative was warmly welcomed by post-secondary institutions and students alike. As of June 2014, international

students have been able to work off-campus under their study permits (without requiring a separate permit), subject to the hour limitations described above.⁴¹

Despite the elimination of the separate work permit requirement, getting a job is not always as straightforward as it should be. An international student's study permit must clearly state that he or she is eligible to work in Canada in order for the student to obtain a Social Insurance Number (SIN) from Service Canada. A SIN is a basic requirement to work in Canada. Unfortunately, the required statement that a student is eligible to work in Canada is sometimes overlooked when study permits are processed by the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA). Correcting the wording on a study permit can often take months, and such delays in obtaining a SIN inevitably jeopardize employment opportunities. This delay is especially concerning for graduate students, for whom research and teaching assistantships are often required.

A related concern is that part-time international students remain ineligible to work. This not only hinders their ability to support themselves financially, but also to participate in their community, build connections, and develop essential workplace skills and networks. The current restrictions lead many international students to pursue internship and co-op opportunities with American employers, meaning Canada risks losing out on their skills and talents.

“Despite the elimination of the separate work permit requirement, getting a job is not always as straightforward as it should be.”

38 *Canadian University Survey Consortium, Survey of Graduating Students 2015*, Ottawa ON, July 2015 Accessed online: http://www.cusc-creu.ca/CUSC_2015_Graduating_Master%20Report_English.pdf; Allison B. Sekuler, Barbara Crow and Robert B Annan, *Beyond Labs and Libraries: Career Pathways for Doctoral Students* (Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, 2013), 4. Accessed online: <http://www.heqco.ca/SiteCollectionDocuments/Beyond%20Labs%20and%20Libraries.pdf>; We Work Hard for our Money: Student Employment and the University Experience in Ontario. Toronto: Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance, 2014. P. 11. Accessed online: https://d3n8a8pro7vhm.cloudfront.net/ousa/pages/101/attachments/original/1473428240/2014-06_-_We_Work_Hard_for_our_Money_document.pdf?1473428240

39 Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada. *Recognizing the Importance of International Students in the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act*. ERIC Clearinghouse, Washington D.C., 2001

40 Citizenship and Immigration Canada, *Backgrounder – Off-Campus work permit program*. September 12, 2007. Accessed online: <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/department/media/backgrounders/2007/2007-09-12.asp>

41 Citizenship and Immigration Canada, *Work off campus*. February 3, 2015. Accessed online: <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/study/work-offcampus.asp>

A final issue is the requirement of international students to obtain a work permit, separate from their study permit, to participate in co-op terms, internships, and other work integrated learning opportunities.⁴² Experiential learning is a key aspect of many program curriculums. Such opportunities are also linked to improved employment outcomes and are growing in popularity across post-secondary institutions as a result.⁴³ Given this, it would be sensible for experiential learning to fall under an international student's study permit, without the need to obtain a separate work permit. This would benefit all international students, and especially graduate students who could bring their specialized knowledge and expertise to Canadian employers through research internships.

“Part-time international students remain ineligible to work.”

Recommendations:

Removing barriers to work will help make Canada a leading destination for international students by improving their quality of life and the opportunities available to them. It will also help meet the growing need for more highly skilled workers. Linking international students with employment opportunities throughout their studies will help those who wish to stay in Canada obtain employment following the completion of their studies. The following steps would improve the work experience of international students:

- » **Coordination between the Canada Border Services Agency and Service Canada to ensure all study permits clearly state the permit holder's eligibility to work, and to ensure that the same permit holders can obtain a SIN without delay**
- » **Improved Service Canada processing times for international student SIN applicants**
- » **The Government of Canada expand eligibility for off-campus employment to international students studying part-time**
- » **The Government of Canada modify study permits to allow international students to participate in co-op terms and internships that are integrated into a program of study without requiring a separate work permit**
- » **The Government of Canada allow graduate students to conduct up to one year of full-time, off-campus elective internship or co-op work experience**

⁴² *Work as a co-op student or intern* (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada). Accessed online: <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/study/work-coop.asp>

⁴³ An American study found that 63.1% of graduates who participated in a paid internship received a job offer upon graduation, compared with only 37% of unpaid interns and 35.2% of those who did not do an internship. See *Class of 2013 Student Survey* (National Association of Colleges and Employers, May 2013). Accessed Online: <http://www.naceweb.org/s05292013/paid-unpaid-interns-job-offer.aspx>

The Post-Graduation Experience and Pathways to Citizenship

Principles:

Canada's relationship with international students should not end at graduation. These students become international colleagues, trade partners, allies and friends. A frequently articulated purpose for attracting international students is that many will want to continue living and working in Canada. Their knowledge, qualifications, and skillset are needed to help grow Canada's economy. Employment opportunities are also a major draw for international students. In Australia, a study found that international students prioritized "[f]avourable job opportunities" when choosing where to study.⁴⁴

To meet the stated objective of encouraging more international students to remain in Canada following graduation as permanent residents and citizens, their pathways to citizenship must be clear and easy to navigate.

Concerns:

Many international students share a desire to stay and work in Canada after graduation but feel that government policy has yet to demonstrate a genuine appreciation of what they contributed to Canada during their studies.

"International student graduates from Canadian post-secondary have just 90 days to secure employment and apply for a work permit."

International student graduates from Canadian post-secondary have just 90 days to secure employment and apply for a work permit. This is too short, given that the average unemployed period for those seeking work has ranged from 4.5 to over 5 months in recent years.⁴⁵

Rules around who international students can speak to for immigration advice are currently too restrictive. While rules around consulting third party advisors were implemented in 2011 with the goal of preventing fraud, the result has been to limit the ability of international students to seek advice from post-secondary institution staff about the immigration process. Given that many international students already have trusting relationships with staff members at their institutions, this creates an unnecessary hurdle. It also imposes high costs when they can only receive advice from an "authorized representative."

Average time it takes to find a job

4.5-5 months

Time international graduates have to find a job

90 days

Many highly skilled international students and recent graduates have found it difficult, if not impossible, to earn enough points in the Express Entry system to be invited to apply for permanent residence. Introduced in 2015, Express Entry was intended to simplify the path to permanent resident status. Applicants are assigned points based on skills, work experience, language ability, education and other details. Until very recently, no points were awarded for having studied and earned educational qualifications specifically in Canada. One of the highest possible sources of points, meanwhile,

⁴⁴ *The Value of International Education to Australia* (Deloitte Access Economics, 2015), 46. Accessed online: <https://internationaleducation.gov.au/research/research-papers/Documents/ValueInternationalEd.pdf>

⁴⁵ *Labour force survey estimates (LFS), duration of unemployment by sex and age group (CANSIM table 282-0048)*. Ottawa: Statistics Canada. Accessed online: <http://www5.statcan.gc.ca/cansim/a26?lang=eng&id=2820048>

was a Labour Market Impact Assessment (LMIA). International students and recent graduates found it exceedingly difficult to get an LMIA, which requires a permanent job in hand.

“Rules around who international students can speak to for immigration advice are currently too restrictive.”

In November 2016, the government introduced promising changes to Express Entry. Earning an educational credential at a Canadian institution will now be assigned an added points value, while the value of the LMIA has been reduced. As these changes are still very new, we do not yet know how many international graduates of Canadian institutions will gain permanent resident status, but CASA will monitor the changes closely in the hopes that it offers an improved pathway to citizenship. Even with these changes, however, it is notable that the work and volunteer experiences that international students obtain while under a temporary post-graduation work permit still do not count for additional Express Entry points.

“Having called for time spent in Canada to count towards citizenship applications again, CASA is pleased that parliament approved an amendment to the law to do just that.”

The Provincial Nominee Program (PNP) allows provinces and territories to nominate people for permanent residence, with the goal of meeting the labour needs of certain sectors of their economy. Each province determines their own criteria for making permanent residence nominations, and not all PNPs assign priority or weight to the attainment of a Canadian degree by international students.

While time spent living in Canada as a temporary resident (e.g. as an international student) used to count towards citizenship eligibility, this provision was eliminated in 2014. International students spend years living in Canada developing strong social, cultural and economic ties as temporary residents. Having called for time spent in Canada to count towards citizenship applications again, CASA is pleased that parliament approved an amendment to the law to do just that. This change took effect in Fall 2017.⁴⁶

Many international students who stay in Canada following their studies possess the skills and creativity needed to help build Canada's economy through entrepreneurship. The significant costs associated with starting a new business, however, are daunting. Supporting international graduates from Canadian institutions establish their own businesses would help encourage more international students to stay in Canada, while also contributing to growing the Canadian economy.

Recommendations:

Beyond the recent changes to the Express Entry program, which CASA supports, several other reforms would help smooth the pathway to permanent resident status and citizenship. It is crucial for the Government of Canada to recognize the immense social, cultural, and economic contributions international students make to their campuses and communities while in Canada, and their tremendous potential to continue to do after graduation. CASA recommends:

- » **The Government of Canada extend the post-graduate job-search period from 90 days to 6 months, to better reflect the average time it takes to find a job**
- » **Exempting post-secondary staff from restrictions around providing immigration advice to international students who ask for help, or offering free training and certification to relevant staff so they can provide accurate and helpful advice when international students seek out their assistance**
- » **The Government of Canada count time spent in Canada as an international student towards citizenship eligibility**
- » **Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada award LMIA points for those jobs obtained while holding a post-graduation work permit**
- » **Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada award Express Entry points for volunteer and community service positions to international students in recognition of the cultural integration and social value these experiences bring to Canadian communities**
- » **Provincial governments across Canada give weight to international students with a Canadian degree in their Provincial Nominee Programs**
- » **The Government of Canada expand start-up and entrepreneurship funding and programs to international graduates starting a new business in Canada**

Expanding PhD Graduate Fast-Track Residency through the Express Entry System

Principles:

Advanced graduate degrees, including masters and PhDs are drivers of a more innovative knowledge economy. As the Science, Technology and Innovation Council has put it, “[t]he number of doctoral degrees is... an indicator of the labour force potential to engage in cutting-edge research and training the next generation.”⁴⁷ Despite this, Canada continues to fall behind other countries in the Organizations for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in the number of doctoral graduates. Canada sits 25th out of 34 countries in the OECD for graduate level university degree rates.⁴⁸ As the Science, Technology and Innovation Council has explained, “with a limited population and thus a relatively small pool of domestic talent, Canada needs to be competitive in connecting with the “best and the brightest” throughout the world.”⁴⁹ A key way of doing so is to attract international PhD students to pursue doctoral programs in Canada, and then hopefully, to remain in Canada following completion of their studies.



Concerns:

While the goal of encouraging international PhD students to study and stay in Canada is clear, the actual systems in place to make this possible leave much to be desired.

The Express Entry program is intended to ease the path to permanent residence for skilled immigrants by awarding points for various factors, including age, education, skills, work experience, and language abilities. Those with the most points are invited to apply for permanent residence. The previous section details the problems all international students encounter with this system. International PhD students encounter several specific obstacles with Express Entry. Within the Express Entry are more specific immigration programs, such as for the Federal Skilled Worker Program, the Federal Skilled Trades Program, and the Canadian Experience Class. PhD Graduates are most likely to qualify for Express Entry under the Federal Skilled Worker Program (FSWP).⁵⁰

International graduate students, who graduate from Canadian institutions, have shown themselves (through years of study) to adapt to life and work in Canada, and have obtained a unique and sought after skillset through completion of a doctoral program. If the goal of the Express Entry system is to identify skilled immigrants with the highest chance of thriving in Canada, value should be assigned to previous experience living and working in Canada during graduate studies.

47 *Imagination to Innovation: Building Canadian Paths to Prosperity* (Ottawa: Science, Technology and Innovation Council, 2011), 61. Accessed online: [http://www.stic-csti.ca/eic/site/stic-csti.nsf/vwapj/10-059_IC_SotN_Rapport_EN_WEB_INTERACTIVE-good.pdf/\\$FILE/10-059_IC_SotN_Rapport_EN_WEB_INTERACTIVE-good.pdf](http://www.stic-csti.ca/eic/site/stic-csti.nsf/vwapj/10-059_IC_SotN_Rapport_EN_WEB_INTERACTIVE-good.pdf/$FILE/10-059_IC_SotN_Rapport_EN_WEB_INTERACTIVE-good.pdf)

48 Andrew Parkin, *Family Savings for Post-Secondary Education: A Summary of Research on the Importance and Impact of Post-Secondary Education Savings Incentive Programs* (The Omega Foundation, November 2016), 7. Accessed online: <http://www.theomegafoundation.ca/documents/Family-Savings-for-Post-Secondary-Education.pdf>

49 *Imagination to Innovation: Building Canadian Paths to Prosperity* (Ottawa: Science, Technology and Innovation Council, 2011), 39. Accessed online: [http://www.stic-csti.ca/eic/site/stic-csti.nsf/vwapj/10-059_IC_SotN_Rapport_EN_WEB_INTERACTIVE-good.pdf/\\$FILE/10-059_IC_SotN_Rapport_EN_WEB_INTERACTIVE-good.pdf](http://www.stic-csti.ca/eic/site/stic-csti.nsf/vwapj/10-059_IC_SotN_Rapport_EN_WEB_INTERACTIVE-good.pdf/$FILE/10-059_IC_SotN_Rapport_EN_WEB_INTERACTIVE-good.pdf)

50 Citizenship and Immigration Canada. *Determine your eligibility – Federal skilled workers*. December 14, 2015. Accessed online: <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/immigrate/skilled/apply-who.asp>

The statistics suggest, however, that relatively few FSWP applicants are gaining permanent residence through Express Entry. In 2011, more than 57,000 newcomers were admitted under the FSWP.⁵¹ Under Express Entry, in the first 6 months of 2015, only 4,809 newcomers were invited to apply for permanent residency in Canada under the FSWP. In that same timeframe, over 112,000 individuals completed an Express Entry profile.⁵² Rather than inviting PhD graduates, who are proven to be highly-trained and bright individuals, fewer are being invited to apply for permanent residence under Express Entry.



While the recent changes to Express Entry will help, PhD students are still not able to count university employment experience, including teaching and research assistantships, as work experience in their applications. There also no specific stream for applying to Express Entry via FSWP as a master's graduate, even though international students who obtain master's level degrees have also demonstrated their ability to adapt to and succeed in Canada.

Finally, reports from PhD students seeking entry through the program indicate that the application process is ambiguous and often contradictory. The forms to fill out are confusing, program requirements lack consistency, and letters from the ministry provide little clarity matters such as application denials. Students must either pay thousands of dollars in legal fees to seek advice and appeal decisions, or are simply left wondering why their application was denied and how they can remedy the situation. Improved consistency and flexibility for qualified international students to transition to permanent residency status will ensure Canada's education system maintains and builds upon its global reputation for excellence.

51 CIC. Fact Sheet – *Federal Skilled Worker Program*. November 17, 2012. Accessed Online: <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/resources/publications/employers/federal-skilled-worker-program.asp>

52 Citizenship and Immigration Canada. *Express Entry Mid-Year Report*. July 31, 2015. Accessed online: <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/resources/reports/ee-midyear-2015.asp>

Recommendations:

More can be done to help international students who obtain graduate degrees in Canada become permanent residents and citizens. CASA advocates several practical policies to improve Express Entry options for graduate students, including:

- » Revising the Express Entry point system to award points for a wider variety of factors that are predictors of economic success for skilled immigrants. This includes counting university employment (i.e. teaching and research assistantships, co-operative education, field studies, internships) and volunteer and/or community positions that demonstrate social integration into Canadian communities
- » Increasing the number of highly-skilled newcomers admitted to Canada under FSWP
- » Expand FSWP by introducing a new stream to include master's students, and by creating a separate cap applicable to master's students
- » Clarify and standardize all procedures, including official forms, throughout the FSWP application process

International Branch Campuses

Principles:

Post-secondary institutions across Canada are increasingly focused on expanding international linkages. A number of institutions are looking overseas not only to bolster domestic enrolment, but also to enhance prestige, boost enrolment, and generate revenues through international branch campuses. These branch campuses include independent and dependent same-named subsidiaries of Canadian institutions in other countries, as well as Canadian institutions with differently named global subsidiaries.

Concerns:

CASA is concerned about the impacts this development has on both Canadian and international students. One concern is the financial liability and risk of these ventures. If they are not successful at attracting and retaining students, the financial burden rests on the domestic institution (and in turn all students enrolled there, whether domestic or international). Examples of international branch campuses struggling financially, as well as the recent decision by Algonquin College to close its international campus, lend greater weight to this concern.⁵³ The notion of using international branch campuses that inflate tuition and churn out students for the profit and subsidy of domestic operations is equally concerning. Failing to maintain the same academic quality standards as a domestic institution risks devaluing the qualifications of not just students of the domestic host institution, but the Canadian education system more broadly.

The rights of students and instructors on branch campus locations is a pressing concern. International branch campuses are sometimes established in countries with vastly different standards surrounding freedom of speech, the treatment of foreign nationals, the rights of women, LGBTQ2+ persons, and visible minorities, religious rights, and rights to due process, among others issues. Added to this are laws in branch campus countries restricting assembly, associations such as faculty and student unions, publications and the media, mobility, and other rights and freedoms granted under Canadian law and protected for students and faculty at post-secondary institutions in Canada. In many instances, Canadian institutions have established international branch campuses despite very real and pressing concerns surrounding the rights of their students and staff and their accessibility within the local population.

While federal and provincial levels of government share jurisdiction to regulate international branch campuses, their roles are confused. While the federal government is responsible for foreign affairs, provincial governments have jurisdiction over domestic education.

Recommendations:

Given their intersecting responsibilities, federal and provincial governments must work together to develop a strong regulatory framework to ensure that academic standards are maintained and that the branch campuses of Canadian institutions ensure the accessibility of the campus to students and faculty from all diverse backgrounds, free from persecution or censorship. CASA calls for collaboration between federal and provincial levels of government to:

- » **Establish clear guidelines and national standards for international branch campuses**
- » **Implement measures to ensure that international branch campuses of Canadian institutions maintain educational quality standards consistent with those on Canadian campuses**
- » **Monitor rights, freedoms, and equalities on branch campuses to ensure their accessibility to students and faculty from all backgrounds, free from persecution or censorship**
- » **Examine and approve the locations of prospective campuses only after careful consideration of issues including institutional viability, effects on Canadian business and investment, foreign relations, migration, physical and cultural safety, and foreign development**

Summary of Suggested Changes:

In summary, CASA recognizes that international students are important members of campus communities who, just like domestic students, expect and deserve an education of the highest quality. As post-secondary institutions and provincial and federal governments focus on attracting more international students to Canada, moreover, it is imperative that they follow their words with actions to remove barriers to success and facilitate truly positive experiences. Measures to improve the international student experience in Canada include:

Improving paperwork and processes

- » Clearer and more accessible instructions for the families of international students
- » Coordination between CBSA and Service Canada around study permits and SIN applications

Better social and financial supports

- » More financial assistance for refugee students
- » Need and merit based financial aid options for international students
- » Federal funding for international student support services and improved transition programs

Work opportunities

- » Allowing work-integrated learning opportunities (e.g. co-ops and internships) under study permits
- » Allow part-time international students to work
- » Entrepreneurship funding opportunities for recent graduates looking to start a business in Canada

Pathways to citizenship

- » Monitoring the Express Entry reforms introduced in 2016 to ensure international students benefit
- » Continuing to introduce Express Entry reforms aimed at assisting international students in becoming permanent residents
- » Improving the FSWP process for graduate students

Regulation and oversight of branch campuses

- » Protecting human rights
- » Establishing national standards
- » Official approval processes for campus locations

Our Members



UNIVERSITY OF NEW BRUNSWICK
STUDENT UNION



About CASA

Established in 1995, the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations (CASA) is a non-partisan, not-for-profit, student organization composed of 22 student associations representing 270,000 post-secondary students from coast to coast. Through its partnership with the Quebec Students Union (QSU) and its 8 members representing 79,000 students, CASA presents a national student voice to the federal government. CASA advocates for a Canadian post-secondary education system that is accessible, affordable, innovative and of the highest quality.



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