



# International Student Support Systems

# Student Affairs Forum

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# 1) Executive Overview

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## Key Observations

**Provide new international students with specialized programming to ease their cultural, academic, and social adjustments to campus.** At all profiled institutions, programming for new international students begins before the start of the semester. Administrators offer international student orientation, which focuses on helping international students adjust to university life in a new culture. For example, international student support staff at **Institution C** use their orientation week to help accommodate students' basic needs (e.g., opening a new bank account, setting up cell phone service). To extend support beyond the first few weeks on campus, administrators at **Institution B** and **Institution D** offer ongoing programming to support new international students throughout their entire first year.

**Encourage domestic student involvement in international student programming to integrate international students into the campus community socially.** Student associations and peer mentor groups at profiled institutions engage both domestic students and international students in programming. At **Institution A**, **Institution B**, and **Institution C**, opportunities exist for domestic and international students to mentor new international students. Peer mentors interact with new international students in on-campus events and help streamline in their cultural adjustment.

**Centralize international student support systems into a one-stop shop structure that supports international students' diverse needs holistically.** All profiled institutions centralize international student support systems into a one-stop student support hub to ease student access to all support services. For example, administrators in the international student support office at **Institution E** oversee international student recruitment, on-campus international student support, education abroad, and internationalization of the institution's policies and practices. By centralizing international student services, institutions avoid potential gaps in service that could arise from coordinating services between offices situated within different parts of the institution.

**Ensure alignment between available international student support services and the unique needs of the institution's community of international students.** Administrators at profiled institutions solicit student feedback on international student support services to ensure that available services best serve students' specific needs. International student support staff at **Institution D** and **Institution E** use surveys and interviews to assess their current international student services. Based upon survey feedback, administrators at **Institution D** now provide additional dorm supplies to international students.

**Publicize international student services frequently to remind students of available support systems.** The international student support office at **Institution D** publishes a monthly email and quarterly newsletter that they distribute to all international students. These resources outline upcoming international and campus events and profile different international student services. By sending this information monthly, administrators ensure that international students know how to access various student services.

## 2) International Student Support Programming

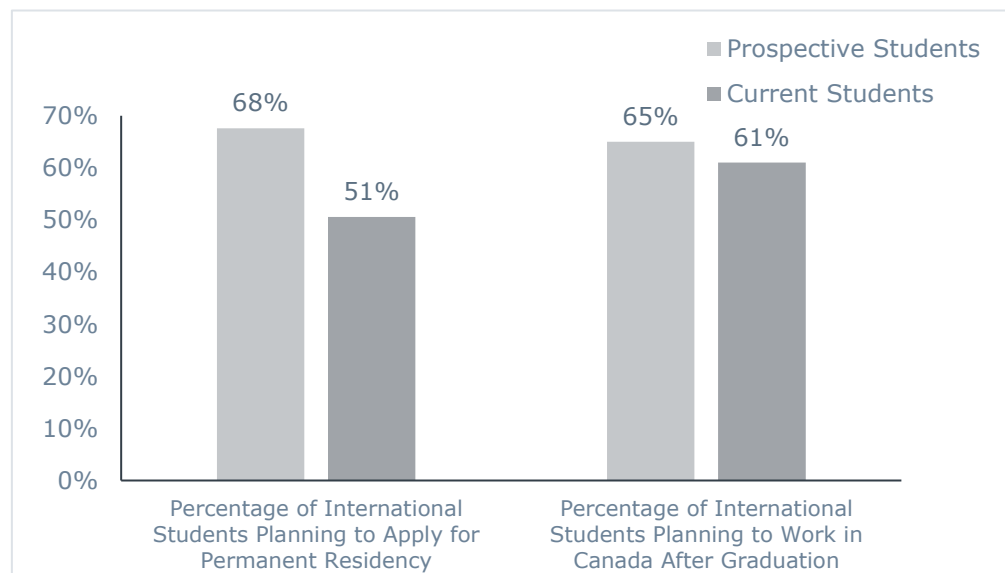
### Challenges Facing International Students

#### International Students Experience Unique Barriers to Academic Success and Persistence

International students generate positive economic benefits to host countries as both students and alumni. Often, international students pay full tuition to institutions, without relying on government aid. As alumni, international students provide a diverse talent pool to draw from for the domestic workforce. Recent Canadian policy changes reflect the desire to recruit and retain international students to maximize these types of economic benefits. For example, to gain a cohort of skilled workers, Nova Scotia's "Study and Stay" program offers professional development support to international students transitioning into the workforce.

As evidence of international students' investments in their host countries, a survey conducted by the Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE) finds that a large portion of current international students plan to apply for residency and/or work in Canada after graduation: 51 percent and 61 percent, respectively.<sup>1</sup> Notably, though, this preference among international students to stay in Canada is less pronounced among current students than it is among prospective students. This drop in interest in remaining in Canada indicates that higher education institutions may need to improve their international student support systems to maintain strong interest in staying in Canada among international students.

#### Percent of International Students Planning on Applying for Residency and Working in Canada: Prospective and Current Students<sup>2</sup>



To better retain and support international students, institutions must actively support students' multifaceted adjustment to campus life. International students face various cultural, academic and social barriers during their time on campus that domestic students may not face.

1) Victoria Esses, Alina Sutter, Alejandro Ortiz, Ning Luo, Jean Cui, and Lisa Deacon, *Retaining International Students in Canada Post-Graduation: Understanding the Motivations and Drivers of the Decision to Stay*, Canadian Bureau for International Education, June 2018. <https://cbie.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Intl-students-post-graduation-RiB-8-EN-1.pdf>

2) Ibid., 3-4.

## Common Barriers to International Student Success<sup>3</sup>

|                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <br><b>Cultural Barriers</b> | <p>International students often feel cultural shock on the foreign campus. Once arriving on campus, international students must adjust to new communication patterns as well as new cultural values and beliefs.</p>                                                                                                                                                  |
| <br><b>Social Barriers</b>   | <p>International students often experience social isolation outside the classroom. Many international students note that it is especially difficult to establish friendships with domestic students.</p>                                                                                                                                                              |
| <br><b>Academic Barriers</b> | <p>International students often encounter language barriers and cultural differences when communicating with their professors. Additionally, they often feel isolated from their classmates—both in and outside the classroom. International students cite language differences and differences in classroom expectations as their most common academic barriers.</p> |

Higher education institutions can help students overcome these various barriers and adjust to the new environment through international student-specific services and programming.

To overcome cultural barriers, administrators at four profiled institutions—**Institution B**, **Institution C**, **Institution D**, and **Institution E**—offer in-person orientation sessions to familiarize international students with life at the institution. For social support, programming at **Institution A**, **Institution B**, and **Institution C** encourages domestic and international students to develop strong connections with one another through peer mentorship programs for incoming international students. To address academic barriers, international student support staff members at **Institution A**, **Institution B**, and **Institution D** provide informal professional development training to all interested faculty on immigration issues and communication with international students.

## New Student Programming

### Help New International Students Acclimate to a New Campus through International Student-Specific Orientation Sessions

Often, the first time first-year international students arrive on their institution's campus is for move-in and orientation. A typical orientation structure can overwhelm international students who are not yet used to the customs and language of their new community. To personalize the initial adjustment process for these students, international student support staff members at all profiled institutions offer an international student-specific orientation prior to the broader new student orientation.

The international student support office at **Institution A** offers an online pre-orientation for international students to complete before arriving on campus for general new student orientation. International student support staff members host orientation sessions on Canvas, which faculty and students use to coordinate course content digitally. This Canvas-based format allows students to familiarize themselves not only with institutional policies, but also with a key classroom technology.

3) Hsiao-ping Wu, Esther Garza, and Norma Guzman, *International Student's Challenge and Adjustment to College*, Hindawi Publishing Corporation, 2015. <http://downloads.hindawi.com/journals/edri/2015/202753.pdf>

Administrators at **Institution E** prefer limiting the number of presenters at orientation. They find that simplifying the presentation of new information maximizes student retention of important lessons.

Once students enroll in orientation, they receive video modules, packing lists, and a “to-do before arrival” checklist. Online video modules discuss various subjects, including immigration and culture shock. For example, to help students adjust to culture shock, the orientation includes video testimonials of previous international students on adjusting to the culture and classroom norms at **Institution A**. Administrators report that self-guided online pre-orientation allows international students to absorb orientation materials at their own pace.

Conversely, international student support offices at the other four profiled institutions—**Institution B**, **Institution C**, **Institution D**, and **Institution E**—offer in-person international student orientation sessions, which last two or three days. Orientation sessions at these profiled institutions familiarize students with campus, create a sense of community for new international students, and educate students on immigration regulations.

At **Institution B**, **Institution C**, and **Institution E**, dedicated portions of orientation programming introduce new international students to current students. Student ambassadors within the international student support office at **Institution B** participate in multiple international student orientation events, including meals and team-building activities. Returning international and domestic students apply to the international student support office ambassador program to help students adjust to life on campus. Administrators report that introducing new international students to peer mentors early on eases them into campus life socially.

## Innovative Orientation Practices at Profiled Institutions



### Airport Transportation

International student support teams at profiled institutions also offer free airport pick-up or transportation for international students. For example, **Institution E** offers free bus tickets to campus to international students during the two-days prior to student orientation.



### President's Welcome

The president at **Institution E** attends international student orientation to address the group of new international students and officially welcome the new students to campus. Administrators at **Institution E** report that students appreciate this tradition, as many international students' cultures value an official start to an event such as orientation.



### Campus Tour

At **Institution D**, international student support staff members introduce international students to the different student services on a day-long campus tour that includes stops at student support offices. At each office stop on the tour, a representative from that office provides a 15- to 20-minute overview of how to access available services. Through the campus tour, the international student support office at **Institution D** ensures that international students understand the various student services available and where to access them.



### Parent Orientation

The international student support office at **Institution C** offers a two-hour orientation for parents of new international students. The orientation includes multiple administrators, such as the President, the Vice President of Academics, and student services staff members. Administrators use this parent orientation to educate parents on available student services, so that they can support students as questions arise throughout the year. On average, about 60 to 80 parents attend this session.

## Offer Basic Needs-Related Supports to Ease International Students' Adjustments to Daily Campus Life

Often, international students arrive on campus without many of the necessities for residential university life (e.g., dormitory furnishings, domestic cell phones, domestic bank accounts). Exacerbating this issue further, few international students have access to the transportation often necessary to take care of these basic needs themselves. To combat these related issues, international staff members at profiled institutions help international students access necessities through off-campus transportation support and on-campus events.

At **Institution A**, **Institution B**, and **Institution C**, international student support staff members offer access to basic needs when international students arrive on campus. For example, international student support staff at **Institution A** and **Institution B** offer off-campus transportation to help international students attend to basic needs such as purchasing items for their dorm rooms and opening domestic bank accounts. Contacts at both institutions take new international students on shopping trips to Walmart during their first day on campus. At **Institution B**, their student ambassadors accompany new international students on this shopping trip to help students navigate the store and ensure they purchase all necessary items. Since most international students have limited access to transportation, administrators at both institutions also transport international students to local stores throughout the year. For example, the international student support office at **Institution B** offers weekly bus transportation to a local grocery store.

Instead of transporting students off campus, the international student support office at **Institution C** ensures new international students have access to basic needs-related services by bringing community partners onto campus. On the first day of their orientation week, the international student support office hosts an all-day service expo for both international and domestic students. During this event, about 45 off-campus businesses and on-campus student services set up stands in the library to centralize access to important student service providers. This on-campus event allows international student support teams to assist students using fewer staff resources than they would need to transport all international students off campus to access these same services.

### Examples of Student Services and Businesses in Attendance at the *Institution C* Service Expo

| <i>Institution-Provided Student Services</i>                                        |                          | <i>External Student Services</i>                                                      |                      |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|
|  | Student Gym              |  | Cell Phone Providers |
|  | Student ID Card Printing |   | Wi-Fi Providers      |
|  | Student Health Insurance |   | Local Banks          |
|  | Student Dining           |   | Local Landlords      |



## Provide Tailored Programming throughout International Students' First Year to Ensure Continual Learning and Support

The adjustment process for new international students often continues well beyond the beginning of the year. To better help students through the ongoing adjustment process, international student support staff members at **Institution B** and **Institution D** offer programming that extends past orientation. Ongoing programming for international students ensures that students continue to adjust to the new culture and higher education landscape throughout their first year on campus.

For example, all first-year students at **Institution D** must take a first-year experience class, a one-credit class that meets weekly for 90 minutes. The international student support office offers two international student-specific first-year experience classes—taught by either the international office recruiter or the office's graduate assistant. One of these classes focuses on English language for non-English speakers, while the other class focuses on the American university experience. To communicate similar content about the American university experience, the international student support office at **Institution B** hosts a new student retreat for international students.

Specifically, contacts at both **Institution B** and **Institution D** use these programs to teach international students about American university sports, such as American football. At **Institution D**, the graduate assistant used the book *Concussion* in their American university first year experience class to teach international students about the rules of American football. Additionally, this class requires students to attend a college football game. Participating in campus activities unique to the domestic culture can help new international students feel more comfortable on campus both culturally and socially.

### Post-Orientation Programming for New International Students at *Institution B* and *Institution D*



#### First-Year Experience Class

The American University first-year experience class for international students at **Institution D** touches on a variety of topics, including plagiarism, national holidays, and national politics. For example, next year's programming will address the upcoming presidential election. In this class, students will compare elections in various cultures, as well as how American political culture influences electoral campaigns in the United States. During last year's elections, administrators took international students to a polling place to introduce them to the voting process. After the polling place tour, students volunteered for local campaigns.



#### New Student Retreat

At **Institution B**, the international student support staff invites new international students to a retreat with international student support office student ambassadors during the first few weeks of class. During the retreat, international students sleep in cabins and attend a bonfire to expose them to a typical American camping experience. This retreat serves as an opportunity for new students to connect with the ambassadors and learn more about **Institution B** traditions. While not all students attend the retreat, about 30 to 50 new students typically attend.

### Engage Domestic Students in International Student Programming to Integrate International Students into Campus Life

Many international students report not feeling at home on campus due to difficulties making friends and due to acts of discrimination.<sup>4</sup> In fact, international students who had domestic friends, or a mixture of international and domestic friends, are more likely to apply for permanent residency than those who are only friends with individuals from their home countries.<sup>5</sup>

With this in mind, international student support staff should identify ways to better integrate students into social life on campus. To integrate international students into campus life socially, international student support teams at profiled institutions include domestic students in international programming either through international student clubs or through peer mentorship opportunities.

First, at **Institution A**, **Institution C**, and **Institution E**, both international and domestic students can participate in international student-focused clubs or societies. For example, at **Institution A** the international student society organizes and hosts on-campus events (e.g., an international culture talent show, an international food festival), with participation and attendance open to all students. These open-access student clubs encourage organic friendships between international and domestic students.

To facilitate more personalized peer mentorship, the program at **Institution A** matches current students (either international or domestic) with incoming international first-year students. The international student support office emails current students to identify interested peer mentors, who fill out a form that collects basic demographic information (e.g., nationality, major) and when they plan to arrive on campus for the start of the next academic year. Incoming international students at **Institution A** also fill out a form to gauge their interest in the program and any preferences they have in a mentor (e.g., desired field of study, desired nationality). Once matched, mentors email their mentees during the summer to open a line of communication and to answer any questions. Administrators ask mentors to invite their mentees to events and activities on campus. Last year, nearly half of the international first-year students participated, as well as 20 peer mentors—including five domestic students as peer mentors.

Each spring, the international student support office at **Institution B** markets their ambassador program to current international students, as well as to any domestic students who have studied abroad or who have participated in international programming.

In contrast to these types of individualized programs, domestic and international students at both **Institution B** and **Institution C** can participate in programs designed to encourage interactions between current students and the new cohort of international students as a whole.

At **Institution B**, domestic and international students can participate in their international student support office ambassador program. Selected ambassadors arrive on campus before the start of each semester to welcome international students, attend international events throughout the semester, and offer general peer support to the incoming international student cohort as a whole.

4) Canadian Alliance of Student Associations, *Value Beyond the Dollars and Cents: International Students' Contributions to Canada and Their Need for Supports*, 2018.  
[https://d3n8a8pro7vnmx.cloudfront.net/casaacae/pages/2693/attachments/original/1535747003/Value\\_Beyond\\_the\\_Dollars\\_and\\_Cents\\_International\\_Students'\\_Contributions\\_to\\_Canada\\_and\\_Their\\_Need\\_for\\_Supports.pdf?1535747003](https://d3n8a8pro7vnmx.cloudfront.net/casaacae/pages/2693/attachments/original/1535747003/Value_Beyond_the_Dollars_and_Cents_International_Students'_Contributions_to_Canada_and_Their_Need_for_Supports.pdf?1535747003)

5) Victoria Esses, Alina Sutter, Alejandro Ortiz, Ning Luo, Jean Cui, and Lisa Deacon, *Retaining International Students in Canada Post-Graduation*.

## Components of the Students for Global Awareness Program at *Institution C*



### *Planning International Student Events*

The students for global awareness program designs events to encourage international students to engage with each other, as well as with domestic students. Examples of their events include a casino night, apple picking, ski trips, and a skate night.

Once selected, students for global awareness program members attend a retreat at the beginning of the year, where they plan all events for the upcoming year. In choosing events, program members consider both student interest in potential programs as well as available resources. Both international and domestic students participate in the students for global awareness program, offering diverse perspectives on possible events.



### *Mentoring Multiple International Students*

Additionally, international student support office staff assign students for global awareness program members a group of first-year international student mentees. Peer mentors send mentees new student information in June and start their online mentorship in July. This mentorship program lasts for four months, helping new international students settle into campus life.

Mentor training for the students for global awareness program includes information on online mentorship and specifically what questions mentors can answer. For example, staff members from the international student support office train mentors not to answer questions on immigration, but rather to redirect student questions to the appropriate staff member.

Staff members at **Institution B** and **Institution C** use applications and interviews to select participating mentors. At **Institution B**, the graduate assistant, the international programs coordinator, and two current ambassadors participate in each interview. Contacts highlight the popularity of this program—for example, last year, about 40 applicants applied for 15 available mentor roles.

Additionally, both institutions provide role-specific training to the selected mentors. Administrators at **Institution B** provide training to ambassadors during the week before student arrival. Unlike **Institution C**, whose administrators train mentors on how to answer questions from mentees, training at **Institution B** focuses on cultural differences and adjustments.

## Selected Cross-Cultural Integration-Focused Events at Profiled Institutions



### International Culture Talent Show

The international student support office at **Institution A** hosts an annual international culture talent show. Individual students or groups of students sign up two months beforehand to showcase a specific culturally-specific talent. Administrators note that students can participate in performances outside of their own cultural background. Typically, 10 to 15 student groups sign up to perform. In between each act, students perform skits to tell a specific thematic story that connects the entire show together.



### Holiday Meals

Administrators at **Institution C** invite international students to free dinners on Thanksgiving and Boxing Day. Many international students remain on campus during the holidays, so administrators created this program to combat international students' loneliness and homesickness.



### Cultural Immersion Dinner

The international student support office also uses these dinners to educate international students on Canadian holidays and traditions. For Boxing Day, the international student support office invites faculty and staff members to attend and serve the students their meal. About 125 to 150 students attend the Boxing Day dinner. While the Office of the President pays for this event, the international student support office manages the logistics.

At **Institution A**, the international student support office hosts cultural immersion dinners, where international students cook a meal of their native food and share it with faculty members. After the meal, the students give a 20- to 30-minute presentation on their native country and cultural values to help professors understand how to best support them in the classroom.



### International Alumni Weekend

In addition to engaging current students, the international student support office at **Institution A** builds cross-cultural community for alumni through their international alumni weekend. Separate from the normal homecoming, the international alumni weekend invites international student alumni back to campus to attend the annual international culture talent show. In addition to the performance, the weekend includes a reception, international students versus alumni soccer match, and a luncheon. Nearly 40 alumni attended in the event's first year. In the future, staff would like alumni to lead planning efforts for this event.

## Partner with Community Members to Increase Resources for International Student Services

International student support systems often lack the resources needed for complete support for international students' needs. At **Institution A**, **Institution B**, and **Institution D**, international student support teams partner with community members to expand the breadth of support services offered.

For instance, many international students arrive on campus without family nearby for support. To address this challenge, international student support teams at **Institution B** and **Institution D** recruit host families for international students. These programs provide international students with a nearby family that can provide another layer of personalized support and guidance in the cultural adjustment process.

At **Institution B**, staff members market this opportunity to community members through flyers and presentations to community groups (e.g., church congregations, civic groups). During face-to-face new student orientation, international student support staff members market the program to new international students as well. The international student support office at **Institution B** uses a survey to match students

with the right host family. The survey asks about student interests, family demographics, interests, and previous experiences with different cultures and languages.

Neither institution's host family program formalizes requirements for host families or students after completion of the matching process. Instead, host families can support international students in whatever ways best align with student and family preferences. However, to engage host families in on-campus international student programming, staff members at **Institution D** regularly email host families details about upcoming events. Administrators hope that by making host families aware of upcoming events, host families will help encourage international students to attend. For example, emails from the international student support office at **Institution D** ask host families to remind students of the annual international cookoff, where students can share food from their home countries. Since international students may not have access to a kitchen, many host families provide their kitchens to help participating students prepare for the event. In the future, staff members at **Institution B** hope to follow up with host families through a survey, to assess the effectiveness of this program in establishing meaningful relationships for students.

Instead of using community partners to operate new programs themselves, the international student support office at **Institution A** seeks financial sponsorships from community organizations to operate on-campus programming. For these efforts, administrators focus first on organizations that already interact with the institution's international student community. For example, international student support team asks for a sponsorship from the local bank where staff members take students to open bank accounts when they arrive on campus.

### 3) International Student Support Team Operations

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#### Organizational Structure

#### **Centralize All International Student Support Systems to Provide International Students with a One-Stop Support Hub**

Each of the five profiled institutions operates a centralized office that oversees international student support. Centralization of international student services into a “one-stop shop” provides international students with more accessible and systematized support across their time at the institution.

At **Institution D**, administrators developed their international student support office around the “three Rs”: recruit, register, and retain. To better retain students, for instance, the international student support office includes an international student lounge and an academic advising center.

Similarly, at **Institution E**, the Director of International Student Services oversees the centralized portfolio of the international student support office, which includes recruitment, on-campus international student support, education abroad, and internationalization of the institution’s policies and practices. Future office centralization will physically bring international student recruitment and admissions staff within the institution’s international student support office as well.

International student support offices at **Institution A** and **Institution B** report to a more general office of internationalization. These broader offices also include services such as international student recruitment and study abroad programming. For example, **Institution B** houses their current international student support systems in their international student support office. This office—along with the study abroad Office and their English-language learner program—reports to the more general office of internationalization.

#### **International Student Support Teams Obtain Funding Primarily through Standard Institutional Budget Processes or from Student Government Budgets**

Both **Institution D** and **Institution E** fund international student support services through the general university operating budget. For example, leaders of the international student support office at **Institution E** participate in budget negotiations to advocate for further funding. In addition to general budget funding, **Institution D** obtains supplementary funding through grants.

Conversely, the international student support team at **Institution A** obtains program funding through the Student Government Association. The international student support office receives additional program funding through community partner sponsorships and ticket sales from their annual cultural showcase performance.

## Consider Space Limitations and Potential Administrator Pushback in International Student Support Hub Implementation

In centralizing their international student support office, contacts at **Institution E** reported that they mainly struggled with space limitations and resistance to change among other staff members. As international student support systems centralize their services, contacts at profiled institutions find it increasingly difficult to identify a space large enough to support all staff members and services. At **Institution D**, the Director of International Affairs faced a similar challenge and located the space for the international student support office in a repurposed dormitory.

Additionally, international student support system staff members at **Institution E** find broader institutional administrators reluctant to the organizational change needed to support international students. To educate faculty, staff, and administrators on the value of robust international student support services, international student support staff promote the international student perspective through participation in several campus leadership committees. On these committees, the international staff members discuss how different departments (admissions, finance, residence) will be affected by increased enrollment of international students.

## Staffing

### Use Student Staff to Provide Supplementary Operational Support to International Student-Facing Offices

Contacts at all profiled institutions—except at **Institution B**—note that their international student support offices need more staff members to fully meet student needs. To combat staffing constraints, international student support staff at **Institution B**, **Institution C**, and **Institution D** hire student employees to assist in program delivery.

For example, at **Institution D**, a graduate assistant teaches one of the two first-year experience classes. As an instructor of this class, the graduate assistant helps integrate students into both the American college experience more generally and their institution's culture specifically.

Each year, the international student support office at **Institution C** hires two undergraduate students to each work 15 hours per week as coordinators for the institution's students for global awareness program. These coordinators help train and coordinate new student volunteers, organize and manage the group's events, and assist with international student orientation.

While all three institutions offer compensation to student employees, compensation structures vary between institutions. At **Institution C** and **Institution D**, the international student support office pays student employees an hourly wage. For example, staff members at **Institution C** pay students for global awareness coordinators \$12 (CAD) per hour. Conversely, the international student support office at **Institution B** offers their international graduate assistant tuition remission for their master's degree program in higher education.

## Common Roles within International Student Support Offices

### Director of International Student Service Office



The director oversees the entire international student support office and ensures that international students receive the necessary services. For example, at **Institution D**, the Director of International Affairs supervises the department and coordinates with other campus stakeholders to ensure successful support service delivery.

### International Student Advisor



Advisors handle any academic questions and general immigration issues. At **Institution E**, the International Student Advisor also addresses issues related to student finances, housing, and health and wellbeing. International students at **Institution E** can schedule meetings with the International Student Advisor to identify the appropriate student services for their needs.

### International Student Program Coordinator



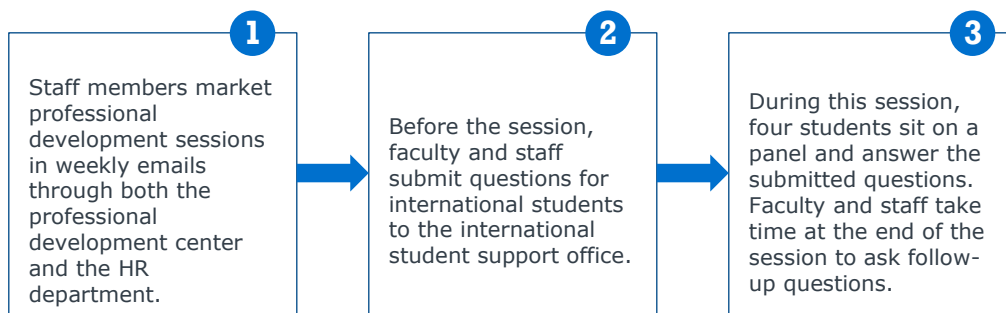
Program Coordinators plan, schedule, and manage programs and events for international students. For example, at **Institution B**, the Program Coordinator supervises the international student support office ambassador program. This role ensures committed oversight of day-to-day international student support programs.

## Provide Professional Development Opportunities to Help Faculty and Staff Across the Institution Understand How to Support International Students

To expand the impact of international student support systems, international student support staff at three profiled institutions—**Institution A**, **Institution B**, and **Institution D**—offer optional training across the institution on international student support. Alternatively, at **Institution E**, intra-team professional development opportunities focus internally to grow the skillsets of international student support team members.

At **Institution A**, **Institution B**, and **Institution D**, international student support staff lead professional development sessions on international student support for other staff members upon request. At **Institution B**, international student support staff present to different offices and departments, providing unit-specific guidance on international student support. For example, international student support staff members show the athletic department how to support international student athletes. At **Institution A**, international students participate in professional development sessions, helping faculty and staff understand their needs on campus.

### Student-Supported Professional Development Panel at *Institution A*





## Program Delivery

Conversely, the international student support team at **Institution E** focuses professional development opportunities internally. These intra-team sessions for the international student support team give in-depth training on topics such as intercultural competencies and risk management.

Even with existing programming in mind, administrators at all four institutions would like to expand professional development offerings to increase their impact on faculty.

### Market International Student Services Regularly to Remind Students of Available Support Systems

By consistently marketing events and services, international student support systems ensure international students understand how to access services specific to their needs. Regular communication reminds international students of the various available student services on campus and of the opportunities to connect with other students.

To market services and events, international student support teams at **Institution A** and **Institution D** email frequent newsletters out to international students. Staff members in the international student support office at **Institution A** send a weekly newsletter to all international students as well as to any other students who express interest. The newsletter advertises international student programs and related events.

Similarly, the graduate assistant at **Institution D** sends out a monthly email, which highlights all the upcoming international and school-wide events on campus. Using recommendations from office leadership, the graduate assistant profiles one or two events in more depth and asks international students to attend.

### Sample Monthly International Student Newsletter from *Institution D*<sup>6</sup>

Choose one to two events during the month to emphasize.

List all-campus and international student-specific events occurring over the month.

Link to longer quarterly newsletter.

Good morning and Happy Hump Day!

Our Founders Day Celebration is this Friday. We will gather near old campus between 2:45 and 3pm. Look for our "You Are Welcome Here" banner. If you have traditional clothing from your home country, we hope you will opt to wear it. Some of our staff members will be wearing traditional clothing as well. This is a wonderful time to celebrate our school spirit. There will be a parade of groups across campus to a celebration in front of the residence hall.

Please plan to attend. Let's show everyone how important and numerous international students are here at **Institution D**!!!

We have lots of exciting things coming up in October, so mark your calendars!

October 1 Gender Panel  
October 5 Soccer tailgate party!  
October 17-18 Fall break  
October 22 Diwali celebration  
October 30 Trick-O-Treat

Be sure to check our event page for exact times and locations.

I am also including the link for our spring newsletter that goes out to campus and community.

The international student support office at **Institution D** also produces a broader quarterly newsletter that administrators send to all members of the campus

6) Example has been edited for length.

community, as well as to external community partners. The newsletter discusses updates within **Institution D**'s international student support office, including recruitment goals, recent community outreach, and academic successes. For example, the spring newsletter highlighted various research conducted by students in the intensive English language program.

## Audit International Student Support Systems Frequently to Align Program Offerings with Changing Student Needs

Institutions should regularly audit services offered to ensure they align with students' changing needs. Routine audits will help administrators tailor programming to fit the needs of the specific cultures and backgrounds represented on campus.

Staff members at both **Institution D** and **Institution E** solicit feedback from international students to inform their program offerings. For example, at **Institution D**, staff members in the international student support office administer surveys to international students at the end of each semester, assessing their perception of available student services and their opinions of campus residence life. Based upon recent survey feedback, staff members noticed that students struggled to furnish their on-campus apartments. In response, staff members created a lending closet within their office with various kitchen items and bedding.

Similarly, staff members at **Institution E** assess their international student services through an informal exit interview. Their International Student Advisor asks graduating students to participate in an optional 30- to 45-minute interview. The advisor uses a rubric to guide their conversation, which includes questions on supports in five areas: academics, immigration, finance, housing, and social-emotional wellness.

### Sample Exit Interview Questions Used at *Institution E*

| <br><b>Academics</b> | <br><b>Immigration</b> | <br><b>Social-Emotional Wellness</b> |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| What is your best class?                                                                                | What are your current immigration documents?                                                               | How have you been integrating with the student community here at <b>Institution E</b> ?                                   |
| What is your worst class?                                                                               | Do you have any travel plans during this academic year?                                                    | Do you have a reliable friend group who you stay in contact with?                                                         |
| Are you seeking or receiving support from other on-campus resources?                                    | What are your post-graduate plans?                                                                         | Have you joined any student societies?                                                                                    |

Additionally, staff members at **Institution E** plan to measure the effectiveness of international student services more formally through future participation in the International Student Barometer assessment. This 80-question international benchmarking survey assesses the international student experience from admissions

to graduation. At **Institution E**, the international student support office plans to administer the survey twice a year to all international students. In two years, the international student support office will assess the initial school-specific results and compare them to national benchmarks to determine future goals for international student support systems.

## 4) Research Methodology

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### Project Challenge

Leadership at the member institution approached the Forum with the following questions:

1. What types of support services are offered to international students?
2. How do international students access services specific to their unique needs?
3. How do administrators personalize services for students from different international backgrounds?
4. How do international student offices market international student support services to students?
5. How do administrators fund international student services?
6. How are international student support systems staffed?
  - a. Where do these staff members sit within broader organizational structures?
7. What are the typical responsibilities of staff members serving international students?
8. How do administrators navigate the implementation of a comprehensive international student support system?
  - a. How do institutions partner with external stakeholders to serve international students?
9. How do administrators measure success of the international student support systems?
10. How do international student-serving staff members collaborate with other institutional staff members to deliver services to students?
11. What types of training and/or professional development are offered for faculty and staff on supporting international students?

### Project Sources

The Forum consulted the following sources for this report:

- Institutions' Websites
- Canadian Alliance of Student Associations, Value Beyond the Dollars and Cents: International Students' Contributions to Canada and Their Need for Supports, 2018.  
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- ETS TOEFL, Retaining International Students: What Works, What Doesn't, The Chronicle of Higher Education. <https://www.chronicle.com/paid-article/retaining-international-studen/53>
- Hsiao-ping Wu, Esther Garza, and Norma Guzman, International Student's Challenge and Adjustment to College, Hindawi Publishing Corporation, 2015.  
<http://downloads.hindawi.com/journals/edri/2015/202753.pdf>
- "Study & Stay in Nova Scotia." Edu Nova. <https://studynovascotia.ca/study-and-stay-in-nova-scotia/>

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- Victoria Esses, Alina Sutter, Alejandro Ortiz, Ning Luo, Jean Cui, and Lisa Deacon, Retaining International Students in Canada Post-Graduation: Understanding the Motivations and Drivers of the Decision to Stay, Canadian Bureau for International Education, June 2018. <https://cbie.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Intl-students-post-graduation-RiB-8-EN-1.pdf>

## Research Parameters

The Forum interviewed administrators managing international student support systems at small-to-medium institutions in both Canada and the United States.

### A Guide to Institutions Profiled in this Brief

| Institution          | Location     | Approximate Undergraduate Enrollment Range | Approximate Percentage of Student Population Composed of International Students |
|----------------------|--------------|--------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Institution A</b> | South        | <5,000                                     | 1%                                                                              |
| <b>Institution B</b> | South        | 10,000-15,000                              | 3%                                                                              |
| <b>Institution C</b> | Nova Scotia  | 5,000-10,000                               | 30%                                                                             |
| <b>Institution D</b> | Mid-Atlantic | <5,000                                     | 1%                                                                              |
| <b>Institution E</b> | Nova Scotia  | <5,000                                     | 4.5%                                                                            |

