

December 1-2, 2014

# Know Canada, Know the World

Lessons from Universities Canada's workshop  
on innovation in experiential learning



Universities  
Canada.





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## **Executive summary**

Canada needs to take an integrated and innovative approach to enhancing student mobility, according to participants at a workshop held December 2014 by Universities Canada.

The workshop – held in Calgary and attracting university and private sector leaders – called for Canada to step up its efforts to get university students moving beyond their province and beyond our borders.

Participants underscored the need for more domestic and international mobility opportunities integrated into study programs and resolved to collaborate across sectors on developing a culture of mobility.

The best approach to ensuring more Canadian students have an opportunity to study abroad – or in other parts of Canada – is to develop an integrated and flexible program to meet individual students' needs and reflect universities' academic and research missions.

Drawing from lessons learned in other jurisdictions and promising practices of Canadian universities, participants identified ways of overcoming barriers, including simplifying the credit transfer process, bundling mobility opportunities into thematic programs, and engaging faculty in promoting and integrating experiential learning as part of the curriculum. It was also emphasized that Canada's approach to mobility must include provisions for learners who often face significant barriers, such as Indigenous students, first-generation Canadians, and students who are the first in their family to pursue postsecondary education.

Canada needs a strategic approach to mobility that will help students to learn outside their own province and abroad to better appreciate the diverse communities that make up our country and understand Canada's place in the world. Governments have a role to play in investing in the next generation of Canadians to ensure that Canada's future workforce is best positioned to contribute to a globally-competitive economy.

## **Creating a culture of mobility**

Discussion during the workshop focussed on short-term mobility experiences undertaken by university students during their study programs, either within Canada or around the world.

Under the auspices of Universities Canada, participants agreed to work on a range of approaches to increase mobility including changing the perceptions of students – and their parents – about the value of academic mobility; enhancing language skills; and creating a network of champions to encourage greater mobility.

An example that captured the imagination of participants is the newly launched Canadian Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Scholarships, a model based on institutional projects designed to move students, based on a set of themes. This program was seen as an excellent example of a collaborative initiative (involving universities, private sector, government and community foundations) that will help thousands of Canadians study internationally.



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## Encouraging international and interprovincial mobility of university students is crucial to Canada's economic competitiveness and cohesiveness.

It was suggested that a new program built on the Queen Elizabeth II scholarships model would allow Canada's universities, in collaboration with other partners and community organizations, to develop mobility programs that:

- Provide learning opportunities for students between and among provinces and abroad;
- Strengthen the bond between campuses and communities;
- Increase awareness of the diversity of the communities that make up Canada; and
- Create a legacy of investing in students for Canada's sesquicentennial.

The workshop also highlighted the importance of creating a coalition of champions to lead a coordinated effort for greater student mobility, including senior university administrators and faculty, business leaders and hiring managers, governments, parents, and students themselves.

Participants agreed that encouraging international and interprovincial mobility of university students is vital to Canada's economic competitiveness and cohesiveness.

### **Canada needs more graduates with international experiences**

Student mobility is a crucial element of Canada's global competitiveness, workshop participants heard. Todd Hirsch, chief economist, ATB Financial, argued that creativity, imagination, risk-taking and entrepreneurship are skills developed through international study experiences and that the Canadian economy needs more such skilled workers to move up global value chains.

Stuart Beck, president of the Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada and Canada's former High Commissioner to India, said that Canada needs more young people with 'Asia competencies'. He cited a recent APFC poll of 350 Canadian managers with business experience in Asia. They identified the ability for young Canadians to operate effectively in another culture as one of the most important skills young people can gain.

This was echoed by key stakeholders including Patrick Horgan, vice-president, IBM Canada; Louise Levonian, senior associate deputy minister, Employment and Social Development Canada; Antonia Maioni, at the time president, Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences; and Seija Roggeveen, director-at-large, Canadian Alliance of Student Associations.

However, we need to do more to encourage uptake by Canadian students, both internationally and interprovincially. Currently, one in ten young Canadians crosses a provincial border to study.

Despite universities' efforts to offer programs and some financial support, too few Canadian students benefit from global experiences: just 3.1 percent of full-time undergraduates had an international experience in 2012-13, and only 2.6 percent had a for-credit experience abroad according to an institutional survey conducted by Universities Canada. These figures have remained static over the last eight years<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Canada's Universities in the World: AUCC Internationalization Survey, December 2014.  
<http://www.univcan.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/internationalization-survey-2014.pdf>



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## International study helps students develop cultural awareness, as well as risk-taking, creativity and entrepreneurship skills.

Universities Canada's recent study on internationalization trends also revealed that although the geographic focus of universities' own internationalization efforts leans heavily toward emerging economies, students' preferred destinations for overseas experience remain the traditional ones of English-speaking and major western European nations such as the United Kingdom, Australia, France and Germany<sup>2</sup>.

### **Barriers to mobility**

A survey of 400 small and medium-sized employers conducted by Leger Marketing for Universities Canada last year found that two out of three employers in Canada say the country is in danger of being left behind by fast-growing countries such as China, India and Brazil unless young Canadians learn to think more globally. The results highlight the importance of global experiences to today's employers, with a majority of respondents who hire new recruits with international and intercultural skills saying these employees have improved the competitiveness of their business. These same employers also value experiences in other parts of Canada as an asset in the hiring process.

Yet, participants and speakers identified a number of barriers that will need to be resolved with regard to student mobility:

- Students often perceive mobility opportunities as “taking a semester away”, and would prefer that they be integrated into their academic program. Making experiential learning and mobility a condition of graduation would help increase student uptake of such opportunities.
- Many students do not want to forfeit summer earning potential and revenue from part-time employment to study abroad or in another province.
- While students are concerned about the cost of mobility experiences, they often overestimate the actual cost.
- Credit transfer needs to be simple and straightforward, perhaps through an online easy-to-use and comprehensive portal.
- Experiential learning and student mobility opportunities need to be captured in student transcripts, and participants called for mobility experiences to be recognized through *additional* credit.

### **Enhancing the institutional environment**

A roundtable of university presidents featuring David Docherty (Mount Royal University), Jamie Cassels (University of Victoria), Sara Diamond (OCAD University) and Alan Shepard (Concordia University) explored the opportunities and challenges related to enhancing experiential learning and the president's role in creating a culture of mobility on campus.

- Bundling mobility opportunities into thematic programs to move students to different parts of Canada could help increase the number of opportunities available and make them more interesting to students and their parents (such as Indigenous knowledge, environmental rehabilitation, etc.).

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid.



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## The profile of students is changing. Our approach to mobility must include provisions for non-traditional learners.

- Creating a one-stop shop to help students navigate existing mobility opportunities and to explain the available choices and pathways would help lead to an increase in uptake.
- Faculty must encourage students to participate in mobility experiences, and must be recognized for their efforts.
- Institutions need to measure and reward departmental success in moving students.
- Domestic and international student mobility opportunities should be integrated into the curriculum, with clearly defined learning outcomes, in the same way that universities have successfully integrated experiential learning and research into the undergraduate experience.
- Where appropriate, preparatory language training should be provided to students undertaking a mobility experience.

### **Outreach to non-traditional groups**

To reflect the changing profile of university students, Canada's approach to mobility must include provisions for non-traditional learners. Indigenous students, first-generation Canadian students, students who are the first in their family to pursue postsecondary education, and those who are parents or supporting elderly parents, and/or working in addition to their studies, face significant barriers to mobility, making it difficult to travel to another province or country for a semester.

Shorter experiences and on-line components could help address this population. Field schools are a good model in this context, providing flexible and intensive learning opportunities.

### **Lessons from abroad: Erasmus experience**

With a funding envelope of €14.7 billion, Erasmus+ is the largest higher education mobility program in the world. It offers opportunities for European students, faculty, and other higher education staff to enhance their personal and professional development through work, studies and traineeships abroad. As of 2012, more than three million students have benefitted from EU Erasmus grants since the program launched in 1987.<sup>3</sup> Workshop participants agreed that some of the "lessons learned" through Erasmus could benefit Canada in developing its approach to mobility, including:

- Engaging faculty to participate in and promote mobility leads to greater student uptake, and
- Embedding credit transfer into the program by requiring institutions to accept principles similar to the Erasmus program Charter, which relate to access, non-discrimination, and credit mobility may help to advance mobility<sup>4</sup>.

Participants were struck by the success of the Erasmus approach, including how it has deepened relations with industry partners that help students develop the skills that businesses need, for example, five years after graduation, the unemployment rate for Erasmus students was 23 percent lower than for those who had not gone abroad<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> Press release, European Commission, [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_IP-13-657\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-13-657_en.htm).

<sup>4</sup> Erasmus Charter for Higher Education 2014-2020, European Commission, 2014.

<sup>5</sup> [http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/funding/2014/documents/annotated\\_guidelines\\_en.pdf](http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/funding/2014/documents/annotated_guidelines_en.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.



### **Canada needs a collaborative approach**

Participants concluded that Canada needs a program that encourages Canadian student mobility in thematic areas, builds on institutional linkages internationally, provides opportunities for traditionally under-represented groups, and allows for partnerships between industry and universities.

To make this happen, Canada must work together across sectors: senior university administrators and faculty, who set the tone regarding the importance of mobility; business leaders and hiring managers, who can make the case for needing the 21<sup>st</sup> century skills that such experiences bring to potential hires; governments, which act as both employer and catalyst for mobility experiences; and parents, who are key influencers in students' decision to take part in experiential opportunities as part of their university education.

The workshop identified an important new approach to encourage students to take part in mobility activities, where Canada's universities, in collaboration with other partners, would develop mobility projects to provide learning opportunities for students in other provinces and abroad, strengthen community-campus links, increase knowledge and understanding about Canada's diversity, and leave a legacy for Canadians beyond the sesquicentennial.

Canada's universities recommend that, as done by other governments, the government of Canada invest in helping Canadian university students acquire the global and cultural skills they will need to succeed in a globally-competitive economy.

Universities Canada will continue to work with its membership to advance student mobility over the course of 2015 and beyond. Investing in Canadian university students to expand their horizons and develop key skills would be a fitting way to celebrate Canada's 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2017.