

TRU Strategic Internationalization

Planning Scan

Key Trends Shaping the Landscape of
Internationalization

January 2024

Territorial Acknowledgement

Thompson Rivers University acknowledges the location of its campuses in the traditional and unceded territories of Indigenous peoples of the Secwépemc Nation. Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc hosts the TRU Kamloops campus; and T'exelc hosts the TRU Williams Lake Campus. The region TRU serves also extends into the traditional territories of the St'át'imc, Nlaka'pamux, T'silhqot'in, Nuxalk, Dakelh, and Syilx peoples.

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Introduction

The field of Internationalization in higher education has rapidly developed over the past 40 years from what could be described primarily as a series of fragmented internationally informed activities, focused largely on international student recruitment, into what is today, a serious and complex sector, replete with its own academic field of study and scholarship with global standing.

In 2023, Thompson Rivers University (TRU) marked a significant milestone, celebrating 40 years of international excellence and innovation. Looking ahead to the next decade, TRU is embarking on a Strategic Internationalization Planning (SIP) process to shape the future of internationalization at the university.

TRU is currently in the beginning stages of developing an institutional internationalization strategy. To lay the foundation for TRU's inaugural Strategic Internationalization Plan, it is imperative to assess the institutional planning context and the planning environment. This scan is intended to provide the Strategic Internationalization Advisory Committee with an overview of global internationalization trends and how internationalization intersects with other global movements and challenges, including climate action and indigenization.

The following scan follows the Part 1, 2a, and 2b scans, which examined internationalization planning activity internally at TRU, within other BC institutions, and within institutions outside of BC, respectively.

1. Global Trends

1.1 The Internationalization Boom

Internationalization is a global phenomenon within higher education that has boomed during the past several decades.¹ It is closely related to globalization, where countries are becoming increasingly more connected with each other through technological innovation and improvements in global transportation. This has resulted in an over 5.6 million international learners studying abroad as of 2020.² Furthermore, the Organisation

for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) projects there may be over 8 million mobile international learners by 2025.³

According to the Government of Canada, there were approximately 807,000 international learners across all levels of education in Canada in 2022 (up 31% from 617,000 in 2021).⁴ Approximately 651,000 of these were post-secondary learners (up 29% from 503,000 in 2021) and 126,000 studied in post-secondary institutions in BC (up 24% from 103,000 in 2021). Within TRU, there are currently 4,664 international students from 106 countries registered for courses in the Fall 2023 semester.

The strong increase in international learners in Canada over the past decade has been largely influenced by the federal government's International Education Strategy, originally released in January 2014 and updated in 2019.⁵ The strategy highlighted the economic benefits associated with international learners in Canada and included the key objective of doubling the international student base from 240,000 in 2011 to 450,000 in 2022. Notably, the 2022 year ended with nearly double the number of international learners compared to the original target objective of the strategy.

In addition, another study highlighted that numerous Canadian graduates possess the essential technical knowledge but often lack the soft skills and practical work experience sought by Canadian employers.⁶ Engaging in periods of studying and working abroad can serve as a valuable means for them to gain these crucial skills.

Summary of Global Trends

- International learners across Canada have boomed from 240,000 in 2011 to over 800,000 in 2022.
- International learners contribute \$21 billion per year to the Canadian economy.
- Technological innovations are spurring more forms of virtual internationalization, including online courses, partnerships, and collaborations.
- In Europe, the EC is focused on reducing emissions associated with student mobility and establishing the European Education Area by 2025.
- In Asia, some countries are deregulating the rules associated with international student admissions in an effort to increase enrolment numbers.
- Twenty twenty-four is set to be the biggest election year in history, with more than half of the global population in more than 70 countries heading to polls.
- There is a growing number of challenges associated with internationalization, including issues surrounding diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), housing, and climate action.

Around 11% of Canadian university students participate in international studies at some point during their academic journey.⁷ Furthermore, such experiences contribute to the development of intercultural competencies, the establishment of robust international networks, and an insight into economic regions that hold significance for Canada.

The boom in internationalization has resulted in many significant benefits for students, staff, and faculty in Canada and across the globe. Increasing cultural understanding through internationalized curriculum, mobility and practices can improve academic quality and help set up students for successful careers in an increasingly globalized economy. Institutions that prioritize internationalization can also help visiting students settle into a new country much faster, increasing their chances for success and improving their overall health and well-being.

As aforementioned, there are also economic benefits to consider for higher education institutions themselves and local economies. In 2015-16, international students contributed over \$32 billion USD to the global economy, with projections reaching as high as \$1 trillion by 2030.³ Within Canada, the economic benefits associated with international students are estimated to be approximately \$21 billion per year.⁸ As such, institutions are now increasingly competing for enrolments to sustain enrolment growth, especially those facing declining domestic enrolments.

1.2 Innovation and Collaboration

One growing trend within the internationalization movement is the development of virtual internationalization. Technological innovation has resulted in increased online delivery methods for higher education and the development of Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) platforms.⁹ These trends were further accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, where many institutions were pushed to develop or enhance existing online delivery modules. Many organizations now recommend virtual exchanges, collaborations, or hybrid options to further enhance internationalization at institutions.²

Collaborations between institutions in different countries or continents, as well as private businesses, are becoming more and more common. For example, the University of

Washington, China's Tsinghua University, and Microsoft recently collaborated to establish the Global Innovation Exchange, which offers learners an opportunity to complete a joint 15-month Master of Science degree.³ Furthermore, in 2017 over 300 members of the Association of African Universities partnered with eLearnAfrica, allowing 10 million African students to access online courses offered to member institutions. Other virtual exchange partnerships with European universities include VAMOS, IKUDU, and EuroTeQ Engineering University.¹⁰

1.3 Trends in Europe and Asia

Europe has been at the forefront of internationalization initiatives for the past several decades, often paving the way with innovative programs and research. Through ERASMUS and the Bologna process, European Union authorities promoted and funded many programs supporting student mobility across European countries.¹¹ In 2015, the European Parliament Committee on Culture and Education commissioned a study on internationalization, affirming that digital and transnational learning are key elements for the future of international learning.¹² The study also concluded that focusing on developing more intercultural understanding and perspectives within curriculum at home could have a much greater societal impact than simply supporting study abroad programs.

The European Commission (EC) has also recently stated that they see "Internationalization as the future of higher education" and consider collaboration to be a key focal point moving forward.¹³ The EC's plans include prioritizing DEI initiatives, sustainability, and transitioning to more digital forms of education to reduce the emissions associated with student mobility. Moreover, there is even interest in creating a "scoreboard" for student mobility for European Union members. The EC is also seeking to establish a European Education Area by 2025, which will help to remove barriers to education within Europe.

In Asia, there are also signs of deregulation for international students and making education for international students more accessible in certain countries. South Korea recently announced a 5-year plan to attract 300,000 international students as part of their 7

Study Korea 300K Project.¹⁴ Strategies include relaxing the requirement that more than 30% of first-year international students must be either level two or three holders of the Test of Proficiency in Korea (TOPIK), making the TOPIK test available online for prospective students, easing of visa rules, and fast-tracking certain learners.¹⁵

Japan is also seeking to bolster their international enrolments, which remained down by nearly 30% last year compared to pre-pandemic levels.¹⁶ To achieve this goal, the government has announced plans to enhance recruitment and improve language and career transition support programs. In an effort to promote general tourism, China has also recently resumed their 144-hour visa-free transit policy, allowing visitors from certain countries the liberty to travel within select areas of the country for up to 6 days.¹⁷ Although not directly related to education, this policy may help prospective students visit universities of interest or better facilitate visits from relatives and other social benefits.

1.4 Challenges

Despite the strong uptake in internationalization and associated benefits for learners, there remain many challenges for institutions to navigate through. Improving intercultural understanding through workshops, hiring additional faculty, developing new programs, and other related initiatives may increase institutional costs and expenditures. To secure the necessary resources, higher education institutions will need to create unique opportunities for entrepreneurship and innovation to secure those resources.³

The benefits associated with studying abroad or accessing higher education that is more costly may also discriminate against certain learners. World Education Services categorizes international learners into four distinct groups based on academic preparedness and financial resources: Explorers, Highfliers, Strugglers, and Strivers.³ Their research indicates that Explorers and Highfliers may be better able to afford overseas education than Strugglers and Strivers, even with more and more virtual opportunities becoming available.

Some suggest that post-secondary institutions have overlooked the ethical intricacies associated with international study and research partnerships and need to create better

processes to establish culturally responsive environments for international students and scholars.¹⁸ Geopolitical, economic, epistemological, ecological factors, and the colonial history continue to influence relationships and conversations about international education.¹⁸

Political decisions, policies, and diplomatic relations between nations can profoundly impact the flow of students, scholars, and ideas across borders. In the last 24 months, 2022 and 2023 stand out as the most conflict-ridden years since the Cold War's end.¹⁹ Numerous armed conflicts have erupted or intensified globally, involving regions from Gaza and Ukraine to Nagorno-Karabakh between Armenia and Azerbaijan, Kosovo, Eastern Congo, Sudan, and Tigray.¹⁹ Syria and Yemen continue to face instability, while criminal gangs menace governments in Haiti and Mexico.¹⁹ Additionally, the looming prospect of a major conflict in East Asia, like China's potential invasion of Taiwan, adds to the global unease.¹⁹ This period paints a picture of heightened tensions and a world grappling with the constant threat of violence.

Twenty twenty-four is set to be the biggest election year in history, with more than half of the global population in more than 70 countries heading to polls.²⁰ The pivotal U.S. presidential election is anticipated to be particularly polarizing, impacting global politics and potentially reshaping the world order.²¹ Among other participants are resource-rich countries like Indonesia, Bangladesh, India and Venezuela, the resurgent Mexico, politically unstable South Sudan, and geopolitical hotspots Taiwan and Pakistan.²⁰ Tunisia, the birthplace of the Arab Spring in 2011, may hold a presidential election around October next year.²⁰ Additionally, traditional European allies of the United States, including Austria, Belgium, and the UK, are gearing up for leadership races.²⁰ Having led Russia for 23 years, Vladimir Putin amended the constitution in 2020, potentially extending his rule until 2036; amid minimal opposition during the Ukraine war, he is expected to secure another six years in the upcoming March election.²² Canada is also approaching both provincial and federal elections within the next two years, potentially reshaping the trajectory of our policies. Notably, these elections occur within a new era characterized by the widespread availability of generative AI, sparking concerns about the heightened spread of propaganda and disinformation.²³

A shift in government often brings about changes in policies and visa regulations, impacting the realm of internationalization in higher education. This dynamic can significantly influence the ease of mobility for students and scholars, reshape collaboration initiatives, and shape the overall landscape of global academic interactions.

Shifting demographic patterns, including population growth in certain regions and declining birth rates in others, impact the demand for international education. While Canada and other high-income countries have seen a decline in the birth rate, the population in Asia and Africa is steadily growing, with 17 of the 20 fastest-growing cities located in Africa.²⁴ Nigeria, D.R. Congo, Tanzania, and Pakistan are projected to be among the top 5 fastest-growing countries in the world by 2050, while India and China, although experiencing slower growth, will continue to remain the most populous nations.²⁵ Due to the prevalence of aging population and anti-LGBTQ+ laws and policies leading to a decline in nuclear families in South East Asia, there is a possibility that an increasing number of individuals from these nations may view Canada as a potential place to call home in the future.²⁶

Other potential areas of concern include focusing too much on student mobility while ignoring other potential indicators such as program mobility or credit mobility.^{3,27} There are also concerns regarding how increasing international students on campus intersects with Equity, Diversity, Inclusion (EDI) goals. There are reports of many international students at Canadian universities expressing challenges that they are experiencing, including social isolation, language-based barriers and financial challenges stemming from high tuition spikes and agent commission fees.^{5,28}

Some groups are now advocating for better integration policies and for governments to take on more accountability for critical issues such as affordable housing to better improve study abroad experiences for international learners.²⁹ In response, Canada's Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Marc Miller, has recently announced plans to include housing as part of the international student program revision and new rules to protect international students from fraud stemming from fake admission letters.^{30,31}

Another notable challenge relates to how growing international student mobility is correlated to rising GHG emissions related to overseas travel. This topic is explored in detail in the following section.

2. Climate Action

There is a strong intersection between internationalization and global climate change challenges. With growing levels of international learners comes an increased level of GHG emissions associated with overseas travel to reach campus destinations. Despite the well-documented benefits that international learners receive by studying abroad, several sources have identified international student mobility as one of the most significant challenges relating to internationalization.^{2,13,32} For example, 41% of GHG emissions associated with delivering international education at Massey University in New Zealand were linked to air travel.³³ This means that many universities now face a dilemma between continuing to recruit international learners and doing their own part in reducing the effects of climate change.³⁴

A recent study has estimated that between 1999 and 2014, GHG emissions associated with international student mobility amounted to between 14 and 38 megatons of CO₂ equivalent per year.³⁵ Another way to frame this result is that international student mobility generates GHG emissions comparable to a medium-sized country.³⁴ Student air travel to and from the US alone is estimated to be approximately 1.1 million metric tons of CO₂ equivalent per year.³⁶ Given that international mobility is expected to continue to rise in the future, many believe that it is imperative that institutions further commit their resources toward climate action and ultimately help reduce the negative effects of climate change.

One well-documented strategy to reduce emissions is to promote virtual internationalization (described in Section 1.2 above) through online delivery platforms and virtual collaborations.^{2,34} Other potential strategies may include focusing on embedding climate literacy into curriculum and educating local communities regarding climate action.^{2,34,35}

In 2021, the Japan Student Services Organization stopped supporting short-term exchanges, even though they represented 60% of all study abroad students at the time, as a means to potentially reduce emissions.³⁷ In Europe, some major cities are experimenting with offering free public transit as a means to reduce emissions by all citizens, including domestic and international students.³⁸

The International Education Sustainability Group (IESG) has also recently created the Climate Action Barometer for international education (CABie) as a benchmarking tool for institutions.³² In addition, European Union has also recently introduced new energy efficiency rules for education that may reduce operating and other emissions sources for institutions.³⁹ Furthermore, the European Association of Study Abroad (EUASA) has created a Climate Conscious Study Abroad guide, offering institutions a four-step process to calculate their carbon footprint and come up with strategies to reduce emissions.³⁶ Resources like these may be beneficial in helping institutions offset some of their emissions pertaining to international mobility.

Another important aspect for institutions to consider is how prospective learners think about higher education institutions their own impact on climate change. Many learners now consider sustainability rankings as important factors in their choice for study.^{32,34} In addition, 79% of students consider the steps that universities are taking to reduce their environmental impact to be very to extremely important.³³

With this in mind, universities may be incentivized to further enhance their climate action policies. Many organizations, including the Climate Action Network for International Educators (CANIE), offer numerous resources to aid in institutions seeking to advance their own climate change agendas.⁴⁰ For example, CANIE includes a Travel Policy section on their website that includes articles and documents aimed at offsetting emissions associated with student travel. Many institutions are also adopting the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into their own policies and strategies, which the Times Higher Education Impact Rankings are also based upon.⁴¹

3. Indigenization

There is also a strong intersection between internationalization and indigenization. Both movements involve developing intercultural understanding and have challenges related to diversity, equity and inclusion. Some institutions, including North Island College, have bridged the two areas together in a single unified strategy (see Part 2 – BC Landscape). This plan includes strategies for educating international learners with regards to indigenous perspectives and culture, often before they arrive to Canada.

Many nations, including Canada, have now implemented the United Nations Declaration on the Right of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) framework as a means for promoting truth and reconciliation of Indigenous peoples. Canada has also recently developed a UN Declaration Act Action Plan in consultation with many indigenous communities across the country to better improve indigenous efforts across the country.⁴² Unfortunately, other countries are still lagging behind in this movement, including Australia who recently voted to reject a referendum that would recognize Indigenous Voice to Parliament.⁴³

Within higher education, there is still much work to be done. Dismantling the economic and geopolitical hegemonies in internationalization in higher education requires comprehensive efforts beyond addressing individual and institutional barriers.¹⁸ Although land acknowledgements are now common in nearly all institutions, the First Nations Technical Institute reported that Indigenous students and their communities are continuing to fall behind due to limitations in infrastructure and financial resources.⁴⁴ Furthermore, in the United States there are calls to increase indigenous visibility within higher education.⁴⁵ One unique example is the University of Washington's efforts in creating an Indigenizing Pedagogy Institute, which focuses not only on indigenizing programs, but also preparing non-Indigenous faculty to teach Indigenous students.

4. Conclusion

Internationalization has been a growing trend within higher education for several decades. The number of international learners studying abroad continues to rise and may be as high as 8 million students per year by 2025. Many countries are now competing for international learners and removing barriers to entry within their own institutions.

Developing international strategic plans and attracting prospective international students can no longer be undertaken without a thorough consideration of the ongoing political, economic, technological, and societal transformations. Recent global trends include the development of virtual platforms, collaborations, and internationalizing curriculum and institutional policies at home. These may be particularly important as the GHG emissions relating to student mobility continue to rise, forcing many institutions to consider their impact on climate change. This is also important to consider given that prospective students are taking into account an institution's climate policies and impact within their choice of study.

Internationalization is also challenging many institutions in various ways. Many international learners are reporting barriers to success, including affordable housing. Diversity, equity, and inclusion is also a highly relevant topic, as both international learners and indigenous students continue to face forms of discrimination. In addition, some learners may also not be able to afford study abroad opportunities. In order to ensure a successful future in a globalized world, it is important that institutions consider these factors and continue to develop their own strategies that promote intercultural understanding, accessibility, and positive climate impacts.

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