


Canada's post-secondary schools exploiting international students, says recruiter

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Mel Broitman is the director of Higher-Edge — which operates the Canadian University Application Centre. (Submitted by Mel Broitman)

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As the provincial government releases new strategies for strengthening international student recruitment and retention, concerns have arisen about the stresses on international students.

CBC Investigates

Overseas teens left vulnerable by lucrative Canadian student visa program, experts say

International students come to Canadian colleges and universities with high hopes. Many choose Canada because of the quality of the education system, but they pay much higher tuition fees compared with their domestic peers.

Mel Broitman, owner of the Higher-Edge international student recruiting company, worked with the University of Windsor from 1999 to 2014. His company has also recruited international students to colleges in Ontario and Alberta.

"The reality is St. Clair College [in Windsor, Ont.] is no different from ... all these other places. They really don't care. They just want these people paying to come [to Canada]," he said.

The 3,087 international students enrolled in St. Clair College's summer semester make up 80 per cent of the total student population. (Sanjay Maru/CBC)

The provincial plan

The Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development estimates international enrolments will account for 20 per cent of all post-secondary enrolments in the province by 2022.

In fact, the University of Windsor is projected to hit that number very soon. International students are expected to make up 22 per cent of the entire student body in the fall.

The province lists out a number of objectives behind the "internationalization" of post-secondary institutions, including the development of "global citizens" who contribute to Ontario's economy.

High enrolment of international students creating housing crisis for some St. Clair students

RM Kennedy, Centennial College professor and Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU) chair, said the influx of international students in Ontario's colleges and universities is a result of "funding shortfalls."

"The key is that we are having a gap between the increased enrolment and the number of services that are put in place to support those students so they can be successful in the environment."

He said there is a patchwork of services across different colleges, which are not sufficient to support international students.

Document: Read the entire strategy here

How many is too many?

The Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development does not impose a cap on the number of international students a post-secondary institution can enrol.

"It is expected that the enrolment of international students should not displace domestic applicants.... Students who feel they are not supported should share their concerns with their institution," ministry spokesperson Tanya Blazina said.

It's unknown how a new PC led Ontario will handle the issue since winning a majority government Thursday night.

The majority of international students coming to Ontario originate from:

1. China
2. India
3. South Korea
4. Nigeria
5. Saudi Arabia
6. United States

- *Ontario's International Post-secondary Education Strategy 2018*

For Broitman, this comment highlights a clear problem for international students — a lack of policing on post-secondary institutions.

St. Clair College is projecting it will have more than 5,000 international students enrolled at the school in the fall, which the college projects will translate to about 35 per cent of the student body — a number that "astounded" Broitman.

City of Windsor says it was unprepared for influx of international students

"That's a significant percentage of the overall student body. It shows they are critical to the school's bottom line," he said. "It tells you that they've been very successful in marketing their programs."

The influx of students also means larger class-sizes, which affects the quality of learning, said Broitman.

"I think it would be fantastic to have a class of 15 to 30 engaged kids and have a really good class," he said. "Could I have that class with 100 to 200 [students]? No way ... This has diluted the quality of education in our classrooms."

International student Hardik Gora said he'll pay nearly \$20,000 to St. Clair College for the upcoming school year. (Sanjay Maru/CBC)

The student experience

Hardik Gora, a first-year business marketing student at St. Clair College, has experienced overcrowding in his classroom first-hand.

"I think there's about four or five sections with 70 students in each section," Gora said.

Like many other international students, Gora has faced issues finding adequate housing and has experienced being skipped for pickups due to overcrowding on Windsor's city buses.

Nowhere to live: Housing crisis for international students in Windsor

"Ontario is overloaded with students. We are international students and the government needs to take care of us," he said. "I am working in a factory and I am paying the same kind of taxes as a Canadian. We are already paying so much."

Gora said his tuition fees for the upcoming school year will set him back around \$20,000.

Those high prices are seen elsewhere in the province, too.

"I consider the University of Toronto [to be] exploiting foreigners who pay to sit in a class with a thousand students there," said Broitman.

The University of Toronto said its tuition costs are "competitive with other world-leading institutions."

"Having the best faculty and the best programs costs money, and our students of course cover some of those costs," said Richard Levin, executive director of enrolment services for the University of Toronto, in an email to CBC News.

"Universities don't receive provincial funding for international students, as we do for Canadian students. Canadian students and their families pay taxes that flow back to universities and colleges, so we ask international students to pay their share as well," Levine added.

Ontario universities 'using international students as cash cows,' critics say

Many international students also struggle with understanding classroom instruction in English.

Brotiman said scoring "around a 5 or 5.5" in the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) represents a mediocre understanding on English.

St. Clair College accepts students from India with a minimum score of 5.5. Chinese students may be accepted with a score of 5.0.

The University of Toronto requires international students to have an overall IELTS score of 6.5 to enrol at the school. (Katherine Holland/CBC)

St. Clair's 'destination strategy'

For St. Clair College, bringing in international students is an "opportunity for the college to deal with what I would call a flat-lining of our domestic enrolment, said Ron Seguin, vice president of International Relations, Training and Campus Development for St. Clair College in a recent interview.

He added the Canadian education system is in high demand around the world.

"We are experiencing growth in Vietnam, Nigeria, Jamaica, Iran, Colombia, Russia, to name a few," said Seguin.

Seguin said there are some "growing pains" with the sudden influx of international students into Windsor.

"There are cultural adjustments for sure. You have a number of young kids living away from home for the first time in great values," Seguin said.

"They're negotiating transportation, they're negotiating buying textbooks and accessing college systems. That's all really, really new."

The goal of the college's "destination strategy," Seguin said, is to create a "world environment."

"I think it prepares both our domestic and international students for the real work world that they're going to be participating in."

Hear more from Mel Broitman on the CBC's *Windsor Morning*:

Windsor Morning

St Clair Recruit

Growing pains. An influx of international students at St Clair College is causing issues with housing and transportation. It's part of a national trend, according to Mel Broitman , an

Looking ahead

The responsibility to provide international students with a high quality of education is on the education providers," said Broitman.

How an app helps international students hit the ground running

"The way it works in Canada is if you want to come to Canada and apply for a visa, you need an invitation. So the study permit or an admission letter to a college is like an invitation."

Broitman acknowledges that post-secondary institutions and the agencies that bring them over have a job to do. But it is in the best interest of all parties to keep international students happy.

"It's a two-way street. Colleges are looking for representatives around the world because they can't be around the world themselves at all times. And agencies are looking for business so they reach out to different colleges and institutions all around the world."

'We have been treated like criminals': South Korea abruptly closes B.C. offshore school

From Broitman's perspective, international students are not being treated fairly but are being exploited for their money at the expense of their education.

"[Change] has to come from leadership and I have not seen leadership in Canada at any level that wants to fix the problem... No one even wants to talk about it."