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# International Students As Immigrants Transition Challenges And Strengths Of Current And Former Students

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INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AS IMMIGRANTS: TRANSITION CHALLENGES AND STRENGTHS OF  
CURRENT AND FORMER STUDENTS

by

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A Major Research Paper  
presented to Ryerson University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts  
in the Program of  
Immigration and Settlement Studies

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# INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AS IMMIGRANTS: TRANSITION CHALLENGES AND STRENGTHS OF CURRENT AND FORMER STUDENTS

Nicole Tanya Kelly  
Master of Arts 2012  
Immigration and Settlement Studies  
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## ABSTRACT

Despite recent government policies aimed at attracting international students as immigrants, little research has involved this population directly. This study explores the experiences of international students in their transition to permanent resident. Data gathered from fifteen semi-structured interviews with current and former international students seek to answer: Why do international students decide to remain in Canada after graduating? What challenges do they face during this transition? What strengths do they possess and what strategies do they use to help them become permanent residents? The findings suggest differing levels of need for support services during their transition and the strong impact of individual decisions on integration success. Participants and the author make recommendations for improving the immigration process.

### Key Words:

International students; transition; permanent residence; immigrants; support

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## **1. Introduction**

The annual flow of over 15,000 international students to Canada's post-secondary institutions is changing the national landscape (Roslyn Kunin & Associates, Inc., 2012). Not only is this evident in the provinces of Ontario, British Columbia, and Quebec, but it is increasingly creating diversity in smaller provinces and rural communities (Roslyn Kunin & Associates, Inc., 2012). As international students graduate and look to the future, many are focused on opportunities for permanent settlement. Current Canadian immigration policy aims to retain this talent, as it focuses on recruiting competitive and highly educated individuals.

With declining birth rates and an aging population, the Canadian workforce requires more people. The number of international students being accepted into Canadian universities is on the rise (OECD, 2011), and this young workforce is increasingly being viewed as desirable permanent skilled immigrants. Younger immigrants are just beginning their work career and have many years ahead of them to contribute to taxes and the Canadian economy (Lu, Zong & Schissel, 2009). Additionally, international students, as opposed to other immigrants, are attractive to employers due to their Canadian education and familiarity with Canadian cultural and social norms (Lu et al., 2009).

The government has made some significant changes to immigration policy in an effort to tap into the "resource" of international students studying in Canada. These changes have sought to make permanent settlement in Canada more appealing by streamlining the process for recent graduates and introducing new avenues in which to apply. In recent years, lower labour market outcomes of immigrants have led to the introduction of the Canadian Experience Class (CEC) (Sweetman & Warman, 2010). This new immigration category allows for some



temporary foreign workers and foreign students to gain permanent residency if they meet certain requirements, including working full time for one year in a skilled occupation in Canada (Sweetman & Warman, 2010). The introduction of the PhD stream of the Skilled Worker (SW PhD) program in November 2011 provides opportunities for PhD students at least 2 years into their program to apply through the Federal Skilled Worker points system (Citizenship and Immigration Canada [CIC], 2011). While the general Federal Skilled Worker stream was recently put on hold to revise the program, applications for the PhD stream are still being accepted (CIC, 2012). Such changes have expanded opportunities for international students to transition from temporary to permanent residence while demonstrating the priority placed on students as immigrants.

Despite the push from government and educational institutions to increase the numbers of students accepted each year, little research has been conducted to understand the experiences of this growing population. While the majority of studies have analyzed the issue from a policy perspective to understand the movement of students on a global level (Hawthorne, 2008; Mueller, 2009; Reitz, 2010), few studies have sought the perspectives of students. In the Canadian context, only a handful of studies have consulted international students to determine the factors impacting their decision to remain in Canada or return home upon completion of their degree (Arthur & Flynn, 2011; Canadian Bureau for International Education, 2009; Lu et al., 2009). Additionally, little recognition has been given to the role policy changes play in the students' decision-making process. Researchers have primarily focused on current students, and therefore can only address migration intentions, without certainty that permanent residency will be the end result. As Gates-Gasse (2012) points out,

“the federal and provincial governments cannot take for granted that international students who study in Canada will choose to stay” (p. 274). In order to thoroughly understand the transition from temporary residency to permanent settlement, perspectives must be collected from former international students who have in fact immigrated to Canada.

In addressing this gap in the research, this study seeks to understand the transition from temporary residency to permanent settlement by collecting data from former and current international students who have immigrated to Canada.<sup>1</sup> This study focuses on the experiences of current international students and international student alumni who have either become permanent residents or have applied and are awaiting a decision. This will provide insight into their transitional period and the types of support they found useful, as well as the needs that were not met.

Four questions will be addressed within this study. First: What are the motivations behind international students deciding to study and subsequently remain in Canada? Second: What challenges do they face in their transition to permanent residency? Third: What strengths do international students possess and what support do they use? Fourth: What suggestions and recommendations do international students have to improve the experiences of future students?

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<sup>1</sup> This paper was conceived as research into what would be most important to support international students who wish to become permanent residents. After the review of the literature and the submission to the Research Ethics Board was complete, a newly catalogued thesis from the same program was discovered (Roach, 2011). The study focused on the service needs and gaps for international students looking to become permanent residents, and was based on interviews with eight key informants. Roach’s report ends, however, with the recommendation that the students themselves be interviewed. Fortunately, this current study was designed to interview not only key informants, but also former international students who have completed their studies and received permanent residence status. This study therefore does not repeat the interviews with key informants which had been planned, but instead, adds additional international student interviews.

This report is organized into seven sections: (1) introduction; (2) literature review; (3) methodology and theory; (4) findings; (5) discussion and limitations; (6) recommendations; and (7) conclusion. By providing insights into the experiences of international students who have endeavored to become permanent residents, this research aims to encourage reflection upon the needs of international students for successful permanent settlement.

## **2. Review of the Literature**

Although international students form a significant percentage of the temporary migrant population in Canada and are increasingly being targeted as ideal immigrants (Lu et al., 2009), relatively little research has examined their transition and integration experiences. Research on international students and their permanent settlement is a recent area of inquiry, with Canadian academic interest developing since the year 2000 (Roach, 2011). While most interest has been focused on policy changes and the economic benefits of retaining international students, few studies have addressed the actual experiences of international students who choose to pursue permanent status.

The few exceptions include studies on the migration intentions of current international students (which inevitably are tied to their integration experiences), the impact of policy and services needs of international students interested in permanent settlement, and narrative accounts of the migration experiences of international students. This review will focus on summarizing these areas as they provide a foundation from which to understand the transition experiences of the fifteen participants in this study.

This study considers the transition experience from temporary student to permanent residence, while seeking the opinion of students themselves regarding the challenges they faced, the support they used, and the areas they see for improvement. Addressing their adaptation to life in Canada after graduation elucidates the challenges of international students and demonstrates the type of support they rely on and desire. As will be demonstrated by the literature review, this has not been done before.

## **2.1 Migration Intentions**

Studies on migration intentions are closely linked to integration in the final few years of international students' academic careers. Because migration intention is such a complex issue, there are many factors which contribute to the decision-making process. Alberts and Hazen (2005) acknowledge "it is not always possible to assign a specific factor to just one of these categories as they are not mutually exclusive and are in many cases interdependent" (p. 139). The difficulty in separating dimensions which are inherently linked can be seen by the varied approaches researchers take to categorizing their findings. For the purposes of this literature review, the findings will be discussed in terms of economic and professional factors, personal and emotional factors, and societal conditions and value systems, while acknowledging that factors often overlap and influence one another.

### **Economic and Professional Factors**

In terms of classic migration theories, push-pull factors have typically emphasized the availability of resources and job opportunities in receiving countries. Nearly all the literature on migration of international students mentions economic incentives as a reason to remain in the host country.

Arthur and Flynn (2011) conducted semi-structured interviews with international undergraduate and graduate students at a Canadian university who were considering permanent immigration, to determine key influences on their career and migration decisions. Arthur and Flynn (2011) found common motivating factors to remain in Canada upon graduation, including career-related opportunities and enhanced working conditions as compared to those in their home countries. The associated financial incentives of higher

compensation for their work were another factor that appealed to the students. From a contrary perspective, some participants also felt discouraged by previously encountered barriers such as cultural differences, difficulty building a network of contacts, and fear of not securing employment in Canada, increasing their desire to return to their home country (Arthur & Flynn, 2011).

Arthur and Flynn (2011) suggest the career intentions of younger students might be quite different than those of students at the graduate level of study. A complementary study using Canadian data collected in 2005 on undergraduate students addresses this younger cohort (Lu, Zong, and Schissel, 2009). In their survey of 160 Chinese undergraduate students at the University of Saskatchewan, Lu et al. (2009) noted distinct gender differences in the responses of international students. While male students were more likely to consider career-oriented attitudes in their immigration decision making (such as human capital, social networks, and occupational success), female students were more reliant on emotional and relational factors (including feelings of belonging, parental expectations and family conditions) (Lu et al., 2009). Aside from gender differences, there was also a strong positive association between working off campus and the intention to migrate. While the benefit of limiting the sample to one ethnic group provides an opportunity to regulate for cultural conditions that impact decision-making, Lu et al. (2009) fail to address the notion of cultural and social conditions that might influence migration decisions. Future research should consider differences in migration intentions by comparing across ethnic groups.

Shifting focus to the United States, Alberts and Hazen (2005, 2006) investigated the factors that motivate international students to stay in the United States or return home upon

completion of their degree. In the results of several focus groups, many students saw professional factors including wages, work conditions and facilities, and opportunities for professional advancement as reasons to stay in the United States. Students from low-wage nations desired the higher economic standard of living provided by the US, while the lack of professional freedom and less-advanced fields in some countries (particularly for the Chinese students) were deterrents to returning home (Alberts & Hazen, 2005). Alberts and Hazen (2006) used the themes that arose in focus groups to develop a survey. Overall, the results of the survey supported the findings from the focus groups. Economic and professional factors were most often cited as reasons to stay in the United States, while personal and societal factors were more influential in their intentions to return home (Alberts & Hazen, 2006). Over 60% of the students surveyed said that the better job opportunities in the United States as opposed to their home countries were factors influencing them to stay (Alberts & Hazen, 2006).

One of the major limitations of this study, as well as of other research is the focus on the intention of international students, rather than the actual behaviour (Lu et al., 2009).

Depending on circumstances and situations that arise, a student's life course and intentions may change drastically. However, the difficulty in tracking students post-graduation creates barriers to empirical research on the migration behaviour of former international students.

Baruch, Budhwar and Khatri (2007) maintain a focus on international students in the United States and the United Kingdom, but use the notion of "brain drain" to frame the migration intentions of students upon graduation. One of the most influential factors in decision-making that was identified by the questionnaire was the student's perception of the labour market in the host country (Baruch et al., 2007). The limitations of the sample to

business management students in the United States and the United Kingdom indicate the results cannot be generalized to different degree programs or to a Canadian context. One particular challenge in extending the findings of this study is the inclusion of the United Kingdom, where migration between countries that are part of the European Union is vastly different than the migration process to a country such as Canada or the US.

Another study which discusses economic and professional factors as motivational categories is a recent questionnaire completed by over 600 international students in New Zealand (Soon, 2012). In examining the intention for destination country after graduation, Soon (2012) found that work experience, work environment, and the opportunity to use professional skills were key determinants in the decision-making process, but New Zealand was not the overwhelming choice of destination country. If the students had work experience in their home country before studying in New Zealand, or they perceived their home country to have a good work environment and saw opportunities to use their acquired skills, they were more apt to return upon graduation (Soon, 2012). Contrary to Alberts and Hazen (2005), Soon (2012) noted that wage competitiveness in the home country did not have a significant impact upon students' intention to return home, which may be attributed to variations between nationalities of the participants and between relative costs of living.

In the 2009 Survey of International Students (Canadian Bureau for International Education), the data collected showed that half of university students and three-quarters of college students chose to study in Canada because of the work opportunities that would be available to them once they graduated. While it was not specified in which countries these students believed work opportunities would be available, 51% of university students intended



to apply for permanent residency, while 57% of college students had the same intention (CBIE, 2009). These numbers are quite high considering the findings from the OECD (2010, in Gates-Gasse, 2012) that show permanent stay rates at about 18% in Canada. It is important to consider what factors could account for the dramatic difference between intended stay rates and actual stay rates of international students.

### **Personal and Emotional Factors**

Personal and emotional factors play an important role in the decision-making process of international students. Feelings of belonging and attachment to the host country versus the home country, interpersonal connections, initial intentions, as well as family support of migration decisions influence whether students will stay in the host country or return home.

The international students in Arthur and Flynn's Canadian study (2011) experienced barriers to migration at the personal and emotional level, including cultural and linguistic barriers, and their concerns that Canadian society would not perceive them as integrated into Canada. Lu et al. (2009) also emphasize the importance of social and emotional adaptations in their analysis, stating that both factors are as critical as economic adaptation in shaping international students' intentions to stay in the host country. Specifically, Lu et al. (2009) emphasize the need for analysis beyond the typical push-pull factors which are usually focused on economic and political factors, and identify the need to consider sociocultural contexts. Gender differences between the Chinese students were noticeable, as males' migration intentions were linked to friendships with Canadians, having kinship in Canada, and social network factors (Lu et al., 2009). Females were more influenced by feelings of emotional connectedness and belonging in Canada, as well as parental expectations (Lu et al., 2009).

The importance of relationships was also highlighted as a main factor in their decision-making about settlement location and career. Students expressed concern that they would miss their family members in their home countries, and this was a deterrent in their choice to permanently settle in Canada (Arthur & Flynn, 2011). Soon (2012) noticed that students who reported close family and social ties in their home country were more likely to return to their home country. While the final decision to remain in Canada was made by the individual students, their decision was influenced by parents and partners (Arthur & Flynn, 2011). Interestingly, all the participants in Arthur and Flynn's study (2011) had positive support from their parents to study abroad, and this support extended to pursuing permanent immigration to Canada.

As stated previously, Alberts and Hazen (2005, 2006) noted personal factors were more likely to draw students back to their home countries, whereas professional factors were likely to influence students to stay in their host country. Personal factors included issues related to the personal circumstances of an individual, exemplified by family structure and friendship networks. Though not all participants felt strong personal and emotional connections to their home country, many had family and friends there, and some students even felt a responsibility to return to their home country to promote the "development" of society (Alberts & Hazen, 2005). Others with children wanted to raise them where they would feel accepted because they were ethnically and culturally similar (Alberts & Hazen, 2005). These were strong personal and emotional factors which indicated students felt a desire to return to their home country.

Baruch et al. (2007) also emphasize the adjustment process to the host country and family ties (in both the host and home countries) as central to migration intentions. According

to the master's students that responded to the questionnaire, the adjustment process and social support (from family, and also classmates from the host country) were the most significant factors that predicted their intention to stay (Baruch et al., 2007). This measure of social support as a significant factor is concerning, considering that in the national survey of almost 6,000 international university and college students only one in three reported "lots of success" in making friends with Canadian students (CBIE, 2009).

The establishment of networks is also mentioned by Mandal (2009) as an important predictor of settlement. Mandal (2009) analyzes settlement decisions of students in Manitoba by looking at the influence of social capital and perceptions of discrimination, but found that the establishment of social capital networks were the most important factor in their intention to remain in Canada after graduation, with consideration of employment opportunities falling closely behind.

Although the study by Soon (2012) was limited due to the failure to define many of the terms such as "good perception of lifestyle at home", the findings from the international students studying in New Zealand are nonetheless significant. Family characteristics played an extremely significant role, with family support of migration leading to a student being more likely to stay (Soon, 2012).

Another strong personal factor found by Soon (2012) was the initial return intention. Students who had strong intentions to return home prior to attending school in New Zealand were highly likely to have maintained this position, with 80% of the students who had initially intended to return home choosing the same option at the point of the questionnaire. As Soon (2012) notes, this is consistent with the findings by Alberts and Hazen (2006) who note that

only a small minority of international students went to the United States with the end goal of permanent migration.

Alberts and Hazen (2006) also hypothesize that the first-hand experiences international students gain as they live and study abroad in the United States lead them to make decisions that are more individual and personal. Although structural reasons such as economic and professional opportunities still form a framework for their decision-making, they believe individual reasons such as personal experiences in the home country become more influential with the increasing time that is spent in the host country (Alberts & Hazen, 2006). Their findings support the emphasis on the adjustment process as crucial in their migration intentions. The respondents to the questionnaire who reported feeling more alienated from US culture were more likely to intend to return home after graduation (Alberts & Hazen, 2006).

### **Societal Conditions and Value Systems**

Although the academic analysis of professional or personal factors is more extensive, social conditions in the host and home country and their associated value systems play an important role in the decision-making process for international students.

Many students cited the high standard of living in Canada as a factor that makes permanent migration appealing (Arthur & Flynn, 2011). Arthur and Flynn (2011) noted certain features that were related to an enhanced quality of life in Canada, as perceived by the international students they interviewed, including the clean environment, slower pace of life, freedom, friendly people, social welfare system, bureaucratic processes, and the quality of the medical system. Although all these factors are subjective, and may be quite dependent on the country of origin of the person being interviewed (something which the authors failed to

include alongside their results), the overall theme of higher quality of life as a motivation for migration is echoed by other studies (Alberts & Hazen, 2005, 2006).

While quality of life can be linked to the economic situation and job opportunities, societal conditions can also extend to the inherent value systems of a particular culture. At the societal level, Alberts and Hazen (2005) found strong associations between feeling less comfortable in the US, dissatisfaction with American values like individualism, materialism, and competitiveness and a desire to return to the home country. Students also felt a disconnection between their values and the lifestyle in the US, citing differences in social priorities and different understandings of friendship. Alberts and Hazen (2005) reported that most of the international students' friends were other foreigners— a point mirrored in the CBIE study (2009) that hints at a lack of integration into the host society. Some participants also felt concerned with racism, especially due to discrimination in the wake of September 11, 2001 (Alberts & Hazen, 2005).

On the other hand, at the societal level, students saw positive aspects in the American culture. Some female students from more traditional societies enjoyed greater freedom in the United States, and unfavorable political situations in their countries of origin led to students' more positive opinions about staying in the host country (Alberts & Hazen, 2005). Arthur and Flynn (2011) also found that their participants valued the safety and political stability that Canada offered them, describing the lack of corruption, the stable economy, and general feeling of safety in neighbourhoods.

Alberts and Hazen (2005) also suggest certain patterns regarding societal factors are relevant, particularly among Chinese students. Although these particular international students

saw social and personal factors as important in their reasons to return to China, concerns with the political situation and economic problems at home seemed to be more of a factor, thus influencing their decision to stay in the United States (Alberts & Hazen, 2005).

## **2.2 Support, Services and Policy**

Because the provision of services to help students adjust to their new surroundings has typically been provided by the post-secondary institutions themselves, minimal research has been done on the post-graduation transition period from temporary student to permanent resident (Gates-Gasse, 2012). A handful of the aforementioned studies have called for expansion of services and policy attention to help guide students in their career planning (Arthur & Flynn, 2011), cultural orientation (Lu et al., 2009; Alberts & Hazen, 2006) and experiences of discrimination or racism (Alberts & Hazen, 2006). International student participants themselves have also stated their desire for more extensive services that offer advice regarding obtaining work permits, job search skills, permanent residency, and immigration status (Arthur & Flynn, 2011).

The argument for service expansion for international students is echoed succinctly by Gates-Gasse (2012) in her review of services and supports that would increase the likelihood of international students in Canada choosing permanent settlement. Gates-Gasse (2012) argues that by “supporting international students with services, governments demonstrate how they value them both as individuals and as possible immigrants, therefore increasing the likelihood that they will choose to immigrate” (p. 271).

One of the few studies that provide empirical evidence of the pragmatic issues of this transition period is by Roach (2011). Roach (2011) interviewed front-line service providers at

post-secondary institutions and an immigrant-serving agency who work with international students, as well as a government official. Her findings highlight the limited services provided for international students to help them transition to the labour market or permanent residency. In light of immigration policy reforms aimed at retaining international students as immigrants, the study suggests the need for extended immigration services, more credential recognition, and specialized employment services. Roach (2011) points out the barriers international student offices (ISOs) face in expanding their services to include immigration and settlement support, including lack of funding and overburdened staff. The professionals interviewed suggest building partnerships among stakeholders as one strategy to move towards a comprehensive service model for international students (Roach, 2011).

In addition to the limited focus on policy reform at the service-delivery level, academic research has failed to thoroughly examine the impact of Canadian immigration policy on student migration. Alberts and Hazen (2006) acknowledge the limitations of their study because of their focus on the decision-making process of students, and state the importance of other factors such as legal restrictions, bureaucratic barriers, or institutional incentives which impact students' decisions, but fail to investigate their role. In a Canadian context, although Lu et al. (2009) state one of their research goals is to understand how immigration policies such as the Saskatchewan Immigrant Nominee Program (SINP) and the Off-Campus Work Permit Program affect student attitudes towards permanent settlement, the discussion of their results related to policy changes is surprisingly absent. Lu et al. (2009) explain that changes in immigration policy impact migration decisions, but the authors lack empirical evidence to support these claims, and merely state the need for further research.

A complementary study in the Australian context examines the way former students experience the bureaucratic process of applying for permanent residence (PR) and how the power of the state impacts their social position in society (Robertson, 2011). Robertson (2011) outlines the three steps of membership from transient student, to permanent resident, to then becoming a citizen. Through interviews with former international students, the authors' findings indicate the participants' frustration and stress associated with waiting for a decision on their application, the building of social networks as a means of support in the permanent residence application process, financial strains associated with the application, and a sense of unfair or inconsiderate treatment by immigration officials (Robertson, 2011).

### **2.3 Migration Narratives**

In terms of conducting interviews with international students who have pursued PR in Canada, only one such study was located. The study by Moore (2008) considers the issue of student migration on a small scale, exploring the narrative accounts of three international students in the application stages of PR, to determine how they define space, place, home, and how they navigate the immigration system. While work opportunities were a major factor which influenced their migration decisions, an important finding was the development of relationships and networks in Canada (Moore, 2008). Moore (2008) explains how the students' ability to network and utilize their built community for support helps to explain their success as students pursuing PR. While the students did encounter some challenges, namely the financial challenge of applying for PR, lack of clear and constant communication from CIC and slow processing times, and dissatisfaction with immigration lawyers, it was their communities they



had established in Canada, and their organization and willingness to ask questions which ensured their success (Moore, 2008).

This research was conducted in 2008, before the three-year post-graduation work permit came into effect, and before the new immigration streams that specifically target international students, such as the Canadian Experience Class, Skilled Worker PhD stream, and various Provincial Nominee Programs (PNPs). The interview subjects appear to have pursued PR while in the midst of their final years of study; thus the study does not look at their transition to PR as a separate transition after graduation, but instead combines the experience of being a student with the transition to permanent resident. Nonetheless, the nature of the narrative inquiry used provided some important insights into the migration experiences of international students.

## **2.4 Rationale for the Study**

As can be seen by the literature review, there are two major gaps within the research. There is, first, a lack of attention to the impact of government policy and bureaucratic processes on the experience of international students pursuing PR in Canada. Immigration policy impacts the way international students are able to become permanent residents, and has not been addressed in previous Canadian research. Additionally, previous studies have primarily focused on current students, and therefore can only address migration intentions without certainty that these intentions will persist or that permanent residency will be the end result. In order to understand the transition from temporary residence to permanent settlement more thoroughly, data must be collected from former international students who have permanent status in Canada.

In light of policy shifts which create a two-step migration process where international students transition from temporary student to temporary worker, then to permanent resident, it is important to expand on Moore's study (2008) to consider this middle transition period. Roach's (2011) recommendation to incorporate the opinions of international students regarding service needs frames the context for this particular research study. Thus this research investigates the challenges, support and strategies international students use to help them reach their goal of permanent residency. By looking at their job search experiences, as well as their structural, social, and emotional needs, this study addresses the paucity of research that exists on this specific population and their transition and settlement needs.

### **3. Methodology and Theory**

The experience of international students transitioning to PR is relatively under researched; therefore, this study was largely exploratory. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to obtain first-hand accounts of the issues faced by international students. This method also enabled the exploration of the subtleties of individual experiences.

Participants were required to meet two criteria: (1) they had, or previously had, a study permit, and (2) participants were either in the process of applying for or had been granted PR status. The year in which participants began studying in Canada was not restricted. As a result, the participants varied greatly in the amount of time they had lived in Canada, as well as the immigration category they had used to apply for PR (due to changing immigration policies).

While it is important to consider the issue of international students becoming immigrants on a national level because immigration policies are both a provincial- and federal-level initiative, this research had limited resources and therefore focused on recruiting participants living in the Greater Toronto Area and Kitchener-Waterloo. The emphasis on this geographical area is justified by the high number of international students studying in these regions, and the increasing number of immigrants settling outside gateway cities. According to a report commissioned by Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada, 85,280 international students studied in Ontario in 2010 (Roslyn Kunin & Associates, Inc., 2012), while an estimated 20,000 foreign students attended Toronto colleges or universities in 2010 (Statistics Canada, 2010). In addition, increasing numbers of immigrants are settling in second-tier cities such as Kitchener and Waterloo, drawn in by post-secondary institutions that play a role in increasing the diversity within the population (Walton-Roberts, 2011).

Interview subjects were recruited by referrals from personal contacts and ISO employees via email (See Appendix A), snowball sampling, and recruitment flyers posted on college and university social networking sites. Using these recruitment methods meant that interview participants were self-selected. Therefore, a non-probability purposive sample was formed as some of the participants were more likely to be selected than others. This recruitment method was deemed suitable because the original target population for the interviews were alumni who had been through the transition process, had PR status, and could reflect upon their experiences. In the end however, several of the participants ended up being in the middle of the PR application process.

Through varied sampling techniques, a broad range of participants was obtained, not only those in close contact with their ISO. One consequence of the recruitment method was that three of the participants were former international students who currently worked in an ISO. However, because of their daily interactions with international students, this added a unique perspective. They were able to draw upon the experiences of international students gathered from their professional work, provide insights into the profession of international student advising, and share their personal experience of going through the PR process.

Once the participants were recruited, fifteen interviews were conducted in person, through internet voice calls, or over the telephone between June and July 2012 (See Appendix C for detailed participant characteristics). Nine males and six females were interviewed, although in the case of the four married participants, they were also asked questions about the experiences of their foreign-born spouses. Most interviews were conducted individually except for a few interviews where the participant asked their spouse for clarification or input, and one

interview that was done with the couple answering the questions together. Participants were between 22 and 40 years old, and attended a post-secondary school in the GTA or the Kitchener-Waterloo region. The participants came from a variety of countries, with the majority from Africa and Asia (5 and 4 participants, respectively), and relatively balanced numbers from Latin America, the Caribbean, Eastern Europe, and one participant who was Kenyan but was raised in the United States. The majority of participants had been granted PR, while several were in the final stages and a few had only just sent in their application (particularly those applying under the SW PhD stream). One participant was still gathering his documents and had not yet submitted his application.

Each participant signed a consent form before the interview began. The interviewees were then asked questions about their experiences studying in Canada, their job search and employment history, and the process of applying for PR. They were also asked to reflect on their transition after graduation and provide suggestions for what could have improved their experience. Participants were given a \$10 gift card in appreciation for their time and participation.

Upon completion, the interviews were transcribed. The information was then coded and organized by theme. These themes were compared with the individual responses, closely analyzed by paying attention to similar responses among participants, and were eventually developed to become the headings for the findings.

In terms of analyzing the interviews, social capital theory was used to shed light on the findings, to determine whether social networks benefitted international students in their transition to PR. The concept of social capital was first proposed by Bourdieu as “...the

aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition” (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 248). Since then, social capital has been redefined in a number of ways, with definitions varying in focus on the relations maintained between people, the structure of relations among a collective of people, or the types of linkages that are formed. Coleman (1990) considered a functional understanding of social capital, with the two defining characteristics of social capital being aspects of a social structure, and certain actions of the individuals within this structure. Putnam (2000) described social capital as resources accumulated based on exchange between networks of people. Putnam (2000) further developed the concept to describe two types of social capital- bonding social capital (connections of trust among homogenous groups) and bridging social capital (connections of utility linking to an outside group or groups). The notion of social capital was used as a general concept in this study to understand the support systems and networks the participants use to help them thrive in their environment.

## **4. Research Findings**

### **4.1 Motives for Migration**

#### **4.1.1 Studying in Canada**

Eight of the fifteen participants did not name just one reason why they came to study in Canada. There was a variety of factors that influenced their decision, some of which they identified as having greater importance than others.

Ten participants had family or friends who already lived or studied in Canada, or had done so in the past. Three participants cited the cultural community or academic contacts in Canada as an important reason to decide to study here. Having personal connections who were living in Canada or were familiar with the country thus appeared to be a very important factor for participants.

Another major factor in choosing to study in Canada was financial reasons. Two of the participants had received a scholarship to study in Canada, while two others noted that both the tuition and cost of living in Canada were cheaper than in other countries they were deciding among. In strong contrast to this scenario was the case of one participant who came from a country where a post-secondary education was free, but she believed an international education would give her a competitive edge in her country of origin, and thus chose to study in Canada.

Participants also spoke of their motivation to study in Canada because of the career opportunities, the reputation of the country and education system, the diversity and culture in Canada, the presence of Canadian school recruitment agents in their home countries, the appeal of a specific academic program, and Canada as an alternate choice to another country

(typically the United States). Here, one student explained how he chose to study in Canada because of family connections, but he had originally desired to attend school in the United States:

I had never even really thought... what Canada could offer me. I only came because my cousin came here first. He came six months before me and he was in the same college I went to. But... basically, the fact that he came here is what pushed me to come to Canada. My parents wanted me to be with him, but actually my first option was the States... [But] the fact that I had at least had one family member [in Canada] to at least help me out to begin with... that's what made me come here. (Participant O-Male travel and tourism student from Kenya)

Interestingly, although all participants applied for PR, only a few mentioned their initial reason for choosing to study in Canada was related to the opportunities for immigration. Another interesting finding was that several students came to study in Canada because they saw the situation in their home country as not ideal. This was also linked to their reason for staying in Canada after graduation, which will be discussed below.

Several of the students had very little knowledge about Canada before arriving - a finding which was correlated with participants who used recruitment agents or saw Canada as an alternate choice.

#### **4.1.2 Applying for Permanent Residence**

As with the intention to study in Canada, the reasons behind staying in Canada were numerous and varied, with many participants giving multiple reasons. Some of these reasons overlapped with their reasons for initially choosing to study in Canada. About half of the participants had made up their mind to pursue PR before they even started their studies (typically those who cited their home country's situation as not favorable, or they had family



living in Canada). A participant who first came to Canada as a high school exchange student explains:

When I left Brazil, I knew already I wasn't coming back, but I didn't tell my parents that, because my mom wouldn't let me come... At that moment I said, "If I am going out of here, I am not coming back. Wherever I'm going to go, I'm going to stay."... And once I got [to Canada], I saw how nice it was, I was like, "I'm definitely not going back!" (Participant J- Male engineering student from Brazil)

Others came to their decision in a more organic way, with time, as they built-up experiences in Canada and started to consider immigration as a possibility. For the participants whose original intention was not to stay, but who then decided to pursue PR, their decision was influenced by changing immigration policies (which made it easier for students to obtain PR), development of a close relationship with someone living in Canada, or developing strong feelings of belonging in Canada.

Participants spoke of the situations in their home countries as a reason to apply for permanent residence. More specifically, one third of participants saw staying in Canada as a way to avoid high unemployment, political instability, violence, poor economic conditions, or discriminatory hiring practices in their home country. Here a female participant speaks about the barriers she expected to face in the field of computer science in her home country:

...in China, employers don't prefer girls, because [computer science is] challenging and it's ... energy consuming, and girls simply can't just work for... 20 hours a day... without resting, without a life. But here I have a choice and... I'm better protected... from gender discrimination... (Participant N- Female computer science student from China)

There were also participants who decided to stay in Canada and pursue PR so that they themselves or their spouse could complete further schooling. At the same time, one third of

the participants also saw PR as a way to lower the cost of their tuition. One participant spoke of the economic advantages for him and his wife that would come with having PR status:

The most important trigger to start the permanent residence *tramit* [Spanish word, means procedure or paperwork] was that it's very, very expensive for [my wife] to study something here, if she wants to do that. So I would say that the trigger was [my wife] wants to study, and [as a permanent resident] she [could] access to language courses... And then, attending grad school, and that implies... a lot of money for international students, it's almost... at least twice the cost, in some cases three times the cost. So we can say that the motive [for applying for PR] was the economical advantage. (Participant C- Male earth sciences student from Mexico)

Several of the participants applied for PR while they were in the middle of their studies or pursued further education after getting PR. This strategy of obtaining PR as a way to lower their tuition costs was a very strong factor for some participants in their decision to apply for PR.

Others believed there were better job opportunities in Canada, or saw Canadian work experience as valuable in their home country or a way to pay off student loans. Some participants wanted to stay in Canada to remain close to certain people who lived here, including family, partners, etc., or because they had a strong support system in Canada. Finally, two of the participants felt that living in Canada had changed their identity, and this factored into their decision to pursue PR. As one participant explains:

Because I felt like, how they say... while I was studying, while I was going through my work permits, and all these experiences; all my twenties I spent in Canada and US. So I kind of felt that I need to circle all this in something. So, actually becoming a permanent residence, and eventually hopefully a [Canadian] citizen, like... it will be the whole circle. That's how I see the thing, you know?... If you spend all of your, I would say, important formative years in some culture... you kind of want to have a permanent contact... to your years from before... It becomes part of you,

and then... you want to make sure that you all the time have a chance to come back... (Participant A- Male political science student from Serbia)

This participant spoke of how Canada became part of his identity, and he saw getting PR and becoming a citizen as a way to have permanent contact with this country. Another participant explained how she now felt like she “belonged” in Canada, and less so in her home country.

## **4.2 Challenges in Transition to Permanent Status**

Policy makers and many people living in Canada assume that by the time they graduate, international students have had a sufficient amount of time to adapt to Canadian society, and therefore no longer experience any challenges. It was surprising to find this opinion frequently cited by the participants themselves, extolling the ease former international students have with regards to the cultural adaptation after having lived in Canada for several years and their capability to apply for PR due to their familiarity with immigration forms and procedures. This is not to say the participants did not encounter any challenges in their transition. For some, the transition was seen as particularly difficult.

### **4.2.1 Lingering Issues from the Initial Transition**

#### ***Social Support and Cultural Adaptation***

While the majority of participants had experienced some feelings of social isolation and a period of cultural adaptation at the beginning of their studies, this was a persistent challenge for only a few people. Many of the participants who spoke of lingering challenges beyond their initial years studying in Canada mentioned the lack of social support as a result of being away from family and friends for an extended period of time, and an inability to develop the same kind of “deep friendships” as they had with people in their home country. This was also the

case for one participant who mentioned that even after studying in Canada for four years, she still had difficulties making friends with “Canadians” as opposed to those from her home country.

In terms of persistent cultural challenges, some participants were confronted with issues related to adapting to Canadian culture. Two female participants from Asia mentioned in passing cultural factors such as communication and implied meanings, constructive criticism, and career networking. Half of the female participants also found it difficult or were concerned about their future ability to adapt to the workplace culture, understand the health care system, or raise a family in Canada. As one participant explains:

After I graduated, I was more exposed to the real society and... more types of pressure than before, because when I was a student I only need to worry about the courses and the marks, but now I have to worry about my financial status... my relationship with colleagues and managers... and also started to worry about... settling here... starting my life and because... well the social system is quite different from China.... For example, if I'm sick in China I just go to a hospital and then get treated immediately, but here I need to find a family doctor, and get referred to a specialist if necessary.... (Participant N- Female computer science student from China)

This former international student was not only concerned about her present life, but was also concerned about the future:

...If in the future I have children and then I have to think about their education and how I will raise them... It's also different [in Canada] than in China because in China, we basically send them to school and then force them to study and that's all... But here, you have to let the kid participate in all kinds of social activities as well... I simply just don't know how that works because... I didn't grow up here.... (Participant N- Female computer science student from China)

### ***Financial Challenges***

Given that international students pay up to three times as much as the tuition fees of domestic students, it is not surprising that financial struggles were a common theme. Without significant financial status or funding in the form of scholarships, international students can face significant financial challenges. Two thirds of the participants worked throughout their studies, with many stating it was necessary to help pay for expensive tuition fees and the high cost of living in Canada. Some students worked close to full-time hours, suggesting the extent of their financial strain.

This high cost of tuition can lead to financial challenges which follow international students beyond graduation. One participant mentioned remaining in Canada to work to pay off student loans. Others noted that the expensive application process for PR compounded the situation, creating an additional financial concern (particularly for students who chose to apply for PR through the more costly PNP program). Although some participants chose to pursue PR as a strategy to avoid paying international student fees, this was not always a straightforward matter as current students faced an undefined waiting period for their PR decision, during which they had to continue paying international tuition fees. In the case of one participant, her academic institution significantly increased the cost of tuition after she had applied for PR, causing her stress over her ability to support herself during this transition period.

#### **4.2.2 Employment**

Financial challenges are closely linked to one's ability to find employment. Although the majority of participants were currently employed and working in their field (excluding those who were currently in the middle of their PhD studies), many participants relayed stories of

their struggles to find a job. Although most of the participants who were interviewed described their job search upon graduation as “intense”, “difficult” and “frustrating”, the participants who had completed a co-op placement generally had an easier time finding a job they were satisfied with.

A major challenge for several of the participants was finding a job in their field after graduation. Those who had graduated several years ago found it particularly difficult due to the different policies that were in place. In the past, obtaining a one-year work permit was dependent on students finding a job in their field within 90 days of graduation, which participants mentioned was extremely challenging. Other participants who graduated more recently ended up working in an unrelated field temporarily, resulting in underemployment and a skills mismatch, before finding work in their field or deciding to pursue further education to upgrade their skills.

Other factors that participants mentioned as barriers to finding employment after graduation included a lack of contacts to turn to in their job search and lack of previous work experience. Many of the international students who came to Canada from non-Western countries to study at the undergraduate or college level had never worked before, or had only worked for their family’s business. In some cases they graduated from college or university in Canada without ever having worked. As explained by the interviewees, in some cultures it is not common to work while in school. One participant from Kenya explained this cultural difference:

I know in Canada some kids work while in high school, but it’s not the same case in Kenya. It would be very rare to find someone in high school who was working, unless they were working for their parents. (Participant O- Male travel and tourism student from Kenya)

Not only did the participants see their general lack of work experience as a barrier, but they also sensed employers were hesitant to hire someone without Canadian experience, and especially someone without work experience in their field. Those who had not worked prior to graduation required additional time and experience to develop their job-search skills and secure a satisfactory job.

Some participants gained job experience working on-campus during their studies, but when this on-campus job was not related to their field of study, they often found it difficult to transition to work outside of an educational institution upon graduation. Several participants ended up working at a post-secondary institution upon graduation and used this work experience to meet the requirements they needed to apply for PR (in both the CEC and SW categories). While some saw it as a “strategy” to obtain PR, for others this experience led them to shift their career goals, as they decided to continue working in student services.

In terms of accessing support in their job search, some participants conducted their job search completely independently, while other participants used various methods including employment agencies, their school career center, and recruitment agents. Although some participants found these different methods to be useful, several participants expressed low levels of satisfaction and little success in finding a job using the support that was available to them.

#### **4.2.3 Applying for Permanent Residence**

One of the challenges participants mentioned in applying for PR was collecting documents to submit in their PR application. Several participants had trouble obtaining their police record and had to return to their home country to apply for one, while others had

difficulties gathering settlement funds to prove they could support themselves (due to student loans) or obtaining a letter from their employer.

The interview participants also experienced some complications in actually applying for PR status. In several cases, the participants had to wait much longer than expected to receive a response from Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC). The participants had a range of expectations when it came to the amount of time to receive a decision about their PR application. These expectations were based on the experiences of others they knew who had gone through the process, as well as the estimated processing time provided by CIC. While most applications were processed in the expected amount of time, some participants experienced significant and unexpected delays. In some cases this led to complications with their work permit expiring, difficulties in concurrently applying for a study permit, and current students paying international tuition fees for a longer period time. Four participants experienced a delay in their PR response because they did not complete the application correctly the first time, either making a mistake filling in the application or missing a necessary form. In these cases, their application was returned and they had to correct the mistakes. Some of these participants ended up having their application returned and resubmitting multiple times.

Aside from these challenges, most of the participants explained that applying for PR was not difficult or complicated. Several interviewees explained how most international students have applied for many visas and permits throughout the course of their studies in Canada and therefore are familiar with similar forms from CIC. Most participants explained that it merely took a significant amount of time to understand and complete the forms and gather the



necessary documentation. The ease with which participants were able to gather documents may be largely dependent on their home country. As indicated by some of the participants, certain countries require applicants to be in the home country to obtain documents. However, by planning ahead, being prepared, and staying organized, the participants were able to complete the PR application.

One of the challenges associated with applying for PR was a lack of support in obtaining information about the PR application process. Many of the participants who graduated in more recent years had initially heard about the PR opportunities that were available to them from their school's ISO. However, these offices typically did not provide specific advice regarding PR applications. While some participants (particularly the currently enrolled students applying through the SW PhD stream) received more direct guidance filling out the forms, reviewing their application and assisting them to writing formal letters to CIC, the majority of ISOs limited their services to providing generalized information about the multiple options for PR and suggesting the students seek out more information independently. Some of the participants speculated that the ISOs did not have much information or knowledge about new immigration categories when they first came out, or mentioned the ISOs did not have up-to-date information on their website.

Participants also mentioned inconsistency in terms of support from CIC. Some participants attempted to contact CIC when applying for PR, either by calling or emailing agents to ask specific questions and obtain clarification. One participant mentioned that the CIC agent did not know the answer to his question, while others were frustrated with the long wait times

or inconsistencies in their willingness to answer applicants' questions. While some participants found CIC agents helpful in answering questions, others provided little information:

...I used to contact with one person [at the visa office] through email and the person is really helpful... I asked, "Oh, my passport is almost expired, can I apply [for permanent residence]?" and he said, "Oh, yeah, you can still apply". So it means that he's willing to help, but in the next few months, I asked another question again, but maybe another person replaced that person. That's my guess. So the tone in the email is different, like, "Okay, I'm not able to answer your question. You did not submit your application yet, so your application is not with us, so we cannot..."...It's not very helpful...I don't ask too many questions, but just one, yes, I think they should answer. (Participant B- Female education student from Cambodia)

Participants also found that the language used on some of the CIC forms was unclear, and there was a lack of communication from CIC on the status of an application. It is important to note that based on their contact with students, some of the participants who worked in an ISO believed CIC's communication with applicants had improved over time.

The lack of support from the ISO and the unwillingness to hire a lawyer (due to the cost or seeing the service as unnecessary) led many participants to pursue PR independently, with little support from others. Some participants were also quite independent by nature, describing their strong sense of initiative and solitary working style, which led them to take on the PR application process on their own. The completion of the PR application was even viewed as a source of pride and accomplishment for some of the participants.

#### **4.3 Sources of Strength and Strategies to Overcome Challenges**

Although many former international students faced several challenges during their transition period, there were strengths and strategies they used to mitigate these challenges.

These included completion of a co-op placement, having social capital, and individual personality characteristics.

#### **4.3.1 Co-ops and Internship Experience**

Some participants were strongly motivated to complete a co-op or internship during their studies, with some even choosing their program specifically for the co-op opportunity in order to gain Canadian work experience. This indicates that prior to coming to Canada, at least some participants had heard of the value of a co-op experience, presumably from a contact who had Canadian experience. Participants who had completed a co-op saw it as an invaluable opportunity to become familiar with Canadian workplace culture, network with others, and gain hands-on experience in their field. One participant explains why his co-op helped him to get a job:

...A co-op is a very, very important thing...Employers... can't really trust the risk of [a] recent grad, just on the basis that "He's educated" or "He's done his degree". They're really looking for experience... people who... know the workplace, the work ethics and what needs to be done. So I think [doing a co-op] helped me [to find a job]. (Participant E- Male engineering student from Pakistan)

Completing a co-op or relevant work experience was strongly correlated with successfully finding a job in their field upon graduation. Completing a co-op often led to a relatively smooth transition into the working world upon graduation, in some cases not even requiring a job search as their co-op employers hired them straight out of school. However, one student who completed his internship outside of Canada had difficulty in finding employment upon his return, which suggests the benefits of a co-op placement in helping to start a career in Canada may not apply when students complete their placements abroad.

Another important factor in ensuring that co-op placements are beneficial for students is to ensure students are well-supported in their search for placements. While some participants had positive experiences and received services from their schools including assistance with resumes, cover letters, and matching with employers, other participants were left without organized, formal support. Many participants mentioned the schools would make announcements about available jobs and co-op opportunities but that was the extent of their assistance. Students were then expected to secure their placement independently—a task which several of the participants struggled with. Others encountered difficulties in finding or completing a co-op placement because there weren't enough placement opportunities available, potential employers were reluctant to hire an international co-op student, or their academic program reserved the limited co-op opportunities to permanent residents or Canadian citizens. These challenges led several participants to not obtain a co-op placement, although there were other reasons such as some students did not see it as important at the time or because their program didn't have a co-op option.

#### **4.3.2 Social Networks**

The participants with strong networks were able to face challenges and make use of their support network to ease their transition struggles. Participants mentioned building different networks—a community made up of people from their home culture, and diverse networks that include people from different cultural backgrounds. These two types of networks served different purposes for the participants, to be discussed below.

## ***Career***

Having strong social capital led many participants to find job opportunities. Participants were able to build these networks through working on campus which led to hearing about other on-campus opportunities. Working as a co-op student also allowed some of the participants to build a network of people within their industry, and in several cases led to being hired within the company upon graduation. Finally, some participants were connected to their school's career center, through which they received job-search support and information about job opportunities.

Several of the participants mentioned the importance of networking in Canada to find a job. However, this was contrasted with the perspective of two participants, who saw the importance of networks in Canada but viewed it as less important for success compared to their home countries. They saw a contrast between the value their home countries placed on "who you know" as a way to succeed, as opposed to Canada, where they perceived career success and promotion as based on skill and ability. One participant explains the situation in her home country:

...It's such a different culture... A lot of people don't get ahead based on their education. They get ahead based on networks, and I recognize that it's the same here, to some extent, but... it's not the same in Trinidad. It's all about who you know and who knows you... (Participant L- Female business management student from Trinidad and Tobago)

This often factored into their decision to remain in Canada upon graduation, particularly if they did not have connections in their home country that would lead to their career success.

## ***Social***

Having close family members or developing strong friendships in Canada was noted as a key factor that helped participants in their transition to life in Canada. This type of social support provided a feeling of belonging and comfort as they adjusted to their new surroundings. This was particularly important for participants in their first few years as a student, during which many participants lived with family members or family friends, but continued to be an important source of social support after graduation and even once they obtained their PR. For example, one participant noted:

I think that's, for anywhere you go, especially if you're there for the long haul, and you don't really have a good social interaction with other people, and you get lonely, it makes it really difficult for you to transition... But if you have a good... social network, then... if you're having problems... you have somebody to ask [for advice]. (Participant K- Male finance and accounting student from Kenya)

By building a social network and developing strong friendships in Canada, participants saw the opportunity for social support and advice when experiencing difficulties.

Another form of social support mentioned by several participants was the presence of a large community from their home country. This was noted as particularly helpful to overcome culture shock and homesickness. While interacting with those from similar regions and cultural backgrounds can be familiar and comforting, some participants noted the tendency of international students to become isolated within their cultural networks. These participants advocated for the need for international students to “branch out” and create connections outside of their cultural community, which would eventually help them succeed in the long run as a permanent resident.

The findings also suggest that spouses of PhD students may play a key role in building a social network through volunteering, as they face difficulty finding work in their field. This leaves them with time to dedicate to social networking and integration, volunteering at settlement agencies, attending conversation circles, and participating in international spouse groups run through universities. However, this is a preliminary finding that requires further investigation.

### ***Permanent Residence***

Social networks also helped participants obtain information and advice about PR opportunities and the application process. In addition to learning about PR opportunities from their ISO, participants commonly learned about PR opportunities from their personal networks, such as family members and friends. Some of the participants had friends, classmates or coworkers who had already applied for PR or were applying at the same time. While this was not their primary means of collecting information about the application process, it allowed participants to support each other through the application process and exchange ideas regarding interpretation of the application procedures.

Four of the participants obtained support for their PR application by hiring a lawyer. This was more likely to occur if they did not have a straightforward case, if complications arose with the application, or, as happened in one case, if their social circle saw applying for PR as something you don't do on your own, but rather something that should be done by an immigration lawyer. In looking back on his experience, one of the participants did not see the use of a lawyer as necessary, and believed he could have completed the application process on his own. For another participant, the company where he had completed his co-op and was now

a full-time employee had a legal department that took care of his PR application. However for the most part, the majority of participants did not hire a lawyer because they saw it as unnecessary or beyond their budget.

#### **4.3.3 Individual Characteristics**

In the face of employment, PR challenges, and cultural adaptation, and despite a lack of support networks which had been available to them in their home country, it appears that many participants' strength of character helped them to achieve their goals.

The large majority of participants were highly independent, self-motivated and resourceful. From looking for jobs to applying for PR, they were proactive in seeking out information to accomplish their goals. Several participants explained how they would actively seek out PR information, particularly from the CIC website, and keep up to date with policy changes. Others made use of online forums and social networking sites to find answers to their questions and phoned CIC or the PNP program to ask for clarification regarding the application form. Participants had first demonstrated their resourcefulness by leaving their home country and their support network to come to Canada and adapt to a new culture; here, they also demonstrated their inner strength by speaking up against international student tuition increases. Many of the participants were also detail oriented and thorough, which made them capable of navigating their way through CIC policies and interpreting language that they found unclear or open to interpretation, although four of the participants were not so fortunate, and had to re-submit their applications due to minor errors or omissions.

The ability to be adaptive to a new school system and a new country was also important in ensuring their success, as was the ability to adapt to a different career. Several of the



participants adapted their career goals as they realized it would not be possible to secure a job in their preferred field of study. For example, several participants worked on campus after graduation. Participants were also adaptive to new social situations. By staying open minded to meeting new people and learning about their values and cultural traditions, participants found they were better able to integrate into the Canadian culture, while at the same time improving their English skills.

#### **4.4 Participants' Recommendations for Improvement**

There were structural and personal factors mentioned as ways that could improve the transition experience of international students. In making recommendations, participants tended to focus on immigration policies and procedures in terms of improving their transition. It was difficult to draw out general suggestions for improvement, but whether this was because of the order of the interview questions, or because the participants did not see much room for improvement in other areas of transition support remains unclear.

##### **4.4.1 Structural Factors**

###### ***Improve the Permanent Residence Application Process***

Participants who had relatively few challenges with their PR application said the system was without many faults, and believed it was “as easy as it could get”, while others were eager to make suggestions for how the PR application process could be improved. In line with many of the challenges that international students faced themselves, they provided a number of related recommendations for how the PR application process could be improved.

In terms of PR policy, regulations, and qualifications, participants suggested the government set lower financial requirements to apply for PR, eliminate the need to do another

English test (which was seen as unnecessary), and develop a system that is more adaptive to the timing and expiry dates of work permits so a person could continue working while waiting to hear about their PR application. In terms of practical suggestions regarding PR, participants desired accessible support and a more user-friendly CIC website to find out information about PR. They also desired clearer information about the qualifications for programs such as the PNP and more communication about the status of PR applications so that applicants could make long-term plans more easily. One student placed emphasis on communication improvements:

I guess a little bit more of communication during the whole application process would be great. I know they have a lot of applicants, but at the same time... they're life changing decisions, right? So if, for example you were to get a job in [your home country] but... you haven't heard back about your Canadian residency, you're evaluating, "Should I take this job or will I be [in Canada] in a year and a half?" So it's difficult to make those types of longer-term decisions... (Participant K- Male finance and accounting student from Kenya)

### ***Extend Transition Support***

Several of the participants were asked whether they believed transitional support for international students pursuing PR was necessary. This was a particularly important question for the participants who worked in an ISO and worked with international students on a daily basis. While many participants stated they did not personally require assistance or support, they believed it depended on the individual, and saw the need for support for those who may encounter more challenges. These participants mentioned a couple of factors that could increase an individual's need for support, including both cultural differences and levels of English language ability.

Participants were also asked who could provide these types of services, and what kind of support should they provide, should they be needed. A couple of participants believed the

ISO was the best place for this because international students are familiar with going there to receive help and advice on their visas and permits, and they often have a close connection with the staff. International student advisors (ISAs) themselves mentioned how they saw the field as evolving towards further qualifications and training for ISAs with regards to immigration matters. However, the two ISA participants also saw the challenges to ISOs providing more extensive PR advice, such as liability issues and limited resources to support the large volume of students who desire PR support. Others mentioned a settlement agency could provide this kind of support, but many participants (even those who had their PR and were eligible to use them) were unfamiliar with settlement services, unclear about what kind of support they provided, or did not see them as a place that would be useful to former international students.

In terms of what type of transition support could be provided, participants suggested a no-cost application support (i.e., a legal service), extensive multi-day workshops on how to apply for PR, job search workshops and career support tailored to international students, information sessions to support international students' transition into Canadian life upon graduation (i.e., information about government services and benefits, raising a child in Canada, permanent settlement in Canada) and a mentoring program for former or current international students with PR to help guide and support newer international students through the process.

#### **4.4.2 Personal Factors**

Although some participants were doubtful that international students pursuing PR needed transition help, stating they were self-sufficient and already knew what to expect from life in Canada, many participants had suggestions for steps international students pursuing PR

could take to ensure they had an easier transition experience and a positive response to their PR application.

### ***Assess and Decide***

Participants spoke of the need to make a decision about whether to apply for PR as early as possible. They cited many factors to consider, including the benefits of PR (such as lower tuition fees, valuable work experience, and developing a global perspective), family members and/or a spouse's opinion on the matter, separation from family, ability to adapt to cultural differences, whether they had strong career networks in their home country, and considering what their ultimate goal was in applying for PR. As one of the ISAs interviewed stated, it would be helpful for students to see working in Canada and getting PR as a trial, where one can see if they would enjoy living in Canada permanently. If the student didn't like it, then they would always have the option of returning to their home country. This in a way would ease the pressure of the decision.

### ***Become Informed***

Participants also underlined the importance of being prepared and becoming informed. They suggested it would be beneficial for international students interested in PR to read extensively about the different immigration categories and policies, stay up to date with changes, and become knowledgeable about the PR procedures, even if they planned on using a lawyer. Others suggested getting information from the ISO and talking to people who have obtained PR status and could share their insight and experiences. One participant warned that CIC may not always give the correct information, as was her experience, and therefore emphasized the need to double-check information, even if it was provided by CIC. Another

participant stated the importance of researching the economic conditions and job opportunities in Canada and evaluating how their qualifications fit within the different regions and industries that exist in Canada. Finally, many of the participants emphasized the need to mentally prepare for the wait times, cultural differences, lack of family support, and general challenges associated with applying for PR. Above all, they emphasized that as an international student applying for PR, one should be prepared to work hard to succeed in the process of transition from student to PR.

### ***Take Action***

The final practical recommendations given by the participants were related to individuals taking the initiative to make the transition to PR easier. One important suggestion was that if students planned early and made PR decisions while they were still in school, they could start saving money and also avoid complications with work permits expiring. The participants also recommended doing a co-op to make finding a job easier, volunteering to gain work experience and confidence, making an effort to learn about Canadian culture and improve their English skills to make the transition process easier, and building a diverse social network by making friends outside of their cultural group. Participants also suggested that international students applying for PR use a lawyer if that would make them feel more comfortable, and also find out where they can access settlement services for people without PR status.

## **4.5 Other Findings**

In conducting the interviews, several other findings arose which fell outside of the main research questions. These have important implications, particularly for future areas of research.

Several participants explained the impact that studying and living in Canada had on them personally, as they became more aware of different cultures due to the diversity found in Canada, thought about their home country in a new way, became more confident and independent, or experienced a changing sense of identity. In one case a participant even spoke of a “loss of identity” as he felt as though he didn’t fully identify with his home country or with Canada. In contrast, other participants didn’t believe they had personally changed much at all, and merely saw the positive nature of their experience studying in Canada as a catalyst for their decision to stay in Canada.

Participants also spoke of how they conceptualized permanent residency and what it meant to them. Some participants saw PR as a symbolic, long-term decision to stay in Canada, whereas others saw PR as a more practical decision. The “more practical” participants saw PR as a way to stay in the country to work, pay off student loans, or go to school for lower tuition fees. In several cases, participants applied for PR with the intention that they would return home if certain factors were in place. Others conceptualized PR as a privilege, or as a status that would lead to government support. In strong contrast was one participant who had applied for PR without a strong understanding of what having PR status meant aside from lower tuition fees; they could offer no further elucidation of its benefits.

The way the participants conceptualized PR status also tied in to their plans for the future. Several participants planned to apply for citizenship and saw the many benefits of having a Canadian passport as well as the symbolism of being a citizen of Canada. In terms of long-term goals, some participants desired to maintain linkages with their home country through professional ties. A couple of the participants had begun, or were in the planning

stages of launching, personal businesses which would “give back” to their home countries and allow them to travel between both countries, while others eventually wanted to work as a consultant in their home country while still maintaining a link to, or career in, Canada.

Another interesting finding was the participants’ perception of Canadian immigration policy. Several of the current PhD students interviewed were confused about immigration policy and its goals, in light of reports on the lack of job opportunities, even for Canadians, in Canada. Others were uncertain about how Canadians perceived immigrants, wondering whether Canadians saw immigrants as competitors for their jobs, or as helpful to the economy and increasing multiculturalism. This was also tied to notions of perceived racism and feelings towards minorities in Canada. A PhD student from Mexico explained his family’s confusion regarding immigration policy:

Well, when we learned... that Canada [created the PhD stream for Skilled Workers], the first thought we had is “Probably they need more people.” So then, you see that you have overqualified people [in Canada] that are not hired, because they are very specialized in some areas, universities doesn’t require much professors, or governments (for example, right now, in the environment section of the government) they’re cutting positions... So we saw that, and now we are not completely clear. If they don’t have even enough positions for the citizens, why do they open new positions for international students? We think... We don’t know what to think! But, it could be a reason that we don’t know. It could be... [the government] just... thought, “Okay, it’s a good way to have some revenue”. (Participant C- Male earth sciences student from Mexico)

One other finding was with regards to the spouses of PhD students and their ability to find employment and their role in building social capital. The two wives and one husband of the three married PhD students found under-employment to be the norm. Whatever employment or community involvement they did find, however, was useful in extending their

social circle. Factors that may be important in the career success of these spouses include credential recognition, gaining Canadian work experience, and overcoming language barriers.



## **5. Discussion and Limitations**

This study reveals the range of transition experiences of international students as they become permanent residents. While the findings demonstrate the independence and capabilities of many international students, there is still a need for increased support to address their diverse needs.

This research supports Roach's finding (2011) that as immigration policy expands opportunities for international students to become immigrants, there has been a lack of service expansion to support them in this transition. However, this research adds to the current body of literature by revealing nuances garnered from speaking directly with current and former international students.

### **Reasons for Migration**

Motivations found for pursuing permanent residency supports previous international student research. Work opportunities were a strong factor, supporting the findings by Alberts and Hazen (2006), Arthur and Flynn (2011) and Moore (2008), while feelings of belonging and personal connections with others in Canada were also significant in research by Baruch et al. (2007) and Lu et al. (2009). While the literature review drew attention to ethnic and gender differences in migration motivations, there was a lack of clear patterns amongst the participants in their reasons for pursuing PR. This may have resulted from the low number of participants interviewed and the many cited reasons for migration. Further research with a larger sample size is needed before conclusions can be drawn about the impact of gender and country of origin on migration motivations.

## **Building Networks**

While the role of social networks in providing support for international students has been discussed by Mandal (2009) and Moore (2008), this study's findings add to the literature by revealing the extent of their ability to support students in their social, immigration, and career transition. Having family or connections in Canada helps individuals integrate into the host country, which reflects the significance of bonding social capital. Social networks were essential in providing social support for international students who have often left the majority of their connections behind in their home country. Social networks were also an avenue to provide immigration support and advice during the permanent residence application process, which was also a finding discovered in the Australian context (Robertson, 2011).

While many participants in this study had a form of bonding capital which was essential to their initial integration, providing comfort and familiarity, it was those who used bridging capital and created ties with people outside their cultural network who felt further integrated in Canadian society. This bridging capital included the professional networks built through co-ops and internships. The findings of this research demonstrate the benefits of co-ops, not only in the practical skills gained through these experiences, which was a finding mentioned by Roach (2011), but also in establishing professional networks which could lead to further career opportunities after graduation. Social networks highlight the value of social capital, as these networks lead to the building of resources (Putnam, 2000) such as work experience and job opportunities. This demonstrates the relevance of social capital theory for understanding the transition experience of international students.

It is also important to consider cultural differences with regards to conceptualizing networks. While most participants saw value in forming social networks to find a job, the participants from China and Trinidad and Tobago used a comparative approach to understand social networks in Canada. In their home culture, social connections were believed to be essential for securing a job. In Canada, these participants saw networking as important, but believed skill and ability to be the most important factors. This suggests the difference in perceived level of importance of networks in different cultures, pointing to the need to consider cultural nuances when using social capital theory to explain the experiences of international students in future research.

In terms of the formation of networks, there were no significant differences among the participants according to gender or ethnicity. All participants mentioned the importance of building networks, whether through school, work, or social groups in order to be successful in Canada. While it may be noted that only one of the six females interviewed completed a co-op placement, most of the other female participants did not complete a co-op because of practical reasons that were unrelated to gender. While certain academic fields may have more co-op opportunities, and some may have higher male enrollment levels, this is not a direct finding from this research. Further research should consider whether female international students have equal opportunities to complete co-op placements. Additionally, since there was a small sample size of fifteen and participants did not mention ethnicity or gender differences, it is not possible to analyze the role of social networks in their transition to permanent residency according to these factors.

## **The Need for Settlement Support**

The findings have also highlighted lingering cultural adaptation and social integration issues, with a few female international students indicating their concern regarding familiarizing themselves with the Canadian work culture, healthcare and education system. This demonstrates the need for increased support after students graduate or obtain PR, particularly for certain demographic groups, although more research is needed before conclusions can be drawn. As Roach (2011) discovered, as a result of their temporary status, international students have limited opportunities to access settlement services. These immigrant-serving agencies rely primarily on federal funding, and thus can only provide services for permanent residents. The findings show that when international students seek help during their transition to PR, they typically turn to services provided by their school or seek support from their social network. It is uncommon for international students and international student alumni to see immigrant-serving agencies as a resource and place to turn for support.

This also ties into Gates-Gasse's (2012) argument that if the Canadian government were to provide international students with support services, both in their PR applications and general transition, the government would demonstrate how they value international students as immigrants. More than half of the participants agreed that more extensive services for international students who stay in Canada after graduation should be provided – a finding echoed by the participants in Arthur and Flynn's study (2011). One participant attempting to find a reason for the lack of support provided by the government contemplated:

Maybe... if [the government] welcomes newcomers with skilled and experienced knowledge, they are thinking that those people might come and then compete with their own people, so they don't want to welcome,

so that's why they don't want to provide support. (Participant B- Female education student from Cambodia)

This type of uncertainty with regards to Canadian immigration policy and disappointment with the lack of support for international students can negatively impact the number of students who choose to immigrate to Canada.

### **Economic Strategies**

Financial strain was one of the persistent challenges mentioned by international students. Financial challenges in applying for permanent residence have also been mentioned by Robertson (2011) and Moore (2008), but applying for permanent residence as a strategy to reduce tuition fees had not been raised in the literature. Financial concerns, particularly related to economic strategies to obtain PR status as a way to lower tuition fees, was an important motivating factor to apply for PR for almost one third of participants. As immigration has become a more accessible option for international students, it is possible that PR is increasingly being perceived in terms of its unintended benefits by those who wish to pursue further education. Though applying for PR is perceived to be a costly process, it appears to be a strategy for some students to reduce tuition fees in the long run, indicating the impact of Canadian immigration policy on student migration. This has implications for long-term immigration strategies and the decisions of policy makers.

### **Applying for Permanent Residence**

Lastly, the findings by Roach (2011) and Robertson (2011) regarding the challenges international students faced in the PR application process and the lack of support available are somewhat supported. However, many participants said they found the application process quite straightforward. The point where they encountered challenges was more related to a

lack of consistent information from CIC, longer than expected processing times, or practical considerations such as expiration dates of visas and permits. Through this, it becomes clear how the Canadian government promotes the settlement of international students through government policy, but fails to understand the challenges they face in their transition and the barriers created by certain immigration procedures.

Although many international students are capable of pursuing permanent residency through the current system (as evidenced by the numbers of international students who have successfully obtained PR, including participants in this study), there are many opportunities for improvement in order to support the long-term retention of permanent residents. If the Canadian government desires to continue retaining international students as permanent residents, it must take note of factors which influence migration decisions, challenges these students face in their transition, and strategies that can help bridge the service gap as they move from student to permanent resident. Important findings from the present research address the challenges that international students face during their transition, but also highlight the strengths and support which assisted these students during this time. These findings indicate areas where the government can compensate with services that target international students who may experience more challenges in pursuing PR.

This study is limited to self-selected participants who remained in Canada to pursue PR, and therefore by default, excludes those who returned to their home country. As a result, it can only examine those with more positive outcomes, and those who are more likely to have had a positive adjustment to Canadian culture. It is unrealistic to assume that all international students who wish to pursue PR have similar, relatively smooth, transitions. Additionally, it

does not make sense for the government to only recruit a small portion of the international student population who have strengths and support such as speaking English as a first language or possessing strong social support networks. As the recommendations below indicate, there should be more outreach to and support of international students for permanent residence. While fifteen participants is a relatively small sample size which limits the ability to generalize the findings, the study is important in that it highlights the reasons for certain individuals' success in order to learn how to support international students who may struggle in this critical transition period.

## **6. Recommendations**

Based on the findings as well as participants' recommendations for improvements, the following are suggestions to improve the experience of international students who desire to become permanent residents.

### **Co-op and Career Services Attuned to the Needs of International Students**

One of the major challenges for international students after graduation is securing employment. A lack of work experience can be a major barrier to finding a job, and when international students look for a co-op position or a job (either during school or after graduation), they may be very inexperienced and need direct support. As mentioned in the findings, international students may come from a culture where working while in school is not common. Therefore assumptions about a basic awareness of job-search and resume-writing skills, etc., should not be taken for granted. There is a strong need to provide specialized support that is sensitive to international student needs.

Several of the participants in the study who accessed support in their co-op or job search expressed dissatisfaction with the services provided. This indicates the need to seek feedback from students regarding their use of student services. It would be beneficial to provide more individualized support for international students seeking a co-op placement, perhaps with an individual coaching component to check-in with students to gauge their progress and ensure they make use of effective job-search strategies. Although there was a strong correlation of co-op students finding a job in their field, without strong support from their school, international students may not reap the benefits of a co-op program. Additionally, without this type of job-search support, students may also be unable to gain the benefits of



Canadian work experience and meet qualifications for certain PR categories. With many immigration categories requiring work experience in qualifying fields, the ability to find a job upon graduation is critical, and having a co-op experience appears to be a strong factor in the ability to secure a job.

### **Opportunities for Mentoring Relationships for Current Students**

Several participants suggested developing a linkage between current international students interested in PR with those who have gone through the process. Creating a networking opportunity or informal mentorships (something some of the participants were already involved in) would be a source of support for students without a strong cultural community or family support in Canada. While this network could provide practical support in terms of applying for work permits, for example, it could also facilitate former international students passing on advice and insights acquired while going through the process. Based on the breadth of knowledge and advice shared by the interview participants, these individuals are an untapped resource which could be extremely valuable to current international students. This would also ease the burden on formal service providers such as ISOs and CIC for providing support during the transition period, and could be established by linking international student alumni networks with current international student groups.

### **Expansion of Settlement Services and Outreach to International Students**

International students have had time to adapt to life in Canada during their studies, but after graduation, many students face new issues such as raising a family, buying a home, understanding the healthcare system, etc. To navigate through these issues can be difficult for international student alumni who do not have the same kind of prior knowledge as their

Canadian classmates. Additionally, with increasing options for international students to apply for PR earlier in their education (such as with the SW PhD program) the findings suggest these challenges may still be of concern to students once they obtain PR status.

Although many international students in this study did not see a settlement agency as useful, necessary, or appropriate for them because they already felt integrated into Canadian society, some participants were very concerned about their integration. By increasing the services available to students who have temporary status, and increasing linkages between schools and settlement agencies so that ISOs can make referrals to these services, it would ease the burden for schools to provide this kind of support. Additionally, many of the participants with PR status were unfamiliar with settlement services, despite their eligibility for using these services. Students and alumni should be informed of the services that are available through outreach programs and partnerships between settlement agencies and post-secondary institutions. By expanding these services and building linkages between settlement services and ISOs, graduating students would be better supported in general immigration issues.

### **Support for Permanent Residence Applications**

While the former students did not use their ISO office extensively for PR support, current students, such as those applying under the SW PhD stream, relied much more on the ISO to provide support for their PR application. This indicates the need for transition support from post-secondary institutions for practical immigration concerns such as interpreting the application procedure and specific language used. While some post-secondary institutions are moving towards hiring ISAs with immigration consulting certificates, other schools are making use of community legal services through their law programs to provide clinics on permanent

residence applications. These types of innovative programs benefit schools because of their ability to increase international student enrollment while also helping international students meet their PR goals. By adapting their view of international students not just as temporary sojourners, but as students with long-term goals, schools will stay up-to-date with current trends in international student migration. Although the actions of institutions will come down to individual institutional decisions, considering ways to support the long-term goals of international students will benefit post-secondary institutions and their international student population.

### **Streamlined Customer Service and Consistent Information from CIC**

While increasing PR support may be the future direction of international student offices (as seen by the increased support for current students applying through the SW PhD program), the current reality is that ISOs continue to lack the training and capacity to deal with these matters. Based on participant suggestions, a reasonable area to turn to for support when questions arise should be CIC. As it currently stands, there is a perceived lack of communication, accessibility, and consistency in answers from Citizenship and Immigration Canada. This is an area that could be improved vastly to support students who choose to pursue PR by creating a more accessible website, increasing call center services staff training and the amount of support provided, and communicating with applicants on a more consistent basis regarding the status of their application.

### **Further Research**

This study has a small sample size and limited scope. The scale of international student migration proves the need for further research to understand the experiences of international

students who become immigrants. Some areas that would be useful to explore include larger studies with more participants, examining ethnic group and gender differences in transition experiences, or focusing on different immigrant gateway cities such as Vancouver or Montreal, or non-traditional immigrant centres which have stronger PNP programs such as Alberta or the Maritime provinces. In terms of the areas of inquiry which could benefit from further research, studies should consider the different stages of the transition of international students, the experiences of spouses of students and their transition experiences, and the personal impact studying in Canada has on international students' identity and their perception of permanent residence.

## **7. Conclusion**

Through these findings, we can see how international students are independent actors who do not always act in expected ways. They are highly motivated and keen to navigate through the immigration system to meet their diverse goals. These goals can range from long-term, such as obtaining Canadian citizenship and raising a family in Canada, to short-term ambitions, such as lowering the cost of tuition or remaining in Canada for a few years to gain work experience.

It is important to recognize that every international student's path to permanent residency is unique and there are a range of experiences encountered. If the Canadian government wants to retain international students in the long term, there must be consideration for successful integration, particularly in terms of career satisfaction, community building, and a sense of belonging and acceptance in Canada. This is where the opportunity arises for stakeholders such as the government, post-secondary institutions, and immigrant-serving agencies to work together to expand services to ensure international students are supported in reaching their permanent residence goals.

## Appendix A. Sample Recruitment Email

### **Subject: Former International Students- Research Participants Needed**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

I am currently recruiting volunteers to interview regarding their transition from international student to permanent resident. Eligible candidates include those who held a study permit and are either in the process of applying for or have been granted permanent resident status.

I will be asking participants questions such as:

- What led you to pursue permanent residency in Canada?
- Did you experience any challenges in your transition to permanent residency?
- What do you think would have made the transition process easier for you?

The interview will last approximately 30-45 minutes, and participants will be given a \$10 Tim Hortons gift card to thank them for their time. Those who are interested should contact me by email at [nicoletanya.kelly@ryerson.ca](mailto:nicoletanya.kelly@ryerson.ca).

Your assistance in directing this information to eligible candidates is greatly appreciated.

Many thanks,

Nicole Kelly  
Masters of Arts in Immigration and Settlement Studies Candidate  
Ryerson University

## Appendix B. Sample Consent Agreement

### **Ryerson University** **Consent Agreement**

You are being asked to participate in a research study on the issues of concern to international students transitioning to permanent residency. Before you give your consent to be a volunteer, it is important that you read the following information and ask as many questions as necessary to be sure you understand what you will be asked to do.

<p><b><u>Study Title:</u></b> International students as immigrants: Services, support, challenges, and strengths of former students</p>
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**Investigator:** This research is being conducted by Nicole Kelly, BA, in partial fulfilment for a master's degree in Immigration and Settlement Studies from Ryerson University. The researcher is being supervised by Dr. Kenise Murphy Kilbride, a sociologist and Professor Emerita and Adjunct Professor in the School of Early Childhood Studies and the Yeates School of Graduate Studies at Ryerson University.

**Purpose of the Study:** This study will investigate issues of concern to international students transitioning to permanent residency. Its purpose is to learn more about the challenges international students face in attempting to settle successfully in Canada. Fifteen international student alumni who have graduated from a Canadian post-secondary institution have been recruited for interviews. Eligible participants include those who have applied for or been granted permanent residency in Canada.

**Description of the Study:** Individual interviews will be conducted by the researcher with international student alumni in a mutually agreed upon location. Interview venues will prioritize aural and visual privacy, and may include private rooms in a public library. Interviews will include approximately 12 questions (both open and closed) regarding their experiences, and last 30-45 minutes. Questions will be asked about the problems or challenges faced in the transition period. The participant will also be asked what they have found to be helpful, or what they wish they had found to help them meet their needs in Canada. Sample questions include "How long did it take you to find full-time work upon graduation?" and "Did you experience any challenges in your transition to permanent residency?"

**What is Experimental in this Study:** None of the procedures used in this study are experimental in nature. The only experimental aspect of this study is the gathering of information for the purpose of analysis.

**Risks or Discomforts:** The risks associated with this study are considered minimal because they are not greater than those encountered in everyday life. These minimal risks include physical discomfort with sitting for a significant period of time, or discomfort or boredom in discussing a topic that is not of particular interest to you. Should you feel uncomfortable or should recollections in the course of the interview become upsetting, you may discontinue

participation, either temporarily or permanently, at any time. If indicated, your contributions to the research will be omitted from the summary of the study. If you choose to withdraw from the research study after the interview has been completed, you should contact the researcher within one month to indicate this. The limited time to withdraw your responses is due to the short timeline for this research project.

**Benefits of the Study:** While no direct benefits to individual participants can be guaranteed, it is the hope of the researcher that your contributions will contribute to significant improvement in services to international students in Canada. The findings of this study will potentially serve to enhance the services provided by international student offices, and thus may benefit future international students.

**Confidentiality:** The interview will be taped to help the interviewer remember precisely what you say. The interview will be written up using codes rather than names to link interview subjects to the data, and the tapes will be kept in the researcher's locked file and erased immediately after being transcribed. All comments will be recorded confidentially.

**Incentives to Participate:** The remuneration for participation will be a \$10 Tim Hortons gift card given at the end of the interview, regardless of whether you choose to end the interview early, or decline to answer certain questions.

**Voluntary Nature of Participation:** Participation in this study is voluntary. Your choice of whether or not to participate will not influence your future relations with Ryerson University or the international student offices which may have helped to recruit participants. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and to stop your participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are allowed. At any particular point in the study, you may refuse to answer any particular question or stop participation altogether.

**Questions about the Study:** If you have any questions about the research now, please ask. If you have questions later about the research, you may contact the researcher or her supervisor:

Nicole Kelly, Researcher  
nicoletanya.kelly@ryerson.ca

Dr. Kenise Murphy Kilbride, Research Supervisor  
kilbride@ryerson.ca

If you have questions regarding your rights as a human subject and participant in this study, you may contact the Ryerson University Research Ethics Board for information.

Research Ethics Board  
c/o Office of the Vice President, Research and Innovation  
Ryerson University  
350 Victoria Street  
Toronto, ON M5B 2K3  
416-979-5042



**Agreement:**

Your signature below indicates that you have read the information in this agreement and have had a chance to ask any questions you have about the study. Your signature also indicates that you agree to be in the study and have been told that you can change your mind and withdraw your consent to participate at any time. You have been given a copy of this agreement.

You have been told that by signing this consent agreement you are not giving up any of your legal rights.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant (please print)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Investigator

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

I have read the information contained above and hereby give my consent to have my comments recorded.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

### Appendix C. Characteristics of Participants

Participant	Country of origin	Gender	Marital status	Field of study in Canada	Completed co-op/internship	Immigration Category	PR application status*	Approximate number of years living in Canada
A	Serbia	M	Single	Political Science	Yes- international	Canadian Experience Class	Perm. Res.	8
B	Cambodia	F	Married	Education	No	Skilled Worker- PhD	In progress	2
C	Mexico	M	Married	Earth Sciences	No	Skilled Worker- PhD	In progress	2
D	Iran	M	Married	Economic Development	To be completed	PNP- Alberta, Family class	In progress	1
E	Pakistan	M	Single	Engineering	Yes- 1 international, 1 Canadian	Canadian Experience Class	Preparing to apply	6
F	St. Lucia	M	Single	Accounting and Finance	No	Skilled Worker	Perm. Res.	10
G	Kenya	M	Single	Applied science	Yes- with current employer	Skilled Worker	Perm. Res.	8
H	Nigeria	F	Single	Economics	No	PNP- Ontario, Master's stream	In progress	7
I	Kenya	F	Single	Economics	No	Canadian Experience Class	Perm. Res.	9
J	Brazil	M	Married	Engineering	Yes- Many	Skilled Worker	Citizen	14
K	Kenya	M	Single	Finance and Accounting	No	Canadian Experience Class	Perm. Res.	9
L	Trinidad and Tobago	F	Common law	Business Management	Yes- with current employer	Skilled Worker	Citizen	9
M	Kenya (Raised in the USA)	F	Engaged	Engineering	No	Canadian Experience Class	Perm. Res.	6
N	China	F	Single	Computer science	No	Canadian Experience Class	In progress	6
O	Kenya	M	Single	Travel & Tourism	Yes	Skilled Worker	Perm. Res.	10

\*Perm. Res. – Permanent Resident

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