Internationalization at Canadian Universities: Where are we Now?

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Abstract

Internationalization is powerfully impacting the missions, planning documents, and learning environments of Canadian universities. Internationalization within Canadian universities is viewed from a local as well as global context. Accounts of the composition of domestic students studying abroad and international students studying in Canada, and the implications of these statistics, are related. Emphasis is given to a discussion of the contribution that economic factors play in internationalization decisions. Economic factors have undeniably shaped the face of internationalization at Canadian universities. Complexities of the relationship between global context and educational goals are outlined and educators are challenged to responsibly interpret and implement university changes resulting from internationalization while prioritizing the learning needs of students.

Globalization is transforming the world and internationalization is changing the world of higher education

(Knight, 2004, p. 5)

Internationalization in Context

In the early 1990s the idea was born of bringing many disparate international activities of universities under the umbrella term *internationalization*. This change has involved far-reaching reinterpretations of the basic missions of the university (Lemasson, 1999). The definition of internationalization within a higher education context has also evolved and its meaning reflects complex realities. Knight (2004) provides a working definition for internationalization at the national/sector/institutional levels as “the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education” (p. 5). A higher education institution can become internationalized by “integrating an international dimension into the teaching/training, research and service functions of a university, college or technical institute” (Knight, 1996, p. 2). Some international education activities include: a) providing Canadian education to people of other countries; b) engaging Canadians in study abroad; c) fostering an international orientation in the curricula; d) fostering international projects (i.e. faculty exchanges, national research

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networks); and e) projecting Canada's image and values internationally (Farquhar, 2001).

Internationalization as witnessed through Strategic Plans

Canadian universities now see internationalization not as simply an attractive adjunct to existing structures, but as imperative to growth and sustainability. For example, The University of Western Ontario's Strategic Plan for Internationalization (2003) indicates, "For Western, the development of a strategic plan for internationalization is less an option and more an imperative within the context of globalized economic and political structure and the increasing importance of collaborative effort in the research process" (p. 12). Universities across Canada are granting internationalization a place of prominence in their Strategic Plans. Brock University (2006) has the goal of ensuring that it is one of Canada's most internationally-linked research universities. This goal is measured by active faculty members and student engagement in international research projects, development projects, and study abroad programs. It also includes an assessment of the number of agreements with international institutions and research centres, as well as an assessment of the numbers of international visiting professors and researchers who are collaborating actively with Brock faculty members (Brock University). In my research I have found that many Canadian universities have Strategic Plans on their websites that outline goals and plans for internationalization. The Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC) Report on Internationalization at Canadian Universities found, in their 2000 publication, that eighty-four percent of institutions reported that internationalization was already part of their university-wide strategy or long-term planning document (Knight, 2000). Canadian university Strategic Plans and planning documents clearly indicate that internationalization is being given high priority at Canadian universities. However, it is helpful to bear in mind that internationalization plans do not necessarily provide an accurate evaluation or measure of internationalization implementation within a university. Canadian researchers Bond, Qian, and Huang (2003), observing the role of faculty in internationalizing the undergraduate curriculum and classroom experience, found that there was little evidence (with some notable exceptions) that internationalization priorities were supported by everyday academic practice and institutional policies.

Internationalization in Process

Canadian universities are increasingly fostering partnership relationships with universities around the world. The Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC, 2005) reports that Canadian universities have more than 3,500 exchange agreements with universities in 142 other countries. In 2001-02, Canada welcomed 104,662 international students from 203 countries around the world. In 2007 there are more than 135,000 foreign students studying in Canada (Citizenship and Immigration Canada [CIC], 2007). *The National Report on International Students in Canada 2002* reports that the total number of international students across all provinces as a percentage of total university enrollment was 5.9% (Savage, 2005). In 2001-02, the top three university programs in terms of international student enrollment were: a) Business, Management and Marketing (10,025); b) Engineering (6,025), and c) Social

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Sciences (4,175) (Savage). It can be concluded that faculty members in business and in professional programs such as engineering are more likely to encounter international students in their classes than are faculty members in the arts and humanities. However, no faculty member is unaffected by internationalization.

Numbers of domestic students studying outside Canada are also increasing. In 2001-02, there were 32,779 Canadian students studying abroad, representing 3.7% of the domestic university student population (Savage, 2005). Although Canadian universities enjoy many exchange agreements with other countries, there is not a significant cross flow of direct exchange between international students studying in Canada and Canadian students studying abroad. The majority of international students coming to Canada come from non-English speaking countries. Over 48% of international students who came to study in Canada came from Asia in 2001-02 (Savage). Canadian students, on the other hand, study primarily in English speaking countries. Ninety percent of Canadian exchange students study in The United States, The United Kingdom, or Australia (Savage). These statistics seem to point to the predominance of English within the global educational context, and the consequent power differential that exists between countries.

It is predicted that the demand for international education will remain strong in coming years. IDP Education Australia predicts in their Global Student Mobility 2025 Report (cited in Knight, 2004) that the demand for international education will increase from 1.8 million international students in 2000 to 7.2 million international students in 2025. International students at Canadian universities are considered to be Canada's future commercial, research, and diplomatic partners (AUCC, 2005). In the past five years there has also been a movement of education programs and providers across national borders. For example, three Canadian universities formerly working with the Al-Ahram Organization (a large private conglomerate) established Al-Ahram Canadian University in Egypt. No longer are students moving across borders, we have now entered an era of cross-border education (Knight, 2004).

Internationalization and the Canadian Economy

In a Citizenship and Immigration News Release on April 27, 2006, Monte Solberg, Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, indicated that "Foreign students make a significant contribution to Canada. They enrich campus and community life with new ideas and new cultures, and they are an important pool of potential future skilled workers that Canadian businesses need to remain competitive." Foreign students contribute approximately \$4 billion a year to Canada's economy (CIC, 2006, para. 2). It is claimed that worldwide the market value is \$30 billion a year for study abroad and \$60 billion for all international education and training products and services (Canadian Bureau for International Education 1998, as cited in Farquhar, 2001). Do the large amounts of money that foreign students bring to Canada increase the probability that economic factors have a strong impact on decisions to internationalize Canadian campuses?

Universities in a Global Context

There are now growing pressures on universities throughout the world to equip greater portions of the population with higher order skills that can be used in the

knowledge economy. Universities are increasingly being pressured to impart to students the knowledge, skills and dispositions related to the ability to learn how to learn in order to hone skills and abilities to a changing global economy (Naidoo & Jamieson, 2005). Changes associated with globalization have also applied pressures on universities to commodify learning and teaching and to sell it in the international education marketplace (Naidoo & Jamieson). Naidoo (2003) indicates that the conception of education as a public good has become somewhat eclipsed by the redeployment of higher education as an industry to enhance national competitiveness or as a lucrative service that can be sold in the international marketplace. Forces of commodification increase the risk that academic success in higher education is measured according to financial criteria such as the number of student customers or the degree of financial surplus generated instead of being measured according to academic principles (Naidoo & Jamieson).

Canadian Universities: Tainted by Commodification?

How influenced are Canadians by these forces of commodification? Compared to other countries, the Canadian government is not investing heavily in the promotion of international education. Farquhar (2001, p. 6) explains that “in terms of annual per capital federal support for international education initiatives, Canada invests 80 cents as compared with Australia’s \$9.07, Japan’s \$4.94, the U.S.’s \$4.70, Germany’s \$3.02, and the Netherlands’ \$2.86.” Adrian Shubert (2004), Associate VP International at York University concluded that the most positive feature of the Canadian panorama of internationalization, to date, is that it has been largely free of commercial motives that seem to be such prominent motivators in other countries such as Australia. The three distinguishing features of internationalization at Canadian universities, outlined by Shubert, include the relative unimportance of commercial motives, the centrality of academic rationales, and its focus on students. Shubert’s conclusion can be compared to the findings of the AUCC report on internationalization (Knight, 2000). In the report 66 Canadian post secondary institutions ranked their top three rationale for internationalization. Rationale included: a) to prepare graduates who are internationally knowledgeable and interculturally competent (73%); b) a belief that knowledge systems are or should be more international (23%); and c) to generate additional sources of income for institutional use (21%). It is this third rationale that I hear most highly contested in the conversations around me.

Yet, regardless of the contestation of economics affecting internationalization decisions, the role of the economy in higher education cannot be denied. Gregor (2002), in a discussion on the relationships between globalization, trade liberalization and higher education, identifies that while traditionally the public mission and social and cultural roles of higher education have tended to be the emphasis on national policy, the economic role is now receiving much greater emphasis. “Higher education institutions are being given more responsibility for meeting national economic development needs, and are increasingly accommodating the interests of the private corporate sector and a more market-driven environment” (Gregor, p. 5).

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Global Context and Educational Goals

The field of international education has matured and developed in recent years and there is now greater recognition of how it spans cultural, economic and interpersonal dimensions of global relations (Rizvi, 2000). Rizvi explains that profound global changes are integrating the world into one extensive system. National institutions remain significant in the global environment, yet they must now become engaged in global processes or they will face obsolescence. The relationship between global context and educational goals is not a simple one.

This is so because what is seen as the context is never self-evident, but always requires interpretation. Descriptions of global processes are highly contested, as are the suggestions of how best to explain them, respond to them, react to them or indeed to use them for our competitive advantage. The questions we might ask about the implications of globalization are often as complex and as pertinent as are the possible answers. (Rizvi, p. 3)

Although the relationship between global context and educational goals is complex, I perceive that it is the responsibility of all Canadians to grapple with interpretations of global processes, especially as they relate to educational goals affecting internationalization at institutes of higher learning.

Conclusion

I maintain that we are all accountable, individually as well as institutionally, to respond to global contexts in a manner that is ethically responsible and equitable for all peoples, Canadian and international. National institutions are now functioning within a global community. Global contexts, as they relate to educational goals, will be interpreted variously by the Canadian government, politicians, corporations, faculty members, university administrators, service providers, and students. It is the students of our universities, is it not, who have the most to gain or lose from the various stakeholders' interpretations of how to best enhance internationalization on Canadian campuses. We need to adapt to the new reality that the emerging global economy is increasingly influencing internationalization decisions at Canadian universities. As educators it is imperative that we remain vigilant in our insistence that academic principles have priority in internationalization initiatives, and that we remain attuned to issues of pedagogy and cross-cultural understanding as they relate to internationalization within Canada's higher learning institutes.

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