NAVIGATING THE CANADIAN IMMIGRATION PROCESS:
A STUDY OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS’ EXPERIENCE AND INTERACTIONS
WITH THE STUDENT SERVICES PROVIDED BY THEIR HOST UNIVERSITIES

by

Wing Sze Wincy Li

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
Graduate Department of Leadership, Higher and Adult Education
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
University of Toronto

© Copyright by Wing Sze Wincy Li 2014
NAVIGATING THE CANADIAN IMMIGRATION PROCESS: 
A STUDY OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS’ EXPERIENCE 
AND INTERACTIONS WITH THE STUDENT SERVICES 
PROVIDED BY THEIR HOST UNIVERSITIES 

Master of Arts 2014 
Wing Sze Wincy Li 
Department of Leadership, Higher and Adult Education 
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education 
University of Toronto 

Abstract 

Canada views international students as potential skilled immigrants. The country has implemented multiple immigration streams to retain these students post-graduation in order to remain competitive in the global knowledge economy. However, research investigating these students’ experiences holistically was lacking. This study addressed this gap in literature by looking at: (1) how international students decided on Canada as a study-abroad destination, (2) how they ultimately decided on seeking Canadian permanent residence, and (3) which on-campus services and resources they sought and/or utilized to help navigate the immigration process, and what their experiences with these services were. Six former international students who graduated from Canadian universities, and had since applied for or obtained Canadian permanent residence, were interviewed in this narrative inquiry. Bronfenbrenner’s developmental ecology theory was used to situate interviewees’ experiences in the broader contexts, and Schlossberg’s transition theory was used as a framework to holistically study their experiences with transitions.
Acknowledgements

Without the support and encouragement of the many educators and individuals in my life thus far, this journey into graduate studies would not have been possible. I would like to take this opportunity to thank those whose presence in the last two years really shaped my experience.

First and foremost, I would like to express my gratitude to my thesis supervisor, Dr. Tricia Seifert, who always challenged me to think deeply about my topic and arguments. Dr. Seifert’s passion in teaching and learning was infectious, and really ignited my intellectual curiosity. Her encouragement and care kept me going even when I thought I could go on no more. Her commitment to see her students succeed both academically and professionally beyond their studies is something that I truly admire and benefit from. Thank you, Tricia, for being a great mentor, connecting me to the larger professional community in the field of student affairs and services, and tirelessly “batting in my corner”!

Next, I would like to thank Dr. Ruth Hayhoe for imparting her knowledge and wisdom during classes and my thesis writing process. She was the first person that I met at OISE, and her assuring presence really set the tone and gave me the confidence to take risks and challenge myself intellectually in my studies. I did not think that I would enjoy learning about philosophies, theories and history of higher education, which seemed like such intimidating subjects to me, but Dr. Hayhoe made these ideas engaging and relevant. Thank you, Ruth, for being a great teacher, and giving me a solid foundation upon which I could develop my ideas.

I am extremely grateful for all of my friends at OISE, who have kept me informed, thinking, engaged, balanced, fed, caffeinated, and generally smiling for the last two years. A big thanks goes out to all of the regular faces at LHAE: Alaa, Christian, Christina, Christine, Cynthia, Diane, Emily Q., Diliana, Grace, Ikumi, Irene, Jack, Jeff, Kamaljeet, Kathleen, Momina, Phirom,
and Olivier. Thank you all for the great ideas, trips, memories, laughs (and sometimes cries) –
you all shaped my OISE experience in the most positive way!

Since this study is about students’ experience with student services, I would like to
acknowledge the LHAE front-line staff members: Vesna, Sylvia, Sezen, Karen P., Karen D., and
Joanne. Thank you all for being so helpful, and for all of your hard work behind the scenes.

I would also like to thank my family, who have supported me always, even though they
may not understand or agree with all of my decisions. Thank you very much for your trust.

Last but not least, I would like to thank Steve Behnke for being a calming presence in my
life despite the distance. Without your love and support, your encouragement and ideas, my life
would have been less bright for the last few years. Thank you so much for loving and believing
in me, and for appreciating me, as well as all of my culinary experiments!
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract .................................................................................................................................................. ii
Acknowledgements .................................................................................................................................. iii
List of Abbreviations ............................................................................................................................... vii

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION ........................................................................................................ 1
  Purpose of Study .................................................................................................................................... 4
  Research Questions ................................................................................................................................. 7
  Summary of Introduction ......................................................................................................................... 8

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW ............................................................................................. 10
  Convergence of Realism and Neoliberalism ......................................................................................... 10
  Competitive Immigration Regime ........................................................................................................ 15
  Two-Step Immigration: Canadian Experience Class (CEC) ............................................................... 20
  Higher Education in the Current Political Climate and Its Contributions to the Competitive Immigration Regime ............................................................................................................................................. 23
  International Student Experience in Canada and Its Universities ....................................................... 32
    Push and Pull Factors ............................................................................................................................. 34
  Student Services in Canadian Universities ............................................................................................ 36
  Schlossberg’s Transition Theory ........................................................................................................... 41
  International Students’ Experience with Student Services .................................................................. 43
  Summary of Literature Review ............................................................................................................. 47

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY ........................................................................... 50
  Research Paradigm and Approach ....................................................................................................... 50
  Criteria and Process for Research Participant Recruitment ............................................................... 51
  Description of Sample ........................................................................................................................... 53
  Data Collection ..................................................................................................................................... 55
  Data Analysis ....................................................................................................................................... 57
  Trustworthiness of Data ........................................................................................................................ 59
  Ethical Considerations ........................................................................................................................... 60
  Limitations of the Study ......................................................................................................................... 61

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS ............................................................................................................... 63
  Choosing Canada as a Study-Abroad Destination ............................................................................... 63
  Choosing to Settle in Canada as Permanent Residents ....................................................................... 67
  The Process of Immigration and Decisions Involved .......................................................................... 70
  On-Campus Services and Resources Used ......................................................................................... 73
    Peer Networks and Student Groups ................................................................................................... 74
    International Office ............................................................................................................................. 76
    Career Services .................................................................................................................................. 78
    Academic and Faculty Advising ......................................................................................................... 79
    Financial Aid ..................................................................................................................................... 79
Registrar .......................................................... 80
Other Student Life Services ........................................... 80
Health and Wellness .................................................. 80
Residence ................................................................... 81
Library ....................................................................... 81
Experience with Student Services ................................... 81
Availability of Services .................................................. 81
Timeliness of services ................................................... 83
Awareness of Available Resources ................................... 86
Quality of the Services/Resources Provided ....................... 90
Provision of Accurate Information ................................... 90
Personalized and Holistic Approach ................................. 94
Empathy .................................................................... 99
Advocacy .................................................................. 103
Summary of Findings ..................................................... 105

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSIONS ...................... 108
    Implications for Student Services Providers and Policymakers ...... 118
    Contributions to Theories and Directions for Future Research ...... 123

References .................................................................... 126
Appendix A: Research Participants Recruitment Notices and Communication Scripts 143
Appendix B: List of Listservs/Groups Contacted for Study Participant Recruitment ...... 146
Appendix C: Interview Protocol: Questions for the Semi-Structured Interviews .......... 147
Appendix D: Informed Consent Form ....................................... 148
Table 1: Demographic Information of the Study’s Participants ............................ 150
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CBIE</td>
<td>Canadian Bureau for International Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CEC</td>
<td>Canadian Experience Class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CIC</td>
<td>Citizenship and Immigration Canada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMEC</td>
<td>Council of Ministers of Education, Canada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICCRC</td>
<td>Immigration Consultants of Canada Regulatory Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEERS</td>
<td>National Entry-Exit Registration System</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOC</td>
<td>National Occupation Classification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PGWP</td>
<td>Post-Graduation Work Permit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PMCs</td>
<td>Primarily Muslim Countries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEVIS</td>
<td>Student and Exchange Visitor Information System</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SFU</td>
<td>Simon Fraser University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STEM</td>
<td>Science, technology, engineering and mathematics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UWC</td>
<td>United World College</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

From a human capital perspective, many scholars and politicians consider international students as a source of productive and skilled workers in academic settings and beyond, and because many of these students stay for a prolonged period of time in Canada for their education, they are often well integrated into the larger society by the time they graduate from their programs (Mueller, 2009; Suter & Jandl, 2008). Given these students’ potential to contribute to the sustainability of the Canadian population and economy, and that the country is able to absorb more international students in the higher education system, some have argued that the post-graduation retention of international students deserves serious attention, and that the government of Canada needs to provide them with incentives to stay (OECD, 2012).

These ideas stem from the familiar discourse around the “brain gain” phenomenon, in which the world’s brightest students – particularly those from developing countries – migrate to other countries in pursuit of better educational and economic opportunities (Altbach, 2007). These students are the skilled workers of the future, and they play an essential role in the global knowledge economy. As a result, many developed countries make the connection between attracting international students to their higher education institutions and their search for top-quality skilled immigrants who can help their economy remain competitive and thrive.

To that end, the federal government of Canada introduced the Canadian Experience Class (CEC) immigration stream in 2008 to encourage international students to remain in Canada and apply for permanent residence after their graduation by simplifying the process and eligibility requirements (Alboim & Cohl, 2012). Many provinces in Canada have also since joined the call to retain their highly employable international students and graduates through Provincial Nominee Programs (PNP). Provinces that have dedicated PNP immigration stream for

At the institutional level, Mueller (2009) highlighted the fact that according to the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, the number of international students in Canada had more than doubled between 1990 and 2001, and this number continued to grow. These students are an important source of revenue for universities and colleges at a time when public funding to higher education is being cut (Shanka, Quintal & Taylor, 2005). As well, with their diverse backgrounds, international students have the potential to contribute greatly to the learning environment on campus through their alternative perspectives and experiences (Hser, 2005). Given the potential contributions that international students can make on Canadian campuses and beyond, understanding their unique needs is the first step in helping universities develop strategies and explore areas where they can improve the quality of their services, which will in turn contribute to these students’ positive experience in Canada. This is particularly true for the services that are focused on helping international students with the intention to immigrate and transition into Canadian workplaces, since the needs of these students can be complex.

If attracting international students is a high priority for Canada and its higher education institutions, it is important for policymakers and university administrators to understand how international students decide on their study-abroad destinations, and how they decide whether or not to permanently migrate to a different country. Many researchers have looked at international student mobility by looking at the “push” and “pull” factors that determine whether they leave
their home countries to study elsewhere, where they choose to go, and if they will stay in the host countries after they complete their studies (Findlay, 2010; Tremblay, 2005). As for issues around international students’ transition into the workplace or a new country of abode, the current literature focuses heavily on the way these students’ social and cultural backgrounds influence their decision-making process, as well as the transitional challenges that they face when job searching in a foreign country (Arthur & Popadiuk, 2010; Shen & Herr, 2004).

Immigration is a complex transition. It is a goal that involves many steps and decisions. Yet, little is known about how the ever-changing immigration process affects international students’ experience; specifically, if and how these students interact with and utilize the programs and services provided by the students services departments at their host universities (e.g. career services, international offices) to help them navigate the planning and immigration process.

Recognizing that the existing literature on international students’ experience focused primarily on their initial adjustments to their host countries rather than their ongoing career development, Arthur and Flynn (2011) recently began exploring factors that supported international students’ pursuit of employment in and immigration to Canada. They acknowledged the connection between employment or career planning and immigration, and explored international students’ experience through this lens. They interviewed international students who were completing their studies and who were pursuing employment and permanent immigration in Canada, and found that these students wanted to stay in Canada because of its enhanced job opportunities and high standard of living. Some of these students faced cultural and linguistic barriers, and feared they might not be able to secure employment in Canada to pursue immigration.
In a follow-up study, Arthur and Flynn (2013) found that most of the students they interviewed did face barriers in securing employment after their graduation – 10 out of 14 interviewed were unemployed at the time of interview – though most of them still felt that their decision to stay in Canada was a good one and intended to pursue immigration. This finding was supported by a study conducted later by Trilokekar and El Masri (2014), who found that international students’ expectations around university-workplace transition were quite different from their lived experience. Both studies found that international students experienced barriers entering the Canadian workforce in their own fields because of their own adjustment and adaptation issues, as well as perceived prejudices from employers, who often required vaguely defined “Canadian experience” from their employees and were unwilling to support the students’ temporary or permanent residence applications.

Arthur and Flynn (2011) wrote, “Support must extend beyond an initial orientation to the university culture to the final goal, held by some students, of permanent migration” (p. 233), further noting that “there is a need to examine the linkage between changing Canadian immigration policy and institutional programs and services directed at international students” (p. 235). In their call for future studies, Arthur and Flynn (2011; 2013) said that more research was needed to explore the international students’ experiences of transition, specifically how they bridged the gap between their career and life goals and their reality of the pursuit of employment and immigration. My study intends to add to their work.

**Purpose of Study**

As Arthur and Flynn (2011; 2013) pointed out in their literature review, much of the current literature has yet to explore holistically the nuanced and complex lived experience of international students transitioning from university to the workplace, at a time when they are also
transitioning from being temporary to permanent residents of Canada. Existing literature tends to focus on international students’ adjustment issues at various transitions, defined as specific, distinct points or stages in time (e.g. culture shock in the host country or re-entry shock when they return home).

While there is value in understanding one facet of their experience in-depth, the reality is international students’ experience is much more complex and has multiple dimensions. The current literature is incomplete because it fails to consider international students’ career and life development as a comprehensive, continuous journey that is constantly being shaped by new experiences and ever-changing factors. Particularly when these students have intentions to stay and apply for permanent residence in their host countries after their graduation, their career development needs to be considered as a continuous journey, and it is important for researchers to recognize the complex goal of immigration involves numerous interrelated and interdependent decisions and actions (e.g. securing appropriate employment in order to qualify for application of permanent residence, which also requires maintaining one’s temporary resident status and ensuring that the appropriate paperwork is in order, whilst perhaps planning for the migration of one’s family from overseas). All these decisions and actions add to the richness and complexity of these students’ experience.

The purpose of my study is to address this gap in the current literature, which tends to focus on adjustment issues that international students face, and analyze their experience in a disparate rather than holistic way. I intend to add to Arthur and Flynn’s (2011; 2013) work by examining international students’ experiences with transition in a holistic manner, against a backdrop of an ever-changing landscape of Canadian immigration policies. As well, my study explores international students’ interactions with the student services in detail, specifically what
resources students utilize – and how they utilize these resources – to navigate their transitions and actualize their career and life goals in their pursuit of Canadian permanent residence. As a mobile group, international students must learn to be adaptive and resourceful in a foreign country amidst the decisions and actions that they must make and take when applying for immigration. Understanding their experience holistically will require higher education administrators to consider what kind of resources international students use in navigating the immigration process, and to what ends. Given the wide array of services and programs available on university campuses, it is worth investigating if and how international students utilize these resources to achieve their life goals, and their experiences with these services. This is an area that Arthur and Flynn (2011; 2013) did not focus on in their studies.

Through examining international students’ experience in a holistic and narrative manner, student services practitioners can catch a glimpse of the challenges brought on by the intersection between the logistics of immigration and the student’s own career and life planning decision-making. This will hopefully help the student affairs and services practitioners appreciate the complexity of their students’ situations, and perhaps gain some insights as to how services can be improved to better serve international students in similar situations.

This research may also benefit policymakers, advocates and practitioners who are involved in the study and management of newcomer settlement services. International students are also newcomers to Canada who have to deal with specific challenges, even though they are considered temporary residents in the country. Their transition from being temporary to permanent residents is one that involves different hurdles from those who come to the country as landed immigrants. Understanding how they seek and receive support from their universities will
hopefully help those working in the sector to gain deeper insights into international students’ experiences and the challenges they face.

**Research Questions**

I believe that it is important for student services practitioners to take into account the practicalities of the immigration process when they are assisting international students with their career and life planning. Therefore, the purpose of this research study is to gain a better understanding of the lived experience of former international students through their immigration to Canada in a holistic manner, which is currently lacking in the literature. Specifically, this research focuses on if and how international students strategically seek help and support from their universities’ student services – which tend to be organized in a decentralized way with various separate departments – to achieve a complex goal: immigration. This research also investigates international students’ experience with these services and resources.

This study aims to answer three research questions. Firstly, how do international students describe their decision-making process when considering Canada as a study-abroad destination? Secondly, what factors led international students to consider immigration and ultimately seek permanent residence in Canada? And finally, which on-campus services and resources did the students seek and/or utilize to help navigate the immigration process, and what were their experiences with these services?

To help answer these questions, some of the questions that the participants of this study were asked during the interview include: What made them decide on pursuing their studies in Canada, and then subsequently staying and applying for permanent residence? What services (if any) did they use to help themselves make the decision to immigrate and plan for the different steps involved in the immigration process? Did they have a generally positive experience with
these departments, and why (or why not)? What suggestions do they have for current student services personnel who regularly deal with international students who may be considering immigration as part of their career/life plan? What are some of the programs that they think university should provide to cater to these students’ unique and complex needs?

**Summary of Introduction**

So far, I have briefly reviewed the background and the purpose of this study, as well as the research questions. In Chapter Two, I provide a literature review that gradually looks at the context of the students’ lived experience from macro to micro perspectives.

To borrow from Bronfenbrenner’s developmental ecology theory, individual experience is situated within a context that consists of the macrosystem, the exosystem, the mesosystem, and finally, the microsystem and the individual (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton & Renn, 2010). According to Renn and Arnold’s (2003) understanding of Bronfenbrenner’s theory in the context of higher education, the macrosystem encompasses social forces such as values and ideologies; cultural expectations around gender, race, and ethnicity; and historical trends and events that shape these overarching forces. The exosystem influences the individual’s environment, and can include such things as government and institutional policies, workplace cultures and practices, etc. The mesosystem involves interactions between the individual and others who are in their immediate surroundings, and it is through these interactions that opportunities for the individual’s development and learning exist and occur. As such, a mesosystem can consist of the individual’s friends, colleagues, family, as well as student services personnel that they interact with. Finally, the microsystem and the individual refer to the “activities, roles, and interpersonal relations” (Bronfenbrenner, 1993, p. 15) of the student.
In my literature review, I first look at the larger political forces at work in Canada (i.e. the macrosystem), and how the realist and neoliberal discourses are dominant in the current political climate. I then proceed to look at how the competitive immigration regime (i.e. the exosystem) has taken shape in the last few decades, and how countries are gradually adopting two-step immigration processes, which have an impact on international students who wish to remain in their host countries. Next, I explore the role of university within this political climate and review the way that student services are currently structured (i.e. the exo- and mesosystems), with a focus on how international students contribute to the university at the institutional level. Finally, I look at Schlossberg’s transition theory and explain how it applies to international students (i.e. the individuals) who intend to stay in the country after their graduation, as well as their experiences with student services.

In Chapter Three, I explain the research methods that I have adopted for this qualitative study. Research approach, method of data collection and analysis, a description of the sample, and some ethical considerations are reviewed. I present the findings of the study in Chapter Four, and synthesize the themes of the findings in light of past literature in Chapter Five.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I provide a rich context to situate individual international student’s lived experience. I do this by reviewing the literature in different fields. I first examine the macro political and social forces that have an impact on national immigration policies and the role of university in the society, before exploring the student services provided by university and how they help individual international students make the transitions from school to workplace, and from being temporary residents to being permanent residents of the country.

**Convergence of Realism and Neoliberalism**

In differentiating various paradigms in international relations theory, Holsti (1985) proposed that one consider how the different paradigms and theories answer three fundamental questions: (1) The causes and conditions of war and peace or world order; (2) essential actors within the paradigm; and (3) images of the world promoted by the paradigm. In this part of the literature review, I look at how key ideas from two paradigms in international relations theory – realism and neoliberalism – converge in the global context, and how they can lend tremendous explanatory power to the current debates around the importance of human capital. But first, let us examine the definitions and ideas of globalization and global knowledge economy.

In reviewing literature about globalization and higher education, Dodds (2008) demonstrated that there was no consensus on the meaning of the term. What is agreed upon is that globalization involves powerful political, economic and cultural forces that exert tremendous influence on people’s lives on a global scale, and is “characterized by increasing interdependence between different actors, converging economies, rapid information exchange, and the liberalization of trade in the market place” (Seifert, Perozzi, Bodine Al-Sharif, Li & Wildman, 2014, p. 3). Globalization is thus “a process that is increasing the flow of people, culture, ideas,
values, knowledge, technology, and economy across borders, resulting in a more interconnected and interdependent world” (Knight, 2008, p. 45).

Intimately related to the concept of globalization is the emergence of the global knowledge economy. In trying to explore its origin and question its very idea, Roberts (2009) argued that global knowledge economy – like the concept of globalization – had yet to be systematically defined by the academic community and policy makers. Nevertheless, Roberts and Armitage (2008) identified eight features that characterized a knowledge economy: (1) Knowledge and information as input into the economy; (2) importance of information and communication technologies in facilitating economic activities; (3) knowledge and information as output of the economy; (4) trend to commercialize knowledge through intellectual property rights; (5) increasing proportion of knowledge workers in the labour force; (6) impact of knowledge across all economic sectors; (7) knowledge management practices; and (8) globalization as a powerful force that drives the expansion of the economy.

At the heart of the phenomenon of global knowledge economy is a division of labour on a global scale. Developed countries increasingly outsource work that is associated with the primary and secondary economic sectors (e.g. agriculture and manufacturing) to developing countries that are comparatively rich in natural resources and/or cheap in labour costs. What remains is a need for developed countries to develop and advance an economy that is based on the production, utilization, and distribution of knowledge and innovation, characterized by the provision of services and the creation of new information. Scholars such as Altbach (2001; 2013) and Roberts (2009) have also acknowledged that there is an inherently uneven distribution of knowledge-related economic activities around the globe; in other words, there is a centre-periphery dynamic in the global knowledge economy.
So how do globalization and the global knowledge economy affect international relations? Scholars who subscribe to the notion of realism would argue that nation states are the main actors in international affairs. As nation states struggle for political power and influence in the world, international conflict and competition are natural and unavoidable, and a balance of political power between nations states is essential in maintaining world order (Holsti, 1985; Gilpin, 2002). The threat of major international military conflict has somewhat subsided with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of Cold War, but the tendency for nation states to vie for power and protect their national interests has remained. Realists’ obsession over building military capacity as articulated by Holsti (1985) has been gradually replaced with preoccupation over gaining economic competitive advantage in the global market place that Gilpin (2002) and McKinlay and Little (1986) described. In other words, countries are becoming increasingly concerned with amassing resources and capital that will help with their economic development and advancement.

That brings us to another major paradigm in international relations: neoliberalism. Neoliberals would maintain that an absence of interference in the free market is essential in order for the society to flourish and prosper, and that essential actors in this paradigm extend beyond the nation states to include multinational corporations or the private sector at large, and individual consumers (Gilpin, 2002; Keohane, 2005; McKinlay & Little, 1986). Neoliberals are proponents of deregulation where economic matters are concerned. They believe in the self-regulatory power of the marketplace – otherwise known as Adam Smith’s “invisible hand” – in adjusting demand and/or supply of different products and commodities, whether they are natural resources, manufactured goods, or knowledge and information. The government, in the eyes of the neoliberal school, exists to facilitate the free exchange of goods and services by ensuring that
the market place is given the free rein that it needs to operate, and that policies are aligned with
the goal of increasing a country’s competitive advantage in the global arena (Gilpin, 2002;
Keohane, 2005; McKinlay & Little, 1986).

With globalization, the world system becomes more complex and integrated politically,
socially, culturally, and economically. Realists’ focus on international competition and
neoliberals’ focus on the free market converge in the context of the global knowledge economy,
in which countries strive to maintain and advance their economic competitive advantage in the
global free market (Gilpin, 2002). As Peters (2007) stated, “neo-liberal grand narrative has
successfully extended the principle of self-interest into the status of a paradigm for
understanding politics itself, and, purportedly, all behaviour and human action” (p. 167). The
result of the convergence of realism and neoliberalism is that a country’s political and economic
agendas increasingly overlap – economic competitive advantage has become the new political
currency in the global arena:

[In] a highly integrated global economy, states continue to use their power and to
implement policies to channel economic forces in ways favourable to their own national
interests and the interests of their citizenry. National economic interests include receipt of
a fair or even favourable share of the gains from international economic activities as well
as preservation of national autonomy. (Gilpin, 2002, p. 239)

Of particular importance to a knowledge economy is human capital. Becker (1975)
defined investments in human capital as “activities that influence future monetary and psychic
income by increasing the resources in people” (p. 9). The knowledge and skills that come with a
skilled workforce are great commodities in a global knowledge economy because of its focus on
knowledge and information generation, capitalization, and dissemination, leading some to
conclude that human capital is “the only source of comparative advantage” and the “key ingredient in the late twentieth century’s location of economic activity” (Thurow, 1996, p. 68). This is because the talent that is encapsulated in the individuals cannot be bought, sold, or transferred easily. As Shachar (2006) noted, “it is the human in ‘human capital’ that makes it a unique, distinct, and irreplaceable resource” (p. 105).

In the Canadian context, there has been much debate lately regarding the extent to which the country is experiencing skills shortage, as well as the kind of skills shortage or skills gap that the country is suffering from (Blackwell, 2013; Burleton, Gulati, McDonald & Scarfone, 2013; Grant, 2013; OECD, 2013; Usher, 2013). Despite the contradicting evidence supporting both sides of the story, Jason Kenney, current Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Multiculturalism, and former Minister of Citizenship and Immigration of Canada, noted that economic and job growth should be Canada’s top priority, and that addressing the skills shortage and skills gap was essential if Canada was to maintain its global competitive advantage (CIC, 2012; Usher, 2013).

The assumption is that as a middle power in the international arena (Trilokekar, 2010) – not considered a “super power,” yet still has a certain amount of influence in international politics – Canada must engage in a global race to recruit individuals with in-demand skills and talents to ensure its economic prosperity in the future. Because the free movement of skilled labour, when within certain limits, is desirable for any economy that wants a competitive advantage in the global economy (McKinlay & Little, 1986), Canada has in the last decade reformed its immigration policy so that it is more aligned with its economic imperative. It also uses the argument of domestic economic and labour needs to justify major immigration policy changes and international education strategies (Trilokekar & El Masri, 2014).
**Competitive Immigration Regime**

I have illustrated how domestic and international affairs, and political and economic agendas, are increasingly converging in the global political arena, which is dominated by realist and neoliberal ideas. I have also reviewed the rise of human capital as the new currency in the global political economy. In an article titled, The Race for Talent: Highly Skilled Migrants and Competitive Immigration Regimes, Ayelet Shachar (2006) perfectly demonstrated how these agendas converge in the matter of skilled migration. In this section, I review this idea of competitive immigration regime, or as Shachar called it, “race for talent” (p. 101).

Traditionally, there are three main categories of migration: Family reunion, humanitarian migration, and skilled migration (Shachar, 2006). Family reunion is self-explanatory, and as an immigration class, it allows people to invite their relatives (e.g. spouses and children) who are currently living in foreign countries to reunite with them in their own countries. Humanitarian migration involves refugees and other protected individuals who are in search of safe havens in foreign countries, where they are free from unjust persecutions. Skilled migration is an economically-driven immigration class that allows people to move to another country based on their knowledge, skills, and/or ability to invest. The receiving country of skilled migrants generally stands to benefit most from this kind of migration.

Recognizing the importance of human capital and its long-term benefits to the country’s economic growth, Canada was the first in the world to introduce the points system in 1967 to assess the suitability of potential skilled migrants (Shachar, 2006). It is worth noting here that preference for skilled workers was not a new phenomenon in immigration policy-making even back in the late 1960s – Canada was just the first to install a system which objectively ranked these potential migrants’ skills and qualifications based on a pre-determined set of criteria and
requirements, thus making the immigration system more transparent. The points system also makes the immigration system more agile and responsive to current economic conditions, since the criteria are subject to change based on the current national economic agendas. Indeed, the immigration system in Canada has undergone major changes and reforms in the past several years to reflect the current political and economic climates and new priorities in this globalized world (Alboim & Cohl, 2012). The points system, as an immigration strategy, effectively bestows upon individuals with skills in demand greater international mobility, particularly those with good linguistic abilities.

According to the Citizenship and Immigration Canada’s (CIC) website (Government of Canada, 2014b), a person interested in applying for immigration to Canada as a Federal Skilled Worker must meet the minimum requirements in the following basic eligibility criteria: work experience and history, language proficiency, and education level. Additional selection factors include the applicant’s age, any prearranged employment in Canada, as well as other adaptability factors that measure the applicant’s likelihood to settle successfully in Canada (e.g. presence of close relatives in Canada, prior study or work experience in the country). Applicants are given a score for each of these criteria to determine whether they are eligible to apply for Canadian permanent residence. Of course, all applicants must also prove that they have enough funds to support themselves and their family after they arrive in Canada, and that they are not inadmissible to Canada (e.g. having a criminal history or serious health issues).

Skilled migration has long been the dominant immigration class in Canada, and its dominance continues to increase in recent years: Between 2005 and 2010, both the absolute number and the percentage of economic-class immigrants have increased in Canada, while the number as well as percentage of immigrants entering the country to reunite with family or as
refugees have decreased during the same period (Dench, 2011). Contrast this with the immigration system in the United States, where most of the immigrants were granted permanent residency based on family ties, and only 15% through employer sponsorship (Papademetriou & Sumption, 2011), it is obvious that Canada has adopted a much more aggressive skills-based immigration regime than its southern neighbour.

The introduction of the points system immigration strategy in Canada occurred at a time when higher education was just becoming massified as defined by Trow (1973), who conceived a mass higher education system as one in which 16% to 50% of its college- or university-aged population were enrolled in higher education institutions. In Ontario, for instance, massification of higher education occurred in the 1960s, when the share of people aged 18-24 attending higher education institutions surpassed 15% (Clark, Moran, Skolnik & Trick, 2009). The higher education system was at the time unable to produce sufficient skilled workers at a pace quick enough to propel Canada’s economy forward (Papademetriou & Sumption, 2011). The shortage of domestic skilled workers in this period certainly helped consolidate the points system immigration strategy as a legitimate way to fill the labour shortage and skills gap in the Canadian economy.

Since the 1980s, globalization of the world’s economy has increased its pace and reach, and immigration has also evolved from being a domestic political and/or economic issue to being an inter-jurisdictional competition. Shachar (2006) called this the “race for talent” (p. 101), and asserted that this race was a rather zero-sum game: Different countries were increasingly focused on skilled migration not only as a move to increase their own talent pool and competitive advantage, but also to diminish other countries’ supply of skilled workers and their ability to compete in the global knowledge economy.
As a result of this race, countries that traditionally attracted immigrants, such as Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and to a lesser extent, the United States, increasingly emulated each other and adopted similar immigration policies to attract the best and the brightest in the world. Even Western countries that had previously adopted zero-admission policies must now reconsider their approach to immigration. For example, Germany enacted its first immigration law in 2005 (Gräßler, 2005), which gave a strong preference to skilled workers who were deemed to have skills instrumental in helping sustain Germany’s economy in the long run. To illustrate the legacy of Canada’s points system, Rita Suessmuth, the former President of the German Federal Parliament and Member of the Independent Commission on Migration, once proclaimed, “We [Germany] need more Canada.” (Jiménez, 2005, as cited in Shachar, 2006, p. 142). This move demonstrates the tendency of countries to emulate each other in order to “stay in the game”. Other countries that have incorporated some versions of points system into their immigration policies to attract skilled workers included Australia, New Zealand, Denmark, the United Kingdom, Singapore, and Hong Kong (Papademetriou & Sumption, 2011; Yeoh, 2006).

In addition to the points system, some countries have also adopted a more employer-centred strategy by allowing employers to nominate potential immigrants (Papademetriou & Sumption, 2011). This allows for greater flexibility for and control by employers, and ensures that immigrants truly have the skills and qualities that fit the employers’ needs – after all, employers would have hired these immigrants before they get nominated for permanent residence or citizenship. Countries that primarily adopt this strategy include Sweden, Norway, and most notably, the United States.

In response, countries that have in the past produced large numbers of emigrants, such as China and India, are now rethinking their repatriation incentives and immigration strategies.
Their new challenge is to entice nationals who have left for different opportunities abroad, as well as foreigners who may be interested in long-term settlement in these fast-growing emerging economies (Yeoh, 2006).

In a way, citizenship or permanent residence in well-developed, mostly democratic polities has always been a powerful incentive to attract skilled workers from countries that are perhaps lacking in political stability and/or economic opportunities. As Shachar (2006) put it, “membership in a wealthy and stable polity represents a valuable resource that affects our well-being, freedom, and level of opportunity in a world of severe inequality across national and regional boundaries” (p. 115). The immigrant-receiving countries then make use of this “brain gain” to advance their own economic agendas. This “talent-for-citizenship exchange” (Shachar, 2006, p. 111) again illustrates the convergence of realist and neoliberal discourses.

The changing conception of citizenship from being a political entitlement to being a political commodity involving multiple stakeholders understandably sparks ethical concerns. Even though individual nation states are still the sole conferrers of the right of citizenship or permanent residence, the private sector is now intimately involved in the process of determining what skills to seek from the countries’ potential migrants, particularly in countries that adopt employer-centred immigration strategies (Papademetriou & Sumption, 2011).

Meanwhile, in both the United Kingdom and the United States, lobby groups from the private sector as well as the academic community have petitioned both governments to loosen up their immigration channels for researchers working in the science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields. Due to the shortage of domestic students qualified or interested in pursuing these fields, they are particularly sensitive to the changes in international student enrolment numbers (Gachon, 2011; Gürüz, 2011; Hser, 2005). In the United Kingdom, eight
Nobel laureates from the STEM fields wrote a joint letter on behalf of the Campaign for Science and Engineering (CaSE) criticizing the government’s plan to cap migration because of concerns that scientific research in the country would suffer (“UK must not isolate”, 2010). Numerous academic and professional associations have also petitioned the Bush and Obama administrations in the United States to ease entry of foreign scientists and students for the same reason (APS, 2009; Bhattacharjee, 2004). This universal emphasis on STEM fields and other professional disciplines by different immigration systems is very characteristic of the realist and neoliberal discourses, primarily because of these fields’ direct relevance to certain occupations as well as their potential to be capitalized for private gain and global competitiveness.

**Two-Step Immigration: Canadian Experience Class (CEC)**

As countries engage in this “race for talent,” they must find ways to streamline the immigration process. Having outlined the tenets of the competitive immigration regime, this section details the rationale and development of the two-step immigration process. The Canadian Experience Class (CEC) is a great example of two-step immigration, and in my research study, I have interviewed former international students who have successfully applied for permanent residence in Canada through this immigration class. In this section, I review the two-step immigration process and some of its advantages, explain the history and purpose of CEC, and describe its relevance to international students.

By putting a greater emphasis on attracting people who were currently working (or had recently worked) in the country, rather than processing new immigration applications from overseas, New Zealand was among the first to adopt a two-step immigration strategy. While traditional immigration processes focus on recruiting foreigners who may have never set foot in the country before, and processing immigration applications from overseas, a two-step
immigration strategy pays more attention to retaining temporary residents who are already living (or have lived) in the country. In essence, the two-step approach offers a temporary-to-permanent immigration pathway, and it is often a hybrid between the points system and the employer-led immigration approach discussed previously (Papademetriou & Sumption, 2011).

Two-step immigration strategy has been emulated across the world because it has many advantages for the immigrant-receiving countries. For one, admitting immigrants who have previously lived in the country will likely decrease the likelihood that they will have adjustment issues (e.g. not being able to adjust to the local culture, not having sufficient language skills to deal with daily-life challenges, not having social support, lacking a professional network to assist with one’s job search). As well, two-step immigration often requires applicants to have secured employment in the country, thus ensuring that these immigrants are able to support themselves financially and contribute to the national economy in meaningful ways through their tax dollars and productivity.

The success of New Zealand’s two-step immigration strategy has inspired Canada to adopt its own. One of the things that Canada did was to heavily invest in various pilot projects to increase the competitiveness of Canadian higher education sector to attract international students, and encourage them to stay in the country post-graduation through new immigration streams (Shachar, 2006). One such stream is the CEC, which was first implemented in 2008 (Alboim & Cohl, 2012). What truly distinguishes CEC from the two other major economic class immigration streams – the Federal Skilled Worker program and the Provincial Nominee Programs – is its central emphasis on the general Canadian experience that is acquired by the immigrants prior to the permanent residence application. CEC does not put too many restrictions on such things as the applicants’ occupational fields (though it does have restrictions on the
applicants’ occupational levels) and financial assets to the same extent as the other two economic immigration classes, which makes it particularly suited to younger people who are just beginning to establish their careers.

International students are ideal candidates for permanent residence and citizenship through the two-step immigration process, since they all initially come to Canada as temporary residents. In order to apply for immigration under CEC, the applicant must have accumulated at least the equivalent of one year of full-time “skilled work experience” in Canada within the past three years, in addition to demonstrated language proficiency and general admissibility (Government of Canada, 2014a). “Skilled work experience” must be managerial, professional, or technical in nature as defined by the 2011 Canadian National Occupational Classification (NOC), meaning only work that is classified as NOC skill type 0, A or B respectively will qualify as valid work experience under the CEC immigration stream.

Upon graduation from a recognized, full-time degree-conferring program that lasts at least eight months, international students can apply for the Post-Graduation Work Permit (PGWP), which is valid for up to three years depending on the length of the international student’s program of study. With this open work permit, students are not tied to a specific employer or position, and they can work almost anywhere in Canada and gain valuable Canadian work experience. While working under the PGWP, students can start accumulating relevant skilled work experience that can count towards their permanent residence application through the CEC stream.

As temporary residents of Canada, international students gain recognized credentials from within the country, experience navigating through the cultural contexts, as well as achieve acceptable levels of linguistic mastery proven through the course of their study. In order to apply
for immigration through the CEC, they also must demonstrate a track record of employability and work history within Canada (CIC News, 2012; CIC, 2012; OECD, 2002). These are all highly desirable qualities that skilled workers possess, where transitions into the workplace or even into a new country are concerned (Papademetriou & Sumption, 2011). The success of CEC in admitting international students and other skilled workers in trades was such that Canada committed to accepting up to 10,000 permanent residents through this immigration stream in 2013, up from 2,500 people who were admitted in 2009 under CEC (CIC, 2012; CIC News 2012). Where Canadian immigration is concerned, it seems likely that despite the recent restrictions imposed on the CEC immigration stream (e.g. caps for the number of immigrants admitted under each NOC category), the country will continue to focus on retention from within rather than recruitment from abroad in the upcoming years.

**Higher Education in the Current Political Climate and Its Contributions to the Competitive Immigration Regime**

Because of its focus on the generation, capitalization, and dissemination of knowledge and information, higher education institutions play a major role in the global knowledge economy (Altbach, 2001; Altbach, 2013; Gürüz, 2010). As the society moves into a post-industrial era, realist and neoliberal discourses have framed higher education institutions as essential partners in producing the next generation of highly skilled and flexible labour who can generate innovative ideas and come up with original ways to synthesize these ideas for the global knowledge economy. Through public investment in higher education, nation states rely on universities and colleges to help them advance their national and international political and economic agendas (Becker, 1975; Trilokekar, 2010). In doing so, universities and colleges have gradually adopted the role of innovation hubs and human resource training centres for the nation
states and the society at large (Peters, 2007; Rhoads, 2003; Slaughter & Leslie, 1997; Tilak, 2008). At the same time, as universities expand their reach into the international community through international student recruitment and other collaborative endeavours in teaching and research, they also act as ambassadors for their nation states in promoting the cultural and economic opportunities that are afforded in their nations. Relationship between university and the government becomes one that is characterized by symbiosis in the new global knowledge economy.

In contemplating the issue of higher education and public good, Marginson (2011) wrote, “it is widely felt that public higher education should be open, egalitarian and accountable to the larger community beyond higher education” (p. 418). However, who constitutes this “larger community”: the nation state, the private sector, the civil society and its citizens, or all of the above? Operating in a competitive global political and economic climate, dominated by realist and neoliberal discourses that so emphasize the value of human capital, what role does the university play? Who does it serve, and more crucially, how does it serve?

In summarizing Bill Readings’ (1996) book, The University in Ruins, Peters (2007) concluded that, “Universities now function as one more bureaucratic subsystem among others harnessed in the service of national competitiveness in the global economy” (p. 163). In the context of the competitive immigration regime, universities’ involvement in the bureaucracy is not limited to the economic functions they perform. Indeed, given the way that the Canadian government is changing its immigration policies to retain international students (e.g. the introduction of the CEC immigration stream), universities have an important role to play: In the same way that university completion acts as a screening mechanism for employers when they are evaluating job applicants (Clark et al., 2009), it also helps the government identify, recruit and
screen potential immigrants who can contribute to the Canadian economy, since any international student who finishes a recognized academic program and can prove their employability in Canada is potentially a future Canadian immigrant (Mueller, 2009; Shachar, 2006).

Other countries have gone even further in co-opting their higher education institutions into the immigration bureaucracy. For example, since 9/11, American colleges and universities have been required to cooperate with the Department of Homeland Security, keeping track of the movements and progresses of their international students by updating infamously cumbersome government databases such as the National Entry-Exit Registration System (NEERS), US-VISIT, and the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) in a timely fashion (Mueller, 2009). Across the Atlantic Ocean, in complying with the Home Office’s requirements, at least two universities in the United Kingdom have installed biometric monitoring systems to ensure that their international students were indeed attending classes and not violating the terms of their student visas by working illegally in the country (Matthews, 2013). Although no such tracking strategy would be implemented in the near future in Canada, there were proposed regulatory changes that would allow only international students from province- or territory-accredited institutions and programs to be granted study and work permits. This proposed change was in response to criticisms that the current system was too lax in ensuring that international students were in the country for the genuine purpose of completing an accredited program of study (Government of Canada, 2012). It would have implications for private institutions and some specific programs, and potentially raise questions around just how involved higher education institutions should be in the maintenance of the integrity of a country’s immigration system.
To demonstrate how immigration policies can have a direct impact on higher education, one need not look further than at the flow of international students in the decade immediately following the events of 9/11:

For the public and a large proportion of academic opinion, all 19 perpetrators of the horrific attacks of September 11 were foreign citizens who had entered the US as students or tourists (Kamarota, 2011). From this perspective, the nature of a visiting student’s studies should be ‘a legitimate matter of concern’. Student mobility is more and more confounded with ‘immigration’, ‘security’ and the fight against terrorism. (Benhafaiedh, 2006, p. 231)

The United States significantly tightened its immigration regulations, visa application process and border control after the attacks, subjecting the system to regular and abrupt changes that heightened the stress and sense of uncertainty among temporary residents and potential immigrants (Shachar, 2006). Discourses around international student mobility in the United States were influenced by the themes of terrorism, and discussions around globalization were characterized by criticisms of multiculturalism and the resurgence of ethno-nationalism (Kell & Vogl, 2012). These restrictive immigration policies, and the growing animosity directed towards anyone considered a “foreigner,” in part fanned by the conservative media, had a particularly negative impact on Muslim males (Bayoumi, 2011).

Against a backdrop of social conservatism and xenophobic prejudices arising from confusion and misunderstanding of Islam and immigrants in general, some doubted the contributions that international students were making to the American economy, even though these doubts were empirically dispelled by various studies (Hser, 2005; Nafziger, 2008). Despite the reality that international students made huge contributions to the economy, visa restrictions
that explicitly condoned discriminatory racial profiling became the norm, border controls were toughened, and people were arrested, detained and imprisoned for suspicions of crime rather than actual criminal actions (Bayoumi, 2011; Nafziger, 2008).

Many scholars have explored how these changes negatively affected international students in the post-9/11 world: Gürüz (2011), Hser (2005), Mueller (2009), Nafziger (2008), and Subanthore (2011), to name a few. They have examined how visa restrictions made it more difficult for international students to gain entry into or remain in the United States. These restrictions also limited international students’ employment options, even as tuition fees and living costs continued to rise and various forms of financial aid were made less available to these students. For a period of time, the American government actually required students to leave the country mid-semester to renew their visas, often delaying – or in some cases, terminating – these students’ courses of study. In addition, tracking initiatives that complemented these visa restrictions were implemented and fervently enforced. These tracking systems (e.g. NSEERS, US-VISIT, SEVIS) were inconvenient and cumbersome, not to mention marred by technical difficulties, which frustrated many university administrators who were mandated to use them.

The visa restrictions and tracking initiatives led to an immerse backlog in application processing, especially for international students in STEM fields and/or from the Middle East.

News about these cumbersome and unfriendly procedures travelled fast – word-of-mouth was a major source of information for international students – and that led to a decline in the number of applications received by American universities and affected the quality of students being admitted (Gürüz, 2011; Hser, 2005; Mueller, 2009; Nafziger, 2008; Warwick, 2005). Based on data from the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, the country experienced a general decrease in the number of international students admitted into the country in the few
years immediately following 9/11, but students from Muslim countries were disproportionately affected:

The total number of students admitted from PMCs [Primarily Muslim Countries] increased by 29.6% between 1999 and 2001, compared to an increase of 22.6% for all other countries. These numbers decreased between 2001 and 2004 by 8.1% for all other countries and by 44.5% for PMCs. [...] The decline among individuals from the subgroup of nations labeled “state-sponsored terrorist states” by the U.S. Department of State has been the most dramatic, with a decrease of 65% between 2001 and 2004, following an increase of 61% in the two-year period preceding 9/11. (Mueller, 2009, p.21-22)

Although the Open Door Report compiled by the Institute of International Education (IIE; 2012b) showed a less dramatic picture, the decline was still obvious and prominent: Enrolment of international students in the United States leveled in the year after 9/11, then declined for three straight years.

At a time when the United States was adopting more restrictive immigration policies, Canada took the opposite route and actively attracted international students with its more relaxed visa requirements. According to Mueller (2009), even before 9/11, the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada noted a dramatic increase in the number of Canada-bound international students, which had more than doubled between 1990 and 2001. With regards to international students from Muslim countries, he further noted that:

[Flows] of students from PMCs increase by about 28% between 2001 and 2005, compared to a decline of about 20% for all other countries. Over this same period, the stock of students from PMCs increases by almost 60%, compared with a rise of only 25%
for all other countries. More dramatic, still, is the growth in students from state-sponsored terrorists states: the flows of these students almost doubled in this period while the stocks nearly tripled. (p. 23/32)

The influx of Muslim international students into Canada mirrored the decline in the enrolment of this particular group in the United States over the same period. Mueller (2009) went on to suggest that these students were diverted to Canada because they found its southern neighbour less hospitable.

In 2006, responding to the fear that the country was losing its competitive edge in the recruitment of international students, as well as complaints from universities and the private sector, the United States government promised to speed up the processing of student visas in order to increase enrolment of international students (Gürüz, 2011). Indeed, the academic community was very active in voicing its concerns about tight immigration rules that were affecting their students, researchers, and scholars (APS, 2009; Bhattacharjee, 2004). As a result, in 2007/2008, the enrolment number and annual growth rate returned to and surpassed pre-9/11 level (IIE, 2012b). However, it is worth noting that the percentage of international students represented in the total enrolment number has remained steady at around 3.42% in the decade post-9/11, compared to the 3.32% in the decade preceding 9/11, so international students’ representation on campuses has remained rather constant.

Another interesting trend that emerged from the 2012 Open Door Report concerned Middle Eastern students: There was a huge increase of students from Saudi Arabia after the King Abdullah scholarship was put in place in 2005 to send Saudi students to study abroad (IIE, 2012d; McMurtrie, 2012; Mueller, 2009). Many of these students were enrolled in short-term intensive English courses rather than long-term degree programs (IIE, 2012c). Looking specifically at the
Middle East, six countries – Oman, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Iraq, Kuwait and Iran – experienced a growth rate of more than 20% in the number of students sent to the United States between 2010/2011 and 2011/2012 (IIE, 2012a). Considering that most international students were sponsored by self, family, foreign donors and international organizations (IIE, 2012e), this return to the pre-9/11 growth in international student enrolment was great news for some higher education institutions based in the United States, particularly those that were adversely affected by funding cuts and decreased enrolment of domestic students.

Canada also experienced a similar growth in its Saudi student population, in part due to the King Abdullah scholarship:

> Over the period from 2004 to 2008, the number of foreign students from Saudi Arabia has grown the fastest among all top ten source countries, at a rate of 40.9% per year, compared with an average rate of 2.0% per year for all students. (Roslyn Kunin & Associates, Inc., 2009, p. 29)

Despite these encouraging upward trends from the Middle East, however, a day after the release of the 2012 Open Door Report in the U.S., the Foreign Affairs Department of Canada released research findings which showed that Canada was failing to attract students from emerging economies in other regions, such as China, India and Brazil (Blanchfield, 2012). As a result, the Canadian government was planning more talks with these countries to strengthen its ties with them, and encourage international students from these countries to come to Canada for their education. One of the strategies was to engage in better marketing efforts to promote Canada as a desirable study-abroad destination through Canadian Education Centres (Mueller, 2009). The streamlined immigration processes designed specifically to retain international
students (e.g. the off-campus work permits and PGWPs, the CEC immigration stream) would no doubt make Canada a more attractive destination to some international students, too.

The post-9/11 decade saw the United States and Canada diverge somewhat in their approaches to immigration. While the former became more restrictive in allowing foreigners to enter the country, the latter became generally more open and welcoming. These changes in immigration policy had an impact on higher education institutions and their international student recruitment numbers. In the context of competitive immigration regime, if countries were to move towards a two-step immigration approach and shift their focus to retaining temporary residents such as international students, it is evident how Canada as an immigrant-friendly middle power could benefit from the more restrictive policies that were implemented by its super-power neighbour, the United States. Canadian policies, which enabled its increased uptake of Muslim students during the post-9/11 decade, have also helped establish the country as a viable and relatively welcoming destinations for all international students and future immigrants.

With the ongoing debate around immigration reform in the United States, it remains to be seen whether it will follow Canada’s example in adopting a two-step immigration approach and retaining international students as skilled immigrants in its bid to gain competitive advantage in the global knowledge economy.

It is worth noting that in response to the phenomenon of “brain drain,” countries such as China and India are also heavily investing in their higher education sector to retain their talented nationals, and rethinking their repatriation strategies to recapture those who have gone abroad (Altbach, 2001; Shachar, 2006). For example, the two countries are both identifying select higher education institutions to develop into world-class institutions to promote research excellence (Li, 2012; Mok, 2005; Mok & Chan, 2008; OECD, 2002; “The Bangalore Paradox”, 2005; Xiong,
Zhang & Liu, 2011). This phenomenon perfectly illustrates the intimate link between the “race for talent,” higher education, and international mobility.

Having discussed the broader political, economic and institutional factors that set the context, I now focus on the human components of these institutions in the next section: the international students themselves. I explore the international student experience under this political climate more closely by looking at some of the contributions that international students make, the factors that influence student mobility, and the challenges that they face.

**International Student Experience in Canada and Its Universities**

International students bring great diversity to university campuses and classrooms. With proper facilitation and the intentional creation of mutual learning opportunities, this diversity can be harnessed to enrich the learning experience for both international and domestic students (Clarke, 2005; Gürüz, 2011; Hser, 2005). In addition – and in line with the realist and neoliberal discourses that were reviewed previously – host countries can benefit greatly from the presence of international students politically and economically.

International education can be a powerful form of cultural diplomacy (Trilokekar, 2010), and international students can act as ambassadors for their host countries, whether or not they decide to return home after their studies. As Colin Powell, former Secretary of State of the United States, once said, “I can think of no more valuable asset to our country than the friendship of future world leaders who have been educated here [in the United States]” (Gürüz, 2011, p. 239). Indeed, prominent individuals who have graduated from American universities include King Abdullah II of Jordan, Kofi Annan, former Secretary-General of the United Nations, and Lee Hsien Loong, current Prime Minister of Singapore, to name a few.
Economically, international students also act as a source of productive and skilled workers in academic research settings and beyond, who are generally well integrated into the larger society (Mueller, 2009). As discussed in previous sections, they are considered a great source of potential immigrants in many countries, including Canada. As well, as the costs of higher education increase and funding cuts from the government become commonplace, expansion of enrolment of self-funded international students becomes a major source of revenue for many universities and colleges (Shanka et al., 2005).

In fact, with international students and their dependents contributing almost $22 billion to the economy through tuition and living costs (Wilhelm, 2012), international education is such a big business that it is the fifth largest service export in the United States (Gachon, 2011). In Canada, international education has also surpassed natural resources such as coniferous lumber and coal to be one of the country’s top export items (Roslyn Kunin & Associates, Inc., 2009). Indeed, the economic benefits brought by international students are hard to deny. In Atlantic Canada alone, it was estimated that “[international] students spent $2.64 (of which $1.91 was new money injected into the economy) […] for every dollar spent by the four provincial governments for their education and health care” (Siddiq, Nethercote, Lye & Baroni, 2012, p. 240). In 2009/2010, international students injected $175 million of new money into Atlantic Canada’s economy, and the total economic impact amounted to $565 million. Roslyn Kunin & Associates, Inc. (2009) also noted this: “In 2008, international students in Canada spent in excess of $6.5 billion on tuition, accommodation and discretionary spending; created over 83,000 jobs; and generated more than $291 million in government revenue” (p. III). Recognizing international students’ potential contributions to their host countries, what are some of the determinants that
influence their mobility? What make them decide to leave their home countries and study abroad, and how do they decide on their destinations?

**Push and Pull Factors**

The push-pull model was originally conceived by Lee (1966) to explain migration in general, and McMahon (1992) was one of the first researchers to apply it to international student mobility. Push factors refer to the undesirable factors that discourage students from staying in a location (usually their home countries), and pull factors refer to the desirable factors that attract students to stay in a location, or resettle in another. These factors can be political, economic, social, cultural and/or environmental in nature.

Altbach (1998), Benhafaiedh (2006), Bray and Li (2007), Mazzarol and Soutar (2002), and Vierimaa (2013) have all explored some of these push-pull factors. For example, lack of access to higher education in home countries can be a push factor that pushes students to migrate and seek higher education overseas. This is particularly true in some Asian and African countries, where the higher education systems have not yet achieved massification, and the quality of the programs offered can be uneven and uncertain. Sometimes students are unable to enroll in their desired programs (e.g. programs in STEM fields) because of fierce domestic competition in their home countries; other times, they are attracted by the prestige and quality of these programs in other countries. Many of these mobile students eventually end up in Western countries, especially in former metropoles, where links between home and host countries already exist as a legacy of colonization. These links include, but are not limited to, common languages, mutually recognized examination systems, and established partnerships between higher education institutions in the two countries.
In terms of pull factors, the availability of better economic opportunities at the host countries is a big pull, and arguably the most important factor in determining whether students decide to leave their home countries to study overseas. In fact, in a study conducted by Ciarniene and Kumpikaite (2011), 85% of the surveyed Lithuanian students cited economic factors as their main reasons for considering emigration, far exceeding the next factor cited, which was politics (32%). Most students in the study opted to go to the United States or other Western European countries because these countries seemed to offer better economic opportunities, more political stability, and a higher quality of life.

Related to the economic pull factors is the possibility of permanent migration to the host countries, which is an option that many international students seriously consider. Indeed, as mentioned above, Shachar (2006) would argue that the prospect to migrate is an independent factor affecting international students’ choice of study-abroad destinations. Many international students recognize that studying abroad is likely a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, and in their search for better lives for themselves and their families, they search for ways to prolong their stay upon graduation to explore different options regarding location for settlement (Benhaiaiedh, 2006; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002).

Recognizing that international students often rely on information obtained through word-of-mouth when making their decisions (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Shanka et al., 2005), the marketing efforts championed by host countries and institutions certainly play an important role in getting the word out to prospective students to influence their decision-making process. Indeed, to promote Canada’s higher education institutions and recruit international students, the federal government committed $10 million over two years in the 2011 Budget to the development and the implementation of international education strategies (Alboim & Cohl,
Further proving Canada’s commitment to integrate international students into the economy, and retain some as permanent immigrants, is the fact that between 2002 and 2011, the number of international students with work permits increased almost nine-fold, from 6,800 to 60,000 (Alboim & Cohl, 2012). Many of the students who secured a work permit during the later years in this period were holders of the PGWP, which – as discussed earlier – frequently serves as a stepping-stone for those interested in applying for permanent residence. If economic prosperity, employment opportunities, and prospect of permanent migration are found to be major pull factors that attract international students, then Canada and its higher education institutions must tailor their information dissemination efforts and settlement services accordingly to meet international students’ needs. These students face a number of challenges that domestic students do not need to contend with, particularly if they were to consider immigration, which is a major life transition and a complex goal in and of itself. In the next section, I discuss how student services are structured in Canadian universities, and introduce some of the services that are most relevant to international students.

**Student Services in Canadian Universities**

In the late 19th century, student services in Canadian universities primarily took the form of guardianship, with staff members acting as the guardians of their students who lived on campus, responsible for their learning and discipline (Cox & Strange, 2010). At the end of World War II, as universities and colleges began broadening access to include students from non-traditional backgrounds and had to find more efficient ways to serve their students, this in loco
parentis framework began evolving into the differentiated model that is more commonplace today.

For six decades, from 1950s to 2010s, access was gradually broadened to include veterans, women, immigrants and international students, students with disabilities, sexual minorities, and first-generation students (Fisher, 2011). Today’s student services in Canadian universities are largely organized by functional divisions. Based on the departments’ expertise, they are responsible for running different programs and providing services in different areas (Sullivan, 2010). One of the main drivers for this differentiation is the professionalization and specialization of the field of student services, which increasingly regards student services practitioners as more than administrative personnel. Those in the field strive to become and to be seen as educators in their own areas of expertise. This differentiation of expertise is the dominant model regardless of whether decision-making regarding programming and service provision is centralized at the institutional level, decentralized at the faculty/school level, or a hybrid of the two (Seifert, Arnold, Burrow & Brown, 2011; Shea, 2010; Sullivan, 2010).

The differentiated model is reminiscent of the division of labour popularized by industrialization and modernization, which tend to focus on the individual problems or issues rather than the individuals themselves. In response to this highly differentiated model, there has been a push in the field of student services in recent years to reconsider students as holistic beings, whose different identities intersect, and whose challenges are multifaceted and affected by multiple, interlinked factors (Strange, 2010; Sullivan, 2010). This new approach requires student services personnel from all functional areas to pay attention to students’ learning and development both in and out of the classrooms, and while it does not erase the differentiated
model that sees student services divided into numerous departments, it does encourage these departments to collaborate, share information, and learn from one another (Ouellette, 2010).

In terms of the functions of student services, Champagne and Petitpas (1989) proposed eight that educators of adult learners should consider: Specialized services, education, advocacy, information provision, referrals, program planning, networking/mentoring, and counseling. These functions have different roles to play in helping international students adjust to their new environment and make various transitions. Meanwhile, the Canadian Association of College and University Student Services (CACUSS) categorizes student services by four types: Educational, supportive, regulatory, and responsive (CACUSS, 1989; Seifert et al., 2011; Sullivan, 2010). For international students who are interested in applying for Canadian permanent residence, the first two types of services will be most relevant because they focus on information dissemination, provision of practical and emotional support, and the holistic preparation of the students so that they are equipped with the skills and knowledge to handle the immigration process which entails complex challenges and elaborate planning.

Indeed, in the context of competitive immigration regime, proponents of a two-step immigration strategy such as the CEC stream would argue that having universities provide services to international students who are prospective immigrants helps the federal government save costs, because temporary residents such as international students are generally ineligible for federally funded settlement programs and services (Alboim & Cohl, 2012). Yet, as newcomers to the country, international students still need assistance in resolving some settlement challenges. In the absence of federally funded programs and services, where can international students seek help and find the support that they need? I argue that the responsibility of settling international students as temporary residents in Canada has been offloaded onto the student services
departments at universities, which serve to fill this service gap and provide the much-needed resources to international students. Some of the student services that are relevant to international students include, but are not limited to: Housing services, organized student groups or student government, career services, and last but not least, international offices.

As discussed earlier, employment is a key eligibility requirement in the permanent residence application process. To the extent that employment and immigration are linked, career services and resources offered by international offices also go hand-in-hand for many international students who intend to stay in Canada as permanent residents. As Shea (2010) noted, “Leading up to 2020, in particular, open immigration policies and the continued assertive recruitment of international students to Canada’s colleges and universities will further shape the texture of these new enrolments, challenging career and employment centres like never before” (p. 150-151). Moving forward in Canada’s new competitive immigration regime, in which two-step immigration is set to play a bigger role and the ability to thrive in a global knowledge economy is prized, it becomes more important for career services and international offices to collaborate in order to serve international students’ particular needs.

Still, even though these services have provided international students with much needed information in the past, international offices of Canadian universities and colleges have recently begun refraining from advising international students on visa and immigration matters related to their study and work permits (Tamburri, 2013). In June 2011, Section 91 of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act came into effect, prohibiting unauthorized representatives from representing or providing immigration advice to anyone. Authorized representatives are lawyers who are in good standing with the law societies, or paralegals and immigration consultants who are registered with and certified by the Immigration Consultants of Canada Regulatory Council.
(ICCRC). After a lengthy legal consultation process, CIC finally advised universities and colleges countrywide in May 2013 that regular international student advisors are not considered authorized representatives. The barring of international student advisors from providing their students any kind of advice concerning their study and work permits is problematic, since the maintenance of the temporary resident status is essential if international students want to stay and finish their studies, search for post-graduation employment opportunities, and eventually, apply for immigration.

Because people and institutions who violate the law can face fines of up to $100,000 and jail time of up to two years, most international offices in Canadian universities and colleges have stopped providing any kind of immigration advice. Some institutions have resorted to employing those considered authorized representatives under the current law as in-house staff. Still, even though regular advisors are now unable to advise students on their individual cases, some international offices and student associations attempt to fill this service gap by hosting information sessions with immigration lawyers to provide general but relevant information about immigration to the international student population. To address the challenges presented by the current interpretation of who qualifies as authorized representatives, the Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE) is liaising and engaging in ongoing consultations with its individual and institutional members, as well as the federal government, to resolve the logistical challenges that are brought on by Section 91 (CBIE, personal communication, May 23, 2014).

While Canadian institutions try to adapt to the changing rules, and find creative solutions to serve their students, the lives of international students go on. These students still have different career and life goals that they are working towards, including immigration, and they
must find ways to navigate the various transitions. The next section is about the different factors that influence the transition process.

**Schlossberg’s Transition Theory**

For international students to successfully attain permanent residence in Canada through the two-step immigration process of CEC, they must go through at least two transitions: into the workplace, and into a new country of permanent abode. This is because CEC requires applicants to demonstrate that they have worked the equivalent of one year full-time in Canada prior to submitting their permanent residence application. Schlossberg’s (1995) transition theory is an excellent framework to use to examine and better understand these transitions that international students go through in the immigration process and some of the challenges that it brings. It can also give us some insights into how student services can assist this particular population.

Transition is defined as “any event, or non-event, that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles” (Goodman et al., 2006, p. 33). It is a subjective experience, and is only defined as such by the perceptions of the person experiencing the transition. However, studying abroad, joining the workforce after finishing postsecondary education and immigration can be considered anticipated transitions by virtue of the planning and actions that are required to achieve these goals. Multiple transitions can add to the stress of the person going through them, and because CEC involves at least two transitions – and depending on the individual, the number may be even higher – it is important to recognize the significance of these transitions and how they may impact our international students.

One of the primary goals of Schlossberg’s (1995) theory is “operationalizing variability” (Evans et al., 2010, p. 213). In other words, the transition theory can be used to untangle and organize the web of factors and variables that are related to the transition itself, as well as the
coping mechanisms that are adopted by the individual. The theory considers transitions as an opportunity for growth and development, but a positive outcome is not guaranteed. In my study, I focused on the experience of former international students who had since their graduation applied for permanent residence in Canada. Some have obtained the status and can be assumed to have achieved a positive outcome, insofar as successful immigration is considered a positive thing. However, the outcome of two of the participants is as yet uncertain.

Central to the Schlossberg’s (1989) transition theory is the 4 S’s: Situation, self, support, and strategies. Evans et al. (2010) explained that these are all important factors to consider when students are approaching their transition, taking stock of their resources, and taking charge of the situation. Situation refers to the trigger, timing and duration of the transition, while also taking into account the individual’s assessment of the transition, such as how much control they have over the situation, how their roles are affected, and whether they have previous experience with similar transitions. Self is about the personal and demographic characteristics of the individual involved in the transition (e.g. socioeconomic status, age, maturity, gender, immigration status), as well as the psychological resources that are available to the individual while they cope with the transition. Support has three facets – types, functions, and measurement – and generally refers to the individual’s social support network (e.g. family, friends, resources available in the community). Strategies are coping mechanisms that the individual adopts in controlling their transition and managing the stress that is brought on by the transition, and can include information gathering, action or inaction, and psychological behaviour (e.g. stress management). This study explores all 4 S’s, in that the participants reflected on how their 4 S’s may have been improved (or not) as they sought help from student services during their immigration process. In
other words, I explore the way study participants’ resources may have been enriched because of their interactions with student services before, during, and after the transitions.

In exploring how student services personnel can integrate the transition theory into their work, Evans et al. (2010) reviewed two counselling models that Schlossberg et al. (1995) and Goodman et al. (2006) referred to in their writing. The first counselling model was proposed by Cormier and Hackney (1993), which involved five stages: relationship building, assessment, goal setting, interventions, and termination and follow-up. Because the model was originally designed for psychologists and counsellors, it has been criticized as being too clinical in the context of higher education (Evans et al., 2010). The second model as proposed by Egan (2007) was considered more suitable for student services, because it involved three general stages that any student services practitioner could use to address a wide range of students’ concerns: Exploration, understanding, and coping.

One of the criticisms for the Schlossberg’s transition theory is that there are not many psychometric instruments that are designed to measure the different variables involved in the transition and how they change during the process, thus limiting the possibilities of quantitative research that is prevalent in traditional psychological research in determining the theory’s validity (Evans et al., 2010). Because so much of the theory is about the individuals’ perspectives, and that it has not been applied in the study of various student groups, including international students, the qualitative, narrative inquiry research approach of the current study may help add to the literature and to the transition theory itself.

**International Students’ Experience with Student Services**

The current study concerns international students’ experience with student services that are provided by their universities as they plan and embark on their immigration journey. These
services enrich international students 4 S’s by helping students gain a deeper understanding of their situations and selves, and contributing to the support and strategies that pertain to the transitions that international students go through during this period. This section explores the current literature around international students’ experience with student services, which tends to focus on factors that lead to their (under-)utilization of available services. It also tends to centre on these students’ utilization of specific services. Indeed, since most of the literature comes from the field of psychology and counselling, many of the studies looked at students’ usage of health and counselling services that are available on campus.

For example, Mitchell, Greenwood, and Guglielmi (2007) found significant differences in the utilization pattern of the counselling centre between international and domestic students in the United States, as well as within the diverse international student population. They found that international students as a group tended to underutilize counselling services compared to their domestic peers. When these students did seek help, they were more likely to be hospitalized for psychiatric reasons, and use the services available at crisis hours. The researchers also found that therapists were less likely to terminate treatment at intake for international students, possibly reflecting their sensitivities towards the complex needs and challenges of international students.

Russell, Thomson, and Rosenthal (2008) found a similar trend in an Australian university, where international students were also underutilizing both health and counselling services because of three main reasons: (1) they did not think their problems were serious enough to warrant help-seeking; (2) they did not know about the services that were available; and (3) they had doubts or discomfort about using these services.

Other studies focused their analyses on cultural factors that influenced students’ help-seeking behaviour. These researchers often conducted their studies on international students from
specific nationalities or ethnicities. For example, researchers have investigated how some Asian cultural values (e.g. stigma around mental health issues) influenced the help-seeking behaviour of Korean international students (Lee, Ditchman, Fong, Piper & Feigon, 2014). In a study conducted by Ellis-Bosold and Thornton-Orr (2013), they found that Chinese international students lacked a personal sense of responsibility for their own health care needs and thus failed to seek help when they needed the services. Interestingly, the researchers in that study also found that because these Chinese students had a great sense of dependency on the international office of their university, they were more likely to attend programs organized by the health services that were at least in part sponsored by the international office. The dependency on the international office staff was so great that 17% of the respondents of that study said they would sooner contact someone from the international office than call 911 or the emergency departments should they encounter a medical emergency. This perfectly demonstrated the importance of trust and familiarity in international students’ help-seeking behaviour. The researchers went on to suggest that student services departments campus-wide should also find ways to collaborate and leverage the student networks that they each had access to, and gradually familiarize their international students to other services available on campus.

With regards to services outside of health and counselling, Fenton-Smith and Michael (2013) found that services related to academic success (e.g. language support, study skills workshops) proved to be much more popular with international students – particularly those from non-English speaking countries – than socially-oriented programs. Students generally had positive experiences with these services, even though the trialling of these services were mandatory for a core first-year course in this particular study. The most common complaint from
students in this study had to do with time constraints. For example, the students felt that the services were too infrequent or the sessions were not long enough.

In a study conducted by Roberts and Dunworth (2012), the researchers found that international students’ and student services personnel’s perceptions and experiences of the services to be mismatched. For example, student support staff felt that students needed to take more responsibility in their own learning, social development, and physical or emotional well-being by proactively seeking out service offerings that were relevant. Students, on the other hand, thought that the staff members were disinterested in their struggles. In instances where both students and staff agreed on what needed to be done, they sometimes disagreed on how the services should be provided. The researchers therefore asserted that student services personnel should communicate with students more often and more intentionally, so that their services could be more aligned with the students’ expectations and actual needs.

In another study that looked at the gaps between international students’ expectations and their perceptions of the quality of the services provided to them, Marriott, du Plessis, and Pu (2010) found that students wanted their institutions in New Zealand to improve services in areas pertaining to daily lives: accommodation, academic study, and social support network. They would also like to have more support in dealing with discrimination. Meanwhile, in South Africa, Govender, Veerasamy, and Noel (2012) also found that there were gaps between international students’ expectations and experiences of student support services on campus. Students wanted to see improvements in the following areas: Tangible deliverables (e.g. facilities and equipment, availability of services), reliability of services, responsiveness of these services to students’ needs, assurance that staff members were competent and that they were able to inspire confidence and trust in students, and finally, empathy shown by student services.
personnel. The South African researchers called for more resources to be spent on staff training and facility and service improvements, so that international students’ needs could be met.

The gap between international students’ expectations and the actual service offerings on campus is very real. To address this issue, Forbes-Mewett and Nyland (2013) argued that universities must provide adequate support to international students through adequate funding to various student support divisions that work with this student population. According to them, since Australian universities benefitted tremendously from the full-fee paying international students that they recruited, the institutions must bear the responsibilities of ensuring that these students were appropriately and adequately served. The researchers believed that universities were focusing their resources disproportionately on building and advancing their research agenda at the expense of student support services. They further noted the irony that international students who opted to attend highly ranked universities with premium fees might not be receiving the support that they expected and needed to thrive in these institutions.

Studies that investigate international students’ experience with student services on campus have until now mostly been conducted in Australia. Similar studies are scarce in Canada. The current study looks at international students’ experience with student services in general when they have a complex end-goal that is immigration. This study fills the literature gap by exploring why international students seek out specific services when they are pursuing immigration. The emphasis is on the students’ own agency and their deliberate selection of services used.

**Summary of Literature Review**

In this chapter, I provided the context in which individual international students’ lived experience could be situated. The macro political and social forces were first reviewed. I began
by describing how the agendas and main ideas of realism and neoliberalism converge, because the two ideologies share many similar characteristics and major actors. Realism and neoliberalism currently dominate our political discourses and shape the macrosystem of international students’ developmental ecology, as conceptualized by Renn and Arnold’s (2003) interpretation of Bronfenbrenner’s theory. The two ideologies influence national immigration policies, resulting in competitive immigration regimes around the world, where countries compete with each other for highly skilled labour and the brightest minds. An increasingly popular skilled migration strategy in competitive immigration regimes known as two-stepped immigration was introduced, and the CEC was presented as a Canadian example of two-stepped immigration strategies. These national policies and strategies are part of the international students’ exosystem.

The realist and neoliberal discourses also have an impact on how the role of the university is conceived in the society. Because of globalization and increased student mobility, as well as the university’s perceived role as a producer of human capital for the country, the issues of international student recruitment, retention, and national immigration policies have become more and more connected. To better understand the university’s role in a competitive immigration regime, I reviewed the ways university’s purposes and practices have changed in the current political climate, and the role university could play in the government bureaucracy. These institutional changes also help shape the international students’ exosystem.

Moving from the more macro forces to the more micro components in the picture, I then examined the experience of international students in Canadian universities. Factors that influence their decision-making (i.e. the push and pull factors) and some of the unique challenges that this group of students could face were reviewed. The structure and organization of student services in
the university, as well as their purposes, were then examined. These factors and structures provide the mesosystem within which international students can develop and learn through interactions with others in their immediate surroundings.

Schlossberg’s transition theory was introduced as a framework to understand the multiple transitions that international students applying for Canadian permanent residence – the individuals in Bronfenbrenner’s theory – were required to go through. Finally, literature around international students’ experience with student services was reviewed to evaluate the support that was available to this student population and the strategies that these adopted in their help-seeking behaviour. These activities and relationships of individual international students make up their microsystem.

With the literature and key concepts reviewed, I now explain the methodology adopted for this study.
CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of the lived experience of former international students through their immigration to Canada. It focuses on their experience with their universities’ student services; specifically, if and how these students were assisted and supported through the immigration process by the university. In this chapter, I detail the research methods that I adopted for the study. I provide justifications for the use of the qualitative, constructivist paradigm and the narrative inquiry approach. The research design is explained, as well as participant sampling criteria, recruitment process, and a description of the sample. The end of the chapter focuses on data collection and analysis, and addresses the limitations and ethical considerations that are relevant to this study.

Research Paradigm and Approach

The transitions that international students go through, as well as their experience of these transitions, are very personal and unique: Unique when compared to domestic students, but also when compared to other international students with different circumstances. International students’ temporary resident status in Canada, their distinct status within the higher education institution as defined by their differential fees and services, as well as the academic and socio-cultural adjustments that many of them must go through, all contribute to a set of circumstances that shapes their experiences in their universities and the society at large (Forbes-Mewett & Nyland, 2013).

According to Donmoyer (2008), the constructivist paradigm takes into account multiple realities as determined by specific contexts. It focuses on the “intentions, goals, and purposes” (Gage, 1989, p. 4) that are subjective. The emphasis of the constructivist paradigm is not only on the research participants’ actions and behaviours, but also on how meanings are associated with
these actions. Because international students’ experiences are situated within a specific context that is different from their peers’, the constructivist paradigm is particularly suited for the current study, which aims to explore international students’ individual experiences in-depth. This study adopts the constructivist paradigm in its methodology and data analysis.

Clandinin and Caine (2008) noted that narrative inquiry examined the experiences of individuals in their own context, which consists of their “place, temporality, and sociality” (n.p.). It is an approach that allows both the researchers and the participants to co-create the research space, wherein both parties can reflect on their own experiences and actions, and the participants are invited to be involved in the co-composition of field texts.

Similar to other qualitative studies, the goal of this study is not to “seek causal determination, prediction, and generalization of findings,” but to “seek instead illumination, understanding, and extrapolation to similar situations” (Hoepfl, 1997, as cited in Golafshani, 2003, p. 600). As such, this study has adopted the narrative inquiry approach to examine the research participants’ experiences as former international students in Canadian universities. It allows their stories to speak for themselves. With the objectives of universities and student services as well as the changing policy around immigration to Canada scrutinized in the literature review, I hope that the context provided – of larger institutional, social and political narratives – can act as the rich backdrop against which the participants’ stories can be situated.

Criteria and Process for Research Participant Recruitment

I chose not to interview current students who are still in the middle of their study and/or immigration process in the current study. Instead, I focused on the subjective realities as experienced by former international undergraduate students, who have since successfully applied for their Canadian permanent residence after their graduation from a Canadian university.
As a former international student who was involved in various student groups, I recruited participants through my own networks by snowball sampling. Noy (2008) noted that, “A sampling procedure may be defined as snowball sampling when the researcher accesses informants through contact information that is provided by other informants” (p. 330). Baltar and Brunet (2012) found that virtual snowball sampling using Facebook led to a higher response rate from potential study participants than traditional snowball techniques, especially with “hard-to-reach” populations. They explained that potential participants had more confidence in the researcher when they could access the researcher’s personal information (e.g. Facebook’s profile, mutual interest groups, etc.). As such, I also opted to recruit primarily through social media.

I started by tapping into two of my primary networks: Simon Fraser University (SFU) international student groups, and the international United World College (UWC) network. As a former international student at SFU, I have friends and acquaintances who have themselves immigrated to Canada using the CEC stream, or know people who have done so. I asked former and current international students leaders at SFU to help connect me with potential participants who met the criteria through their own networks. As for the UWC network, it was chosen because of its very active and diverse international alumni body. Many UWC alumni have chosen Canada as a study-abroad destination upon completing their International Baccalaureate diploma, and quite a few of them have decided to settle in Canada permanently.

I began recruiting research participants by personal email communications, posting messages on email listservs (e.g. Mountbatten UWC Alumni Electronic Group), as well as various social media avenues (e.g. LinkedIn and Facebook groups) (see Appendix A for recruitment notices and communication scripts, and Appendix B for a list of listservs and groups that I contacted to recruit participants). The recipients of these messages were then encouraged to
pass on the recruitment notice to people who they thought might be interested in participating in the study. Potential participants were given my contact information, so they could contact me directly if they had any question regarding the project or would like to participate.

In deciding the number of interviewees appropriate for this study, I referred to other similar narrative inquiries that aimed at investigating people’s lived experiences: Estefan (2008) interviewed five men for his doctoral thesis on self-harming in the gay community, while Kitchen (2006) worked intensively and exclusively with one teacher in his study about relationships in the school landscape. In a narrative inquiry, saturation of data is achieved through the depth of the stories told, and very often observations and data are collected with the participants physically present in an environment that is relevant to the topic of inquiry. Because the participants of this study have all left their alma maters at the time of the interview – they were asked to reflect on their past experiences outside of that environment – I was not able to get the kind of rich contextual data that would come with participants interacting with their immediate environments to which the data would be connected. To compensate for this potential lack of contextual data, I aimed to interview a few more people – around six to eight – than was done by others (Estefan, 2008; Kitchen, 2006). This would provide a wealth of data from which saturation in the students’ narratives could be reached, so that conclusions could be drawn.

Description of Sample

In the end, eight people expressed their interest in participating in this research study. Only six people met the participant selection criteria, and they were interviewed. They were all former international students who graduated from public Canadian universities with bachelor’s degrees. Since their graduation, they had all applied for Canadian permanent residence through the CEC immigration stream – four of the six interviewees had since attained their permanent
resident status. I summarize their demographic information in Table 1 in an effort to provide contexts to their stories and experiences. The participants of this research study are highly mobile, and their backgrounds are diverse. Pseudonyms are used throughout this document to protect their identities.

Alef is 24 years old. He is originally from Pakistan. Prior to coming to Canada, he completed his high school study in Hong Kong. He attended a large university in Ontario, where he obtained his degree in Human Biology and Economic Geography. Having graduated in 2012, he is currently working as a business analyst in the retail sector. He is waiting for CIC to make a decision on his permanent residence application.

Anna is a 28-year-old from the Philippines, and she completed her first bachelor’s degree in her home country. Canada was her first study-abroad destination, though she had worked abroad in China before. She graduated from a mid-sized university in British Columbia with a degree in Education. Since her graduation in 2012, she has been working as an early childhood educator. Like Alef, she is also awaiting CIC’s decision on her permanent residence application.

Bibi is 23 years old, and she is originally from Togo. She was the only Francophone student in this study, and lived in France for 17 years before coming to Canada for her undergraduate study. She graduated in 2011 from a large university in Québec with a degree in Economics. Since attaining her permanent resident status, she has enrolled in a graduate program at a large university in Ontario.

Cate is a 31-year-old from Indonesia, and she spent one year studying in a middle school in the United States before returning to her home country. She graduated from the same university as Anna in 2007 with a degree in Communication Studies, although when she first
arrived in British Columbia in 2001, she was enrolled in a community college. She is now a Canadian permanent resident, and is currently working as a graphic designer.

Harry is 30 years old, and originally from Colombia. He completed his high school study in the United States before coming to the same British Columbian university attended by Anna and Cate to pursue a degree in Engineering. Since his graduation in 2008, he has become a permanent resident in Canada, and is currently working as a software developer.

Kevin is a 31-year-old from the United Kingdom, and completed his high school study in Norway. He graduated from the same university in British Columbia as Anna, Cate and Harry in 2007. He majored in Earth Sciences, and was among the first 300 to obtain Canadian permanent residence through the CEC stream. He is currently employed as an environmental scientist.

Anna and Cate were the only two participants who included their non-Canadian spouses on their permanent residence applications. The other four participants all applied for their permanent residence as single individuals. None of the participants had children or other dependents.

**Data Collection**

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, which were conducted in-person or via Skype, depending on what was more convenient for the participants. In addition to being logistically impractical and expensive, I did not believe that in-person interviews set in the universities that the interviewees attended would add much contextual value and content to the study. This was because the interviewees had since graduated from their universities and, in some cases, moved to different parts of Canada. The study required interviewees to retroactively reflect on their lived experiences with the immigration process and their usage of student
services at their alma maters. It was not necessary for the interviewees to be on site at their universities for their memories of these events and decisions to be triggered.

Having experienced the university-workplace transition and the immigration process, the participants retroactively reflected on their experiences with the transitions and their universities’ student services, the challenges they faced, and the intentions behind the decisions that they made. The aim was to get a more complete narration of what was fruitful or what was unsuccessful about the experiences. As such, the participants for this study were former international students who had completed their undergraduate studies in Canadian universities, and had since applied for or attained their permanent residence in Canada using the CEC immigration stream.

The participants’ utilization of the student services at their alma maters was examined to see if and how these students were assisted in their immigration journey. Their experiences will provide insights into the sort of student services international students need in order to achieve certain goals that are crucial to their immigration process, and how the current services can be improved.

The interview questions were developed to answer the key research questions identified in the first chapter of this document. Appendix C lists all the interview questions that were asked. The interviews lasted for an hour each on average, with the longest being an hour and 22 minutes, and the shortest just under 40 minutes. In order to ensure that the data I collected reflected the participants’ complex and nuanced realities, participants in the study were asked how they arrived at the decision to migrate permanently to Canada. They had the opportunity to describe the requirements that they needed to meet in order to be eligible to apply for permanent
residence in Canada, and how they utilized the services offered at their universities to help them accomplish the tasks and meet these requirements.

The participants of this study were given the list of questions prior to start of the interviews so they could review them in advance. This was done for two main reasons. Firstly, the transitions that the interviewees had gone through were complex, involving many important and trivial decisions along the journey. Secondly, participants might want to share some stories or experience that were not covered by these questions. Giving them an opportunity to reflect on these questions beforehand helped facilitate their recall of certain events, as well as their ability to share their stories in a comprehensive way that would reflect their experience more accurately and holistically. It helped minimize any potential linguistic barrier and anxiety that some of the participants might have while recounting their experience and responding to questions in English in situ. The semi-structured interview format also allowed room for questions that arose during the interviews to be answered and addressed.

Audio recordings of the interviews were made and securely kept on electronic devices, and the interviews were then transcribed. Interviewees had the opportunity to review their own transcripts to ensure their accuracy. They also had a chance to add further comments post-interview as they saw fit.

**Data Analysis**

As each interview was conducted and transcribed, I began initial coding to detect themes that seemed to be emerging. This allowed me to begin exploring or following up on these themes in subsequent interviews. When all the interviews were completed, and all the transcripts were coded, I returned to review all the transcripts to make final adjustments to the codes to ensure that coding was done consistently across all interviews. Major themes that emerged from the data
and that pertained to the research questions were identified and organized to be presented in the findings chapter of this document.

This approach to data analysis that happens during and after data collection is described by Kvale (1996) as the strategy of condensation, which allows the researcher to interpret and code the meaning of the interviewee’s responses during and after the interview, inform the interviewee of these interpretations and codes, and give the interviewee an opportunity to reply. Follow-up questions were asked during the interviews until the key themes were distilled and identified for each of the questions. Once the themes were identified through condensation, interpretation was possible through referring back to the conversation with the interviewees for elaborations and quotes, as well as the comments that the interviewees provided after the interview at the field text collaboration stage.

It is worth noting again that participants had the opportunity to review their transcript, and collaborated and commented on the field notes pertaining to their individual case. Once the common themes were identified, all six stories were connected into a narrative whole in the Findings chapter to illustrate the lived experience of all the study participants. The interviewees again had the opportunity to comment on the draft of this final write-up, which added to the trustworthiness of the data analysis process, making the final analysis more credible. Following the advice of Clandinin and Caine (2008), sharing the transcripts and the themes with participants encouraged the co-construction of meaning that is central to narrative inquiry, and reassured me as the researcher and the presenter of the data that my interpretation and analysis of the interviewees’ lived experience accurately reflected their lives. All the exchanges and interactions during and after the interview or data collection process, as well as the constant data analysis that occurs with condensation, were really in line with the narrative inquiry approach.
Trustworthiness of Data

Given my own experience as a former international student who has attained the Canadian permanent residence after graduation from my undergraduate degree, it was important for me to engage in critical reflections throughout the research process. I was careful not to let my experiences, values and biases obscure the participant’s voices during the interviews, so that their stories could actively drive the process of inquiry. For example, the participants of this study were all made aware of my own background prior to the interviews, and they were constantly encouraged to challenge my assumptions, and actively share with me their perspectives throughout the interview process.

This self-checking allowed me as a researcher to engage in the kind of critical self-reflections that were necessary during the research process. The active role that the participants played in this collaboration also ensured that their experience and views were prominently represented in the text. For example, all interviewees were encouraged to review the transcripts of their interviews and, more importantly, the way their ideas and messages were captured in the write-up of my findings to ensure that my understanding and representation of their experiences were accurate and trustworthy.

Furthermore, in accordance with the narrative inquiry approach, wherein participants are encouraged and given the space to collaborate on the contents of the field text, the interviewees had multiple opportunities to co-compose the field text by responding or adding to the interview transcript post-interview as Clandinin and Caine (2008) suggested. As mentioned earlier, interviewees were encouraged to read the draft of the Findings chapter to ensure that their experiences were accurately reflected, and they were invited to reflect on it and send me feedback during the writing process. This back-and-forth allowed for multiple interactions
between myself as the research and the interviewees, which encouraged the interviewees to both reflect on the interview questions but also the interview process, thus ensuring the trustworthiness of the data and their representation in the final report.

**Ethical Considerations**

This study was subject to the University of Toronto’s ethics review process. Approval from the Research Ethics Board was obtained before the project proceeded.

The interviewees were fully informed of the purpose of the study before giving their consent to participate. As mentioned above, they were given the opportunity to review the questions prior to the actual interviews. The interviewees were made fully aware of their right to withdraw from the study, or to not answer questions that made them feel uncomfortable, at any time during the interview without negative consequences. All interviewees signed an informed consent form (see Appendix D) before the interviews and the recording began. For those who were interviewed via Skype, an electronic copy of the consent form was sent to them prior to the interview, which they all signed, scanned and emailed back to me for the record.

To protect the interviewees’ confidentiality, pseudonyms are used in this document. Other identifying information, such as the Canadian universities where they completed their undergraduate studies, are also be kept confidential. All the raw data, including notes from the interviews and audio recordings, were encrypted and stored securely on a computer that is password-protected. In accordance with university guidelines and research protocol, the raw data will be discarded five years after the completion of the project. All necessary precautions were taken to protect the privacy and the confidentiality of the individuals and their information. All communications with the interviewees (e.g. the scheduling of interview, the exchange of field notes) were conducted through my secure University of Toronto email account.
As the immigration process can at times be onerous and wearisome, and some students might have better experiences with the student services of their institutions than others, I was aware of the slight possibility that some participants could get upset during the interviews as they reflected on their past experiences. Of course, the possibility of this happening was minimized because participants had the opportunity to review the questions beforehand. Still, prior to each interview, I researched local resources for counselling services in the event that any participant should get upset during the interview. Fortunately, none of the interviewees required this kind of referral.

**Limitations of the Study**

Narrative inquiry honours the individual’s experience, and reminds readers that these stories are important and unique (Caine & Estefan, 2011). While this study provides valuable insights into the lived experience of a certain group of international students, it is important to bear in mind that the results and findings from this study are not meant to be generalizable to the larger population – generalizability is not the intended outcome of narrative inquiry. The goal is to learn from the uniqueness of the individuals’ stories and identify common threads of their experiences, which can then inform policy making and practice. The convenient snowball sampling method that I adopted to recruit participants for the study as well as the small sample size also meant that this sample may not be representative of the general international student population.

Another limitation that is important to acknowledge is the fact that these interviews were conducted outside of the immediate context of immigration, i.e., participants were asked to recall and reflect on their past experiences. The elapsed time may affect the details and events that the participants recalled. With that said, there were advantages associated with interviewing former
international students who had gone through the process as discussed earlier. To compensate for
the potential loss of information associated with the elapsed time, I decided to increase the
number of participants in this study.

My own experience as a former international student who successfully attained Canadian
permanent residence may also bias the way I interpreted the results of this study, which was why
the sharing of field notes and transcribed texts with the participants, as well as inviting them to
comment and co-construct the meaning of the data, were important steps to take in order to
safeguard the trustworthiness of the data and the analysis. Where it is appropriate for me to share
my own experience and journey in this document, I do so with explicit acknowledgement that
those experience and journey are my own and not the participants’.
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Choosing Canada as a Study-Abroad Destination

Every international student’s journey begins with their decision to leave their home country to study abroad. In this section, I examine some of the factors at the national, systemic/institutional, and personal levels that influenced our interviewees’ decisions to come to Canada for their undergraduate studies.

At the national level, when asked why they ultimately chose to come to Canada, the interviewees tended to describe their decisions in terms of push factors from home countries, push factors from other potential host countries, and then pull factors of Canada. In deciding to leave their home countries, some of the interviewees cited the limited availability of economic opportunities at home as their primary concern. For example, Harry and Alef, who both came from developing countries, believed that overseas study and work experience would open up better career opportunities at home or abroad, particularly for someone with a degree from a recognized institution in a Western country.

For others, political instability at home was the main motivator in convincing them to leave and seek a better life overseas. For example, the tension between different ethnic groups was a major push factor in Cate’s decision to leave her home country. She vividly recalled:

I was sent here […] because there was, um, a political situation in my country in 1998, where there was a big riot, and then there was the whole, um, targeting of the ethnic Chinese, especially the females were getting raped and killed. […] That riot was just like one of those tipping points where, you know, to keep their daughters safe, [my parents] just sent us abroad.
Having decided to leave home and study abroad, the interviewees then began weighing the pros and cons of the different host countries. As described earlier, the participants of the current study are all highly mobile individuals: Five out of six had previous study-abroad experience outside of their home countries and Canada, while the sixth had some work-abroad experience. So, what made them decide against other countries that traditionally play host to large populations of international students?

Not surprisingly, most of the interviewees had considered going to the United States, as it is one of the largest receivers of international students in the world. However, Kevin and Anna both decided against going there because of the high costs (e.g. tuition fees, general living costs, etc.) involved in such a move. For Cate, who was considering the United States and Australia as potential destinations, the balance of cost and the quality of the education she would receive was her main concern. She felt that in order to attend what she called “Tier 1” institutions in either country, she would “have to pay astronomical fees”.

Economic push factors were not limited to the costs involved in the study-abroad experience – they can also be about the general economic outlook of the host country. For example, Bibi, who had been studying in France for a long time and had the option of staying there for her undergraduate study, decided to leave because there was an economic crisis looming in Europe.

As for Alef and his parents, the fact that the relationship between Pakistan and the United States had traditionally been volatile played a role in him deciding not to go there. For example, he explained that some of his friends had trouble acquiring entry visas and study/work permits for the United States. These political concerns loomed particularly large for Alef’s parents, who wanted him to have a good experience overseas.
As a country, what made Canada an attractive destination? Alef, Bibi and Cate all referred specifically to the relative ease of working and settling in Canada after graduation, and cited the option to immigrate as a factor that influenced their decision. Beyond that, however, none of the interviewees had really specific things to say about life in Canada when they were deciding on their destinations. For instance, Harry only knew Canada as a Western country with a good general reputation, while Bibi described it as a “hot country,” in that it was very popular among young people who were studying abroad.

To understand why the interviewees ultimately picked Canada, systemic/institutional factors need to be considered. Most of the interviewees cited the quality of the programs and the reputation of their universities as the main pull factors that convinced them to come. Alef and Bibi were attracted by the fact that their universities were highly ranked and regarded internationally, while Cate appreciated the fact that most universities in Canada were public institutions, and that the quality of the education offered seemed on par across the board.

One of the reasons why the interviewees were quite informed about Canadian universities was that many of the institutions did a good job at promoting themselves overseas. Alef attended an information session organized by his university in Hong Kong, where he was studying, and he was able to speak to recruitment representatives from the university. Cate visited a Canadian Education Centre in Indonesia, where she was able to learn more about different institutions in Canada. Both Anna and Bibi commented on the ease of finding information about their universities and programs of study online. This was essential as international students could not visit the campus in person and see what the universities had to offer.

The availability of scholarships and financial aid were key factors that attracted Harry, Kevin and Alef to their institutions. Without these financial incentives, they probably would not
have attended their universities – they might have gone to other host countries that could offer them better financial packages (e.g. the United States) or stayed at home – as they would not be able to afford to study and live in Canada.

The flexibility of the Canadian higher education system was something that Kevin and Alef really appreciated. For example, Kevin left the United Kingdom because he did not have a good experience with its higher education system. In his own words:

You have to decide very, very early on what you want to do, and you apply to university for a specific degree. Uh, and then if it -- later you discover that it doesn’t suit you, it’s very difficult to change to -- or to kind of customize your -- your university experience.

Indeed, within the liberal arts model offered by his Canadian university, Kevin eventually became really interested and decided to major in Earth Sciences after taking one of the courses by chance. The breadth of the program offerings, combined with the opportunities for students to explore different fields of study through elective courses, gave students like Kevin and Alef the possibility to figure out their interests and pick their majors in a more informed way.

Of course, at the personal level, the interviewees also had their own reasons for choosing to study abroad and picking Canada as a destination. As discussed earlier, many of them wanted to gain overseas experience so they could have better career prospects, but for some students like Alef, Anna and Harry, they also went abroad out of a personal desire to see the rest of the world, experience something new, and learn from different cultures.

In contrast, Cate and Bibi came to Canada because it offered a certain degree of familiarity and comfort. For Cate, having previously studied in the United States and enjoyed the experience, she felt that Canada could offer a cultural environment that was familiar to her – one in which she thought she would feel more comfortable. Bibi, as the only Francophone participant
in this study who was not totally confident with her competence in English, wanted to find a Francophone study-abroad destination, and Canada was it.

Existing social support networks also helped clinch the decision to come to Canada for some of the interviewees. The presence of friends and family helped assure Anna, Cate and Kevin that they would be well supported in Canada. These social networks also helped provide the interviewees with first-hand information about living and studying in Canada.

**Choosing to Settle in Canada as Permanent Residents**

There was indeed much overlap between the reasons the interviewees chose to come to Canada for their undergraduate studies and the reasons they opted to settle in the country and apply for permanent residence. However, the interviewees overwhelmingly cited personal reasons when asked why they decided to apply for permanent residence and settle in Canada, as compared to the more general factors about Canada’s economic and political environments that they cited when asked why they wanted to study in Canada. After spending several years studying in the country, all of them have developed personal relationships in Canada: new colleagues, friends, and spouses. These social networks fostered a sense of belonging and comfort that helped the interviewees feel welcomed and at home in Canada. As Harry put it:

> When you think about your routine, the day-to-day, uh, lifestyle that you -- that you have, you -- you realize that you end up hanging out with Canadians, watching hockey game, [...] learning how to ski, how to skate, um, getting used to the winter time, [...] you realize all these things that you -- you have acquired. And you change -- you’ve changed. Um, you feel like you --. Yeah, you’re part of Canada, and [...] Canada has become a part of you as well.
As these roots became stronger and the interviewees became more grounded in Canada, ties to their own home countries became weaker. However, Kevin and Anna were quick to point out that they were not unhappy in their home countries, and that they did not have a desire to avoid their family and friends back home. They have simply established comfortable and independent lives for themselves in Canada, and in doing so, the country has become their new home.

Alef, Harry, Kevin and Anna also wanted the freedom from having to renew their immigration paper work (e.g. work permits) every so often in order to maintain their temporary residence – a process that can be onerous for students from certain countries. They hoped that Canadian permanent residence would give them a sense of stability, which helped them focus more of their energy on pursuing their other life goals, such as advancing their career, pursuing further education, and continuing to travel the world as Canadians. Since the CEC immigration stream existed, and the eligibility requirements were less restrictive than the other two economic class immigration streams – Federal Skilled Worker and Provincial Nominee Programs – and the process of application was relatively straightforward and convenient, the four really thought of applying for permanent residence as the natural next step in their lives.

According to the interviewees, certain features about the Canadian society made them feel welcomed and at home. Harry pointed to the fact that cities in Canada were culturally diverse, and the Canadian people were generally quite welcoming to immigrants. Cate, on the other hand, appreciated Canadians for their more direct and assertive communication styles as compared to Indonesians.

All interviewees, particularly those from developing countries, referred to the quality of life in Canada as an important factor that persuaded them to settle here. For example, Alef really
liked the fact that Canadians had good access to education and health care, while Anna admired the well-established infrastructure in the communities that helped make daily life easier, particularly the libraries, playgrounds, and the transportation systems. For Bibi, this quality of life manifests itself in the world of employment, where she observed that people were generally professional and courteous, and they were able to maintain a good level of work-life balance. Evidently, quality of life means different things for each individual.

As discussed earlier, economic and political factors were important considerations when the interviewees chose to come to Canada as their study-abroad destinations. These factors held true and remained influential when the interviewees had to decide if they wanted to stay after graduation. The only difference was that after living in the country for a few years, they now had a better and more nuanced understanding of the inner workings of the Canadian economic and political systems.

For example, Bibi and Harry both learned very quickly that employers preferred to hire permanent residents and citizens, so they would not have to justify the need to hire foreign workers in the onerous labour market opinion process when the worker applies for their work permit. For those wanting to pursue graduate studies or a career in research, Alef learned that Canadian permanent resident status or citizenship would mean less school fees and access to more funding opportunities and grants. Anna also mentioned her desire to keep and use the large amount of education tax credits that she had accumulated through the years, as she had been paying international student fees.

For Kevin, the career path that he was on was intimately linked to his love for the great outdoors. As an environmental scientist, he said that one of the main reasons he chose to stay in Canada was because of its physical environment and the natural beauty of its West Coast. He
conceded that had he moved back home or to another country, he might not be able to find work that would both fit his professional training and satisfy his love for outdoor activities.

Lastly, many of the benefits of settling in Canada discussed in this section are really made possible by its stable democracy: universal access to education and health care, good basic infrastructure, safety and relative political stability – all of which were commented on by the interviewees, particularly those from developing countries. The fact that the Canadian government has an immigration system that favours skilled workers is something that obviously all the interviewees could appreciate, as they took advantage of the CEC stream to apply for permanent residence.

**The Process of Immigration and Decisions Involved**

Immigration can be a long and arduous journey, involving many steps and decisions along the way. As all the interviewees of the study acknowledged, the process of becoming a Canadian permanent resident was complicated. Combined with the fact they were also transitioning out of university and into the workforce during this period, many found this to be a process filled with a sense of insecurity and uncertainty.

Since this research study explores students’ experience with student services, and how the students use these services and resources to navigate the immigration process, it is crucial to understand this journey and the students’ needs from their own perspectives. In this section, I explore some of the decisions that the interviewees made and steps they took as they considered their options and planned their immigration.

Immigration is a major commitment in one’s life planning. As a few of the interviewees explained, sometimes other life plans revolved around the central goal of immigration, while other times immigration revolved around or fit in with other plans. For example, Alef gave up
the option of pursuing graduate studies right after finishing his undergraduate degree, and went straight into the workforce. He did this because he wanted to apply for Canadian permanent residence in the most expedient way possible, and post-graduation employment was the most straightforward and quickest route to the path of permanent residence. However, the permanent resident status was not his end goal. Indeed, Alef acknowledged that immigration was a step he took to open up graduate studies opportunities in the future, since permanent residents would have more access to different funding opportunities and grants.

As Cate explained, immigration and general life planning were “one in the same, because I planned to have a life here”. All the interviewees were aware of their need to balance and prioritize these different life goals that could sometimes compete with each other. They must find a way to achieve these goals in a sequentially logical way, while troubleshooting unexpected issues that could arise.

For example, Bibi pointed out the effect student protests in Quebec had on her international peers, whose graduation and immigration plans were delayed because universities were shut down for a prolonged period in 2012. Anna also spoke of the stress that she underwent: The CIC changed the occupation requirements of the CEC program when she was preparing to file her application, so she had to re-establish her eligibility midway through the process. These are just some of the unexpected changes that international students and permanent residence applicants must deal with as they embark on their journey.

The participants of this study all started thinking about and planning for their immigration very early on in their study-abroad journey: Harry said he started seriously considering it in the second year of his study, while Bibi and Cate thought about that before they even set foot in Canada. Everyone was looking for the fastest way to immigrate, and in the
meantime, they must be diligent in maintaining their legal status as temporary residents (e.g. renewing and following the conditions of work permits).

One of the ways to speed up the immigration process was to choose the right immigration class based on one’s personal situation. For example, Kevin had considered applying for permanent residence through the Skilled Worker Program and the Provincial Nominee Program – both economic-class immigration programs – before the Canadian Experience Class came into effect. As one of the first 300 applicants, Kevin was able to attain his permanent resident status within four months.

Another advantage of the CEC stream over other immigration programs, as Kevin pointed out, was that once you qualified for the program, you could not disqualify: Unlike sponsorship by a spouse or an employer, the immigration application was not contingent on the ongoing relationship between the applicant and the spouse/employer. This feature about CEC, which allowed applicants to apply for permanent residence independently, was something that many participants of the study appreciated.

As noted in the literature review, to qualify for the CEC stream, applicants must have the equivalent of at least one year of full-time work experience after their graduation. Moreover, the work experience must fall under Level 0, A, or B within the National Occupation Classification (NOC) system. Some occupations also have caps in the number of permanent residence applications it can accept. Thus, it is understandable that immigration planning involves career decision-making, including academic planning.

For example, Anna had to strategically find work that would fall into the right NOC category, or at least classify her work under the NOC system in a way that would fit the CEC requirements. For Kevin, he switched his major from Music to Earth Sciences, which he thought
would help him access more employment opportunities. Both Harry and Kevin also had to ensure that not only were they fulfilling their program requirements when they were choosing their courses, but that their courses would allow them to register in their respective professional bodies post-graduation, so they could be employed in their fields.

A few of the interviewees also mentioned the importance of finding supportive employers to see them through the immigration process. Harry was lucky to work for a company that provided him access to immigration lawyers and offered to pay his applications fees, which helped reduce the stress. Others like Kevin and Cate were less fortunate. Their employers were reluctant to provide supporting documents that would aid their applications, and both of them ended up consulting with lawyers on their own to move the process forward.

Because of all these considerations and potential hurdles, Alef said he felt the pressure to accept the first job offer that came to him right out of school, and stay in that position until he attained his permanent residence. It discouraged him from high-risk career moves, such as entrepreneurship.

In addition to the logistics of immigration application, career planning, and its related academic planning, it is worth pointing out the reality that some permanent residence applicants also have to think about family planning. Both Cate and Anna included their partners on their applications. Indeed, Anna married her husband before they submitted their joint permanent residence application, furthering illustrating the logistics and life planning that some must consider when deciding to immigrate.

**On-Campus Services and Resources Used**

Given the complex web of decisions and planning that international students must make when they are applying for Canadian permanent residence, I asked the participants of this study...
to describe the on-campus services and resources they used to help themselves navigate through the process. The interviewees also explained why they approached these services and resources in the first place.

The variety of the services used showed the resourcefulness and the agency of the interviewees, who were all keenly aware of how these different pieces fit together to help with their life planning. It is also important to recognize how connected these services are, even though the way they are described below can seem somewhat disparate and decentralized. The participants of this study certainly acknowledged the potential or actual cross-departmental collaborations that some of these departments could engage in. For example, some interviewees suggested that international offices could collaborate with student-run peer groups to promote different services to international students. Another possible partnership was between international offices and career centres, which interviewees suggested could co-host workshops about Canadian job search strategies specifically for international students. This section explores the services and resources that played a role in the interviewees’ immigration planning process.

**Peer Networks and Student Groups**

Most of the interviewees discussed the importance of peer mentoring or advising in helping them navigate the university bureaucracy and immigration process, particularly since universities’ ability to provide any kind of immigration-related advice was very limited under CIC rules – a fact that all interviewees were aware of and acknowledged. Not only did international peers help inform each other of the most updated immigration requirements, they also acted as a source of information for those looking for assistance in other areas, such as academic planning, employment search, or just general advice about settling in Canada. Peer networks can be a tremendous source of information and referral.
Peer networks could be official (e.g. peer educators affiliated with various on-campus student services) or informal (e.g. friends, student-run clubs and associations). Alef and Cate had both previously held student leadership positions in student-run groups on their campuses – the Pakistani Student Federation and the International Students’ Group, respectively – and they both spoke of how natural peer advising was among friends and how wide-ranging the topics of discussion could be. They believed that peer networks provided a safe environment where students could get their needs met and questions answered, particularly in areas that universities’ student services could not assist with, such as immigration. Others, like Harry, felt that his international peers were able to relate to his situations and challenges better, since many of them would have experienced these issues first-hand.

These student-run groups and peer networks also contributed to the overall campus life, as international students were often encouraged by their friends to get involved in different groups and clubs. Peers could also act as a great source of information about university-run services as they told each other of useful resources available on campus.

Indeed, Alef, Cate and Harry all encouraged universities to do more to support these peer networks – perhaps student services could reach out to existing peer networks and student groups for opportunities to collaborate. Alef and Harry were especially keen for universities to develop formal programs to connect current international students with international alumni, so students could learn from the experience of those who had successfully navigated the Canadian system, whether that meant employment, immigration, or settlement in Canada. These connections could also help new graduates navigate what Alef called “the vagueness after you graduate”.

That said, Anna warned that sometimes students could get bad information from their peers. In her case, because her friend did not need re-entry visa to enter Canada and never
mentioned that to her, she assumed that she would not need it either. As a result, she was once sent back to the Philippines from the border. This is why services that are provided by personnel in various university departments – personnel who are accountable to a certain professional standard – play a crucial role in ensuring that international students receive quality advice and have access to credible resources.

**International Office**

Another service that most interviewees really took advantage of was, naturally, the international office of their universities, given the mandates and purview of this particular department. It is a natural entry point for many international students who are looking for guidance on anything related to their university life. In fact, Cate explicitly referred to the in loco parentis role that international students often projected onto their international offices thusly:

> Like, it’s -- it’s equivalent to your parents essentially, um, in a way, that you could go there for anything that you don’t understand. They would be able to, like --. If they cannot do it themselves, they would point you to the right direction, but most of the time, they would actually take care of it, or they would help you through it.

As mentioned before, the inability of international offices to give personalized immigration advice to international students was understood and accepted by all interviewees. However, some of the interviewees did attend information sessions that were regularly organized by their international offices on such topics as pathways to permanent residence and citizenship in Canada, and they did depend on their international office as a source of information and general advice on temporary status renewal (e.g. forms for study or work permit renewal, application for entry visa).
When crises and emergency situations arose about an international student’s temporary status, the international office often had to step in. For example, when Anna was barred from entry into Canada and returned to the Philippines because she did not have a re-entry visa, the international office at her university did try to help her troubleshoot. Even though they could not help her with that specific incident, they did help refer her to relevant information in a timely manner.

International offices were also important in facilitating certain settlement challenges that interviewees faced: They could provide limited housing and homestay arrangements for selected students like in Cate’s university, coordinate international student orientations in which Alef learned how to navigate the university system and the Canadian society in general, or organize tax filing workshops for international students like Anna. International offices also organized academic exchange and study-abroad programs, which Bibi took advantage of.

Interestingly, Cate described her experience with the international office at her community college as being very different from that at her university. She pointed out how the former was more holistic in their approach in guiding the students through the entire institution by making proper referrals, while the latter was more focused on helping students with specific concerns, such as renewing permits and visas:

They’re used to dealing with people who come from very, very different background. That they had -- they felt the need -- like, like, they took it upon them to give [students] a full service. […] To a large extent, they would be the main guide, like they’re just the guide to help the international students. You can go there for anything. […] If they cannot do it themselves, they would point you to the right direction, but most of the time, they would actually take care of it, or they would help you through it. […] It’s a very,
very different mindset from the university, where they would bounce you around from
department to department to department, and you have to, um, know how to navigate the
entire system.

Cate’s experience with two different international offices highlighted how different institutions
and staff could interpret the role of their departments differently, resulting in different models of
service delivery and thus, student experience and satisfaction.

**Career Services**

Securing employment is a key requirement for permanent residence application through
the CEC immigration stream. As such, five of the interviewees explicitly discussed their
experiences with the different career services provided on their campuses. These services could
be provided by a variety of departments: Career centres, co-operative education (co-op) offices,
human resources, as well as faculty student unions and even faculty members.

Co-op coordinators played an important role in Cate’s journey and really shaped her
university experience. They helped with her “transitioning from academic life to real life” by
connecting Cate to the community outside of the university, including employers and
professional associations, for networking and job opportunities. As an Engineering student, co-
coop was a mandatory academic requirement for Harry. Indeed, at the time of the interview, he was
still working for the company with which he completed his co-op work term, and that company
was very supportive in helping him through the immigration process. The one-on-one advising
helped students like Cate and Harry with their individual concerns, such as resume writing.

In addition, career services provided resources such as books on job search and career
planning, which enabled students to conduct labour market information research on their own.
They also organized events that helped connect students to the work place, including Backpack
to Briefcase seminars with industry or employer panel discussions, job fairs, and networking events. Job fairs, in particular, were key in helping Alef and Kevin secure their post-graduation employment.

**Academic and Faculty Advising**

In addition to securing employment, graduating from a program at a recognized institution was also an important requirement of the permanent residence application process. Some interviewees actively sought help to ensure that they would succeed academically, or at least that they were taking all the courses required for graduation.

Both Cate and Kevin described their university experience as driven by the faculty or program they were in. Cate’s helpful and friendly academic advisors, in particular, “went above and beyond their call of duty,” and were crucial in keeping her on track by helping her register in classes that she was not able to register for herself. Thanks to their assistance, Cate was able to finish her program on time and not take and pay for extra courses.

Others like Alef and Kevin relied more on their faculty members for academic and career advice: Alef had extensive discussion with his professors about the prospect of graduate school in the future, while Kevin secured on-campus employment in the field of Earth Sciences through his professor, which helped him gain valuable experience in his field.

**Financial Aid**

The availability of scholarships and financial aid was shown to be a major pull factor that influenced the participants of this study to come and study in Canada, with Kevin saying that the scholarship “was the reason I was there in the first place,” and Harry stating that without his aid, he “wouldn’t have been able to graduate.” Understandably, some interviewees benefited greatly from the services provided by the financial aid office.
As Cate said, the availability of financial aid provided international students the peace of mind that they needed to focus on their course work and finish their degree, which was a major step in their immigration process. As a recent study suggested, the top three reasons affecting international students’ retention – as perceived by students rather than educators – were all related to money: Lack of access to jobs or internships, unaffordability, and unavailability of scholarships (Fischer, 2014). The importance of financial aid in international students’ lives is not to be underestimated by university administrators.

Registrar

The permanent residence application process requires applicants to submit a variety of documents to prove their degree completion, demonstrate their work history, and establish stable physical presence in Canada. To that end, the registrar’s office was a resource cited by Alef and Kevin as being useful in their immigration journey. It provided credible documents (e.g. transcripts, registration letters) that international students could use to prove their status in Canada for different immigration applications, from permanent residence to temporary status renewal.

Other Student Life Services

Health and Wellness. CIC requires all permanent residence applicants to pass a physical exam to prove their health. As such, Anna, Cate and Kevin really appreciated the presence of health and counselling services, as well as the athletics and recreation programs, on campus. These services and programs helped them maintain their general health and well-being, which gave them the strength to navigate the university life and the immigration process. They also appreciated how easy and convenient it was for them to access these services because of their locations on campus.
Residence. Alef pointed out that lots of international students stayed at on-campus residences when they began their studies due to the difficulty associated with finding housing from abroad. Because of this, residences are excellent places to promote services and programs for international students. He himself lived in a residence where seminars and workshops were hosted regularly to inform international students of different opportunities, including pathways to permanent residence.

Library. Anna was particularly appreciative of the services that the library had to offer. The resources and services available at the library – something that were apparently not available to her to the same extent in the Philippines – really helped her succeed in her research and studies. Cate also used the library to do research for both her studies and, indirectly, her immigration and career planning.

Experience with Student Services

Having explored the student services that the interviewees used when they were planning their immigration, and the reasons behind them utilizing these on-campus resources, this section discusses their experience with these services and resources. The interviewees were also asked to provide suggestions on how the services and programs could be improved at their universities, and how student services personnel could work with all international students more effectively. Their responses touched on four broad areas: availability of services, students’ awareness of these resources, quality of the services/resources provided, and the universities’ role as advocates of international students. These four areas are explored in more detail in this section.

Availability of Services

For a service or resource to be helpful, it first has to exist. The broad range of services and resources that the interviewees utilized were explored in the previous section. The
interviewees were generally appreciative of the fact that these services and resources were available on campus, and that they could be accessed easily both on site and online. Some of the notable services and resources that were available to the participants of this study included access to peer advising, limited one-on-one advising and information sessions organized by international offices regarding temporary resident status application/renewal, and career services such as job fairs and access to online job boards.

All interviewees acknowledged that universities were prevented from advising students individually on their permanent residence applications because of CIC rules. As Cate said, “Their hands are tied. They could imply, they could insinuate, but they could not give you direct advice.” That said, Harry mentioned that he would like to see his university organize more general information sessions on how to renew study and work permits, as well as pathways through which international students could apply for permanent residence.

Alef and Harry also identified an important gap in service, and that was helping international students connect with international alumni. As discussed in the previous section, peer connections were very important to our interviewees, who gathered much information and received much support from their friends and colleagues. Alef noted the role that the alumni office could play in facilitating these connections:

I think, like, our Alumni Office could, um, contribute in this, and specifically for resident -- uh, permanent residence applications. If you -- when you’re a student, if you’re in a cultural club, you can only speculate and maybe have some alumni there who can help out, guide the process and prepare you for that. But still, alumni who have graduated, who have worked, and who have applied, and who have gotten their citizenship/PR [permanent residence], who can be extremely helpful in uh, telling the students and
helping students out if they have any questions on this. So the Alumni Office, if they have these people in contact, if they volunteer to, uh, support the students -- uh, current students, I think that would be really helpful.

Sometimes, gaps in services could be a result of a perceived lack of demand from students on the part of the universities; other times, even if the services were available, international students may not be eligible for them because of their temporary resident status. For example, Kevin noted that his university did not offer the co-op program in the Earth Sciences department, speculating that this was because:

They always saw it as unnecessary, because it was technically so easy for students to get these summer jobs doing mining exploration. Um… And so they never really had any for -- And that, you know, ends up being effectively the same as Co-op, except you’re not doing it through the university, and you don’t have to pay any fees for it.

While the absence of co-op placement opportunities was not an issue for domestic Earth Sciences students, who had the freedom to accept off-campus job offers and earn valuable work experience any time, it presented a challenge for Kevin, who did not have access to an open off-campus work permit at the time because the program was unavailable. Of course, this has since changed, and international students can now work off-campus with the appropriate permits. Still, for students like Kevin, even with the abundance of off-campus work opportunities in the field, they were unable to participate in any internship or work placement with off-campus employers that could provide them with valuable work experience and professional connections.

**Timeliness of services.** Interviewees also commented on the timeliness of the services and resources available to them. The timing at which these services and resources are provided needs to make sense. Some services are best provided to students early. For example, Kevin
believed that students should be introduced and granted access to academic advising early on in their program, particularly for fields of study where graduates must meet certain course requirements to register with professional bodies in order to practice. As he explained:

I know some people that went through their whole degree and graduated with their Earth Sciences degree, and then discovered that they don’t quite meet the requirements for registration as a professional geoscientist, because they missed, like, um -- they needed, like, um -- it could be a science course, or they needed uh, something -- something trivial, that you didn’t tick all the boxes. Um, so then they have to go back and take that one class in order to qualify, uh, for the registration. And that’s just because they didn’t plan. Like, they didn’t know about those requirements early enough in their degree to be able to plan to include those courses.

Since employment in skilled occupations is a requirement for permanent residence applicants of the CEC stream, a delay in professional registration and thus the inability to practice in one’s field will seriously affect an international student’s immigration process.

Another resource that the interviewees thought important to share with students early on was information regarding immigration. For instance, Bibi found the international student orientation at her university to be the most helpful resource, because it introduced her to the different immigration options right at the beginning of her journey:

When I first arrived in Canada in 2008, we did the international orientation. So they already explained at international orientation everything about immigration: That when we graduate, we can apply for the -- the work permit post-diploma, worth three years. So already I knew about that. And they explained everything, they gave the links of the website of Immigration Canada.
As Alef said, it was important to “catch them [the students] early and at least tell them what the options are,” because “a lot of students would apply just at the crunch time,” which may negatively affect their immigration and life planning.

In addition to services and resources that should be made available to international students early on in their degree, interviewees also talked about the importance of making certain transitional services available post-graduation. Drawing inspiration from certain career services that recent university graduates could access at their alma maters, Anna and Kevin thought that there would be tremendous value in offering some advising services to international graduates through the international offices, at least for a limited amount of time.

These services could include advising about temporary resident status renewal, or even permanent residence application, since most international graduates could only seriously plan for their immigration after their graduation. Kevin would ideally like to see some kind of basic legal services available, or referrals to such. Anna also pointed out that with the rules and eligibility requirements for different temporary and permanent residence statuses constantly changing, having some basic guidance through these processes would be greatly appreciated by international graduates.

As for how these services and information could be made available to international students and graduates, the interviewees believed that convenience and accessibility were key. Some like Anna and Cate appreciated the fact that student services (e.g. international office, library, health services) were centrally located on campus. Others like Bibi preferred to do her own research online, though Kevin did comment on the importance of improving online accessibility of resources:
There was the trend towards making everything online and electronic for – in terms of registration and -- and setting things up, which was -- which is good. But obviously, people end up having trouble navigating those ridiculous IT systems to try to find their information. I had to look for a transcript recently, and I couldn’t navigate the way that they changed it at [my university].

Of course, Anna and Harry acknowledged that the availability of any service or resource would really depend on whether the universities had the funding to sustain them. As Harry said, “You need people to -- to help with that. You need people to answer those emails, […] to organize those information sessions. But I think, uh, the amount of time you can save doing that is -- is incredible.” Ultimately, it is up to the universities to determine the level of services and resources that is appropriate for its students and graduates.

**Awareness of Available Resources**

Of course, it is not sufficient to only make services and resources available – students must know of their existence. Even amongst our interviewees, there were some who were not fully aware of the services available to them on campus. For example, Harry did not know about the temporary residence renewal advising available through his international office, and Anna was not aware of the international student orientation at her university, even though interviewees from the same university that they attended spoke of utilizing these services.

Sometimes, students are not even aware of the vast and resourceful peer network that immediately surrounds them on campus. As Harry pointed out:

I was lucky enough, because I came from an international high school and a lot of my classmates were at the same university. So the link was there. Um… But, uh -- but I also know about other international students who -- who were pretty much, um, unaware of
how many international students there were. [...] I have seen other international students [...] who were also interested in being part -- part of [these networks], but just weren’t aware of them.

Given the important role peer support played in helping the participants navigate the immigration process, and the large international student populations on many university campuses, it is a somewhat troubling notion that some students might feel they were alone in this journey.

This unawareness can be due to students’ unfamiliarity with the way universities are structured. To find a way to navigate this complex institution can be challenging at the best of times, but international students must learn to do this in a cultural context that is foreign to them as well. As Cate said, some students “just didn’t know how to navigate the system, period.”

Hence, all of the interviewees thought that universities could do a better job at marketing their services to students. For Bibi, that meant having highly visible advertisements across different parts of the campus, so that students could be made aware of the different resources that were available to them. Others like Harry would prefer to see more regular online communications via email. The end goal is, as Cate would put it, “bringing -- integrating the international students to the overall system.”

Sometimes, the issue is more about students not perceiving themselves as requiring some of the services offered on campus, even though they could potentially benefit from these resources. In other words, they may not be aware of their own needs. This unconscious incompetence – not knowing what one does not know – can land international students in some difficult situations.

Take Anna as an example, she was not aware that even with a valid study permit, she still needed to secure an entry visa in order to enter Canada. She was denied entry into Canada at the
border after returning home to the Philippines for a short visit. Surprised that the international office of her university did not tell her about the entry visa when she went to see them about renewing her study permit before the trip, she described her conversation with the international office when she found herself in this predicament at the border:

Eventually I got a hold of them, and then they told me, “Oh yeah, you do [need the entry visa], and [the information is] really out there. […] It’s not our fault this happened to you, right? Because you didn’t know.” […] I remember a handout for extending student permit. I’m pretty sure I read it several times. I never really saw a part -- like, pay attention to your visa. It might have expired.

In Anna’s case, the international office of her university actually did have information regarding entry visa renewal on its website. However, as Anna herself admitted, “I wouldn’t have known to look for it, because I didn’t know I needed it.”

One way to increase the effectiveness of a marketing campaign is to increase international students’ awareness of the value of the programs that are offered. As Harry pointed out, a good way to attract students’ attention was for universities to promote their services by connecting them to students’ needs. For example, to promote the co-op program to international students, the university could let the students know that:

If you want to stay in Canada, Co-op is a good option for you to get some work experience, and it’s gonna facilitate your integration into Canada: Your -- your ability to find a job later on, and -- and these things. […] [M]ake them aware of something they weren’t aware of before.

It is equally important to ensure that students are aware of the intended audience of the services offered. While discussing the international office on campus, Kevin, who is a native
English speaker, said, “Maybe I got the impression that it was more there to help with students – maybe you didn’t have English as a first language, so who maybe would struggle with writing a resume or cover letter or that kind of stuff.” On the other hand, Cate commented, “When someone becomes an international student, they don’t often think of themselves as being able to access all the other services that are available to general students necessarily.” It was apparent that the interviewees sometimes made assumptions about their perceived needs and eligibilities when deciding which services and resources to access, and student services should keep this in mind when designing their marketing efforts.

Interviewees such as Alef encouraged universities to be more proactive in reaching out to students. He noted:

One of the things I do think that the school can improve upon is making people more aware of these facilities and this information that they have. I think as a person, or as a student, I had to reach out to the university for these, uh, resources, as opposed to the university reaching out to the international students, and telling them what these resources are. […] They can easily identify who the international students are and offer them services, and maybe in one of their emails just tell them that these are the options you have for temporary stay and also for, uh, future – that these are the options you have.

As a former student leader, Alef made a point to “always tell [my fellow students] that the school has a lot of resources that they can avail.” He suggested that students services departments could collaborate with individual colleges, residences, faculties and student groups as a way to tap into the various formal and informal networks on campus to promote their services, e.g. co-organizing or co-sponsoring events and information sessions, encouraging different groups to cross-train each other on what services were being provided, etc.
Quality of the Services/Resources Provided

Having discussed the availability and awareness of the services provided, I now explore the core dimension of our interviewees’ experience with student services – their evaluation of the quality of these services and resources. Unsurprisingly, the participants of this study spent much of the time reflecting on this dimension of their experience, and their responses fell into three general themes: Provision of accurate information, personalized and holistic approach, and empathy.

Provision of Accurate Information. During the interview, Anna said quite simply, “I think for me, information is just the biggest thing.” This sentiment was shared by all the other participants of the study. As discussed earlier, there are many steps in the immigration process, and there are many decisions and things that students must consider.

All interviewees acknowledged that because of the complexity of the process, it was easy to make mistakes and miss something when applying for various immigration papers (e.g. study and work permits), taking the appropriate and required courses so students could graduate on time and register with different professional bodies if applicable, securing skilled employment that would fit the eligibility requirements, and even planning for overseas travel. They believed that student services could play a bigger role in encouraging all international students to think about and plan for their future early.

One way to do that is to increase the students’ awareness of the different post-graduation career options, as well as short-term and long-term immigration paths. By being proactive in their outreach to international students, as Alef had suggested, student services could greatly enhance their students’ experience at the university.
The provision of updated and accurate information is paramount for international students who are trying to maintain their status as temporary residents or apply for permanent residence. Canada has been making many major changes to the immigration streams and their associated eligibility requirements in the past few years, and Kevin had an important suggestion for all student services personnel:

I think the big thing would just to be very -- to be really knowledgeable, because [the immigration system] is changing so much. [...] They’ve done so much tinkering with the system in the last 8 or 9 years, [...] so it’s really important that if you are gonna be advising students or telling them about that, you have to be really current on your information. [...] And last thing you wanna do is give bad advice to somebody. [...] And also to caution people that, you know, if you’re -- if you’re looking into this stuff in the first year of your degree, be aware that it might not be the same by the time you graduate.

One of the things that many international students who intend to apply for permanent residence in Canada must learn is the National Occupational Classification (NOC) system, which the Canadian government uses to determine whether a particular occupation is considered skilled work. Alef pointed out that many of his peers were not familiar with it, and that perhaps “career centre [...] can help students identify -- tell them that these are the different NOC codes, and these are the kinds of jobs which fall under this.”

For example, Anna was one of those who were directly affected by the said changes in eligibility requirements. By the time she had met all the requirements, and was ready to summit her permanent residence application, the Canadian government had changed the rules and introduce caps on the number of professionals they would allow in from various occupations:
And then all of a sudden, the quota came out, and that was the same month I was planning to apply. Like, they came out -- like, we’re only accepting 12,000 student applications, and only 200 from each [NOC category] and all that stuff. […] I needed to check all the information again and again, and make sure that I was going to be -- I would fit into, like, the – what do you call it – categories.

The need to redo a lot of work and race against time to ensure that her application was complete and would meet the eligibility requirements created a lot of stress and confusion for Anna. Since securing employment in the right categories was essential for immigration, she also believed that universities could be more transparent and do a better job at providing accurate labour market information to their students – particularly those in the professions – so they could make better-informed decisions about their career paths:

Maybe they just have to really say, like, there’s not much of a need of teachers right now. […] Maybe they need to let the person aware, too, like that’s not just teaching that you’re -- you can do. You are good at another thing, like, maybe exploit that one. […] Because sometimes what you want isn’t really what you need right now, right? Like, I really want to be a teacher, but right now, there’s just not enough financial stability. You have to explore other options.

Anna’s story perfectly illustrates the precariousness of international students’ status as temporary residents, and the fluidity of the situation they are in, thus demonstrating the importance of accurate and up-to-date information.

One way to address this issues regarding accuracy of information provided amidst all the changes is to introduce students to the source of information itself early on in their degree, and raise their awareness of the existence of these resources. For example, all the interviewees’
universities had organized panels and seminars where government officials and immigration lawyers were invited to speak to international students about post-graduation options, and many of them found these information sessions useful. For example, Alef said:

When I came in Canada and came to the university, I had applied just for my visa and permit, got on the airplane, but after that I didn’t know what’s the process to renew it, and what -- what are some of the steps I need to take from within Canada.

After attending some of these sessions and some initial guidance from his university’s international office, Alef, just like Bibi, eventually became so familiar with the process and the CIC website that he was able to navigate the permanent residence application process himself.

Questions did arise during the interviews as to who should bear the responsibility to provide information specifically about immigration matters. While acknowledging the limitations of universities in providing one-on-one advising on permanent residence application, most of the interviewees would like to see student services play a role in at least advising international students on matters concerning their status as temporary residents. Where appropriate and a particular request for service falls outside of the university’s mandate, student services personnel could refer students to the appropriate sources for accurate information. As Alef pointed out:

I feel one of the things they can do is just guide them towards the resources. […] Telling them about the different Canadian websites, the -- the Canadian resources -- the government resources. […] It’s just telling people what the options are, what the resources are, um, as opposed to – I don’t know – as opposed to just, like, forcing them into it, or not telling them enough information for legal or other reasons.
It is about encouraging students to remain vigilant, and continuously learn and seek out relevant and accurate information. The interviewees believed that student services at universities could act as a source of information referral.

**Personalized and Holistic Approach.** It is important to provide services and access to information that match students’ needs, and as I have established earlier, these needs can be complex and connected for international students who are considering immigration after they graduate. For example, I have examined how immigration planning involves extensive career planning, which is also in turn closely connected to academic planning. Some international students also have to consider family planning, and all must take care of their own physical health and emotional wellness during the process.

Some interviewees stressed the importance for student services personnel to see the connections between these needs, which would necessitate an understanding of the international students’ motivation behind seeking out assistance from these services and programs, so that the students’ situations and challenges could be addressed in context. The interviewees also argued that student services personnel should have some basic knowledge in the functional areas that were beyond their own areas of expertise, so that students could be referred to the appropriate resources to continue their research for information.

For example, when international students are looking for advice in career planning and job search strategies, sometimes they are doing that out of a desire to apply for permanent residence in Canada. During the interview, Alef, Anna, Harry and Kevin all clearly distinguished three groups of international students where immigration decisions were concerned: Those who were definitely planning to stay, those who were definitely returning to their home countries, and those who were still exploring the various options and had not made up their minds. According
to them, it was important for student services personnel – in this case, career advisors – to understand how the career planning for those intending to stay was impacted and restricted by the NOC system. Kevin explained:

Like, if somebody’s trying to immigrate, um, then they might need very specific types of jobs they’re looking for. So you don’t want to have somebody from career services pushing a -- a particular type of job on you, or -- or a particular option, if that’s not gonna fit with your long-term goals. […] If you’re career counselor that’s -- that has an international student come to see you, uh, you should be aware of all their intentions. […] Because that will help inform the -- the, uh, advice that you might give.

For Harry, one way to address students’ concerns holistically was to address the root causes of the challenge that they were facing, realizing that their immediate struggle in one area may in fact be caused by barriers in another area. Harry recalled that when he approached his co-op office for job search advice, his coordinator was able to address his underlying insecurity about his English skills:

So, I remember talking to my co-op coordinator, and I remember her giving me advice, uh -- some advice on -- on language skills, and how -- how to manage that. […] ‘Cause it was only my first semester. […] And more than that, just kind of give me confidence on how -- how I was just qualified to get -- to get a job, and even though I didn’t think I was. So -- So it was -- it was -- it was good support in that sense. […] More the personal sense, as a -- as an international student, but also in the technical sense, uh, with technical things like my resume writing, and my cover letter, and what not. […] They -- they tried to help me within my own context as an international student.
Because good services were personalized and tailored to serve the students’ unique needs, the interviewees acknowledged that generic information meant for the general student population was insufficient sometimes. Indeed, the interviewees believed that professional interventions by competent practitioners, tailored to address individual students’ concerns, were necessary in some instances. For example, Anna believed that job search assistance should be tailored to suit the field of study the students were in, and that generic job search strategies would not work for all professions the same way. She explained why she did not find the services at her university’s career centre useful thusly:

The person advising me was a student as well, and he wasn’t from the Education background. So a resume of a person in an Education flow and a Business flow would -- wouldn’t look the same, right? I wouldn’t -- I wouldn’t say it would look the same, or I don’t know. So I don’t think like whatever he told me --. I don’t really use it to apply for my current job, or my previous job as well.

Anna also spoke of how she did not think the staff members at her university’s career centre were familiar with the NOC system, which was so central to her immigration and career planning process. Like Anna, Kevin also explained his need to secure employment in a specialized field. As a student from the Earth Sciences program, he explained:

Because it’s a very specific type of work, like a lot of the jobs that you would find would never be posted on, like, the Job Bank, or you know, the kind of -- the -- the general-level, um, job stuff. [...]The idea of doing the -- the department-specific job fairs, um, which when you’re in such a specific scientific field, you need -- you need that connection.
Another way to work with international students holistically is to recognize their level of readiness to absorb the information. The participants of this study all acknowledged that even though they themselves were motivated to find the information and they succeeded in navigating the system, some students might need more assistance than others because of their backgrounds and contexts. Anna said, “It’s also helpful for [student services personnel] to sort of take into [consideration] the students’ developmental stage, for lack of a better word: How mature they are, what their -- what their individual circumstances are, when they’re giving advice.”

It is important to keep in mind that all of the interviewees have had study- or live-abroad experience prior to coming to Canada, so understandably, they have had at least some prior experience navigating the bureaucracy of immigration and being independent. Cate elaborated on how the lack of this experience might affect international students’ ability to learn:

It’s like moving out of your parents’ house. […] You’re 18, 19 -- like, 17 to 19 years old. Um, first time living on your own, and abroad, too, on top of it all. So, um, it’s just helping them look after the basics: Finding housing, that you have bills to take care of, don’t screw up your credit. You know, it’s just some very, very basic, uh, things, that everybody has to look after, but because they’ve never been on their own, then sometimes they -- they need -- they do need guidance.

Students are holistic beings and have multiple goals and dimensions, and sometimes students can focus too much on one of these goals and dimensions at the expense of others. For some international students, returning to home country after graduation may not be a viable option for a variety of reasons (e.g. lack of stability at home due to ongoing military conflict). In these cases, Harry thought that student services personnel could play an important role in helping
these students maintain their perspective and see the bigger picture when they are planning for their future, so they are not “blinded by the fact that they have to become permanent residents”:

I think it’s -- it’s important to -- to get more information out there, in a sense that you can keep doing what you want to do, and eventually you’re gonna get what -- what look -- what you’re looking for in terms of immigration, without forgetting about your other goals. [...] Once you become a Canadian, what else would I want to do with my life, or what else would I want to do in terms of my personal and career life? [...] That’s something they -- someone needs to help them with. I, uh... In my personal case, I tried never -- never to let that pressure, uh, decide my -- my next steps, but I think it’s still -- still, uh, had an influence on -- on -- on my decisions.

Student services in universities are sometimes organized in a decentralized way, with different departments responsible for different services. It can be challenging for people who work within the system to know about all the parts within the system and the services they provide. To help students maintain the perspective and avoid the myopia in immigration and life planning that Harry described, student services personnel could be more reflective about how their services and programs contribute to the students’ life planning process, what other departments they could refer the students to, and how these different pieces in the puzzle fit together to impact the students’ lives.

To do that effectively, Cate suggested that student services personnel needed to know how their own departments and programs fit into the bigger student services apparatus at the university. With more collaborations between different departments, students’ needs can be addressed holistically rather than disparately to avoid having students “bounce [...] around from department to department to department”.
As Cate aptly described during the interview, international students were “whole” beings with their own unique experience. It is impossible to address individual needs disparately, because these needs were connected and steeped in the students’ own context:

It’s -- it’s very much, uh, an immigrant’s life, really. It’s --. That’s your life story. […] You can’t really compartmentalize that – can’t really separate it. It’s not like you’re an international student, and then you’re an immigrant. It’s kind of -- it weaves together.

In order to provide meaningful assistance to students, their needs need to be considered in the context of their unique situations. The next section explores a characteristic that interviewees of this study believed to be essential in student affairs and services personnel who could provide this kind of meaningful and holistic services to students.

**Empathy.** Words like “caring,” “friendly,” “approachable” and “attentive” kept coming up time after time during the interviews when the participants of the study were asked what made a particular service or resource helpful. These were all qualities that the interviewees liked to see in those who ran programs and offered guidance when the students engaged in their immigration and life planning.

The importance of understanding a student’s situation holistically was explored previously, but students must also open up and communicate with student services personnel their needs. The participants of this study believed that there were ways that universities could create an environment in which international students would feel comfortable sharing their stories. This section explores how student services can establish the trust and rapport that are essential for this exchange of information to occur.

In Harry’s experience, he found that staff members who had first-hand experience being international students themselves were the best equipped to understand his situation and
challenges. He recalled that one of the co-op coordinators that he worked with was herself previously an international student, and “she understood exactly what I was looking for, and what I wanted.” That being said, Harry added that it was the ability to empathize with the student’s situation that mattered most:

That’s doesn’t say that someone who’s -- hasn’t been international student cannot do that as well. […] Being aware of the specific context of an international student definitely helps, yes. And -- and it allows you to do -- to sympathize, and it allows you to be more aware of the specific needs they have. And when you do that, you know how to help them more efficiently.

Harry went on to encourage student services managers to pay attention to these interpersonal qualities and characteristics when hiring new staff or providing professional development opportunities for current staff.

Cate was particularly articulate when she described what empathy meant for her in the context of student services. She believed that student services personnel should have the competence to anticipate some of the questions that international students would have, so that these challenges could be preemptively addressed:

Maybe it’d be a student-centred service, in a sense that you actually try --. Like, before you even bother in thinking of recommendations, […] spend a day, or even a month, um, putting yourself in the shoes of a student, then try to navigate the system. That way, you can actually see what points are missing. […] It’s -- it’s a very ethnographic approach. […] Imagine that you’re actually constrained with the constraints of the student, um, and try to navigate the system in that way. […]
Drawing inspiration from her own occupation, she further proposed that this competence could be achieved through experiential learning on the part of student services personnel:

‘Cause I belong to, well, the design profession, and we do actually learn, um, methodologies and to put ourselves in the place of the user, because often times the people who are making the websites are not the end users. [...] So then we have to understand, like, their technical expertise. For instance, the things they’re looking for, what their background is. Basically, understanding how they think, and the limitations of -- um, their limitations. Um, and then we start designing things accordingly. And I would suggest that you adopt that similar approach to improve the student services. [...] So you’re given a goal -- you’re given a task: This is your long-term goal, this is your short-term goal, this is what you have to fulfill, and go. Navigate the university -- university system accordingly and see -- and actually see how it feels like from the students’ perspective.

Alef summed up his sentiments thusly, “[It] makes you comfortable [...] knowing that the school cares for you -- cares for your future.” This is particularly important for international students whose lives are built on shifting grounds because they are living as temporary residents in Canada while waiting for their permanent residence to be approved.

At times, some interviewees did feel that their universities could do more to demonstrate their empathy and care, and it was usually when the students’ expectations were not met. As a former student leader and advocate, Cate had the most to say on this issue. She said that some international students felt like they were “cash cows” for their universities, and that they wished their universities would do more to enhance their experience at the institution. Comparing her university to the community college that she attended before, Cate said:
In the community college, for instance, I was able to feel like, “OK, well, I’m paying three times as much as the local students, but [the college’s staff] are really looking after me.” […] It’s not that we’re special, but you understood our needs: That, yes, we may require extra help that the domestic student don’t necessarily need, because we’re coming from a very different system, very different mentality, and um -- and you’ve paid a lot […] The -- the community college at least made an effort to demonstrate that – uh, the value for the money that we’re putting in. Whereas I felt the university was not doing that at all. They didn’t even bother making the pretence to do it.

Cate suggested that one of the ways student services personnel could show their empathy was to engage in meaningful dialogue more often with international students. Sometimes it meant opening themselves up to constructive criticisms: “To have the courage to actually, uh, listen to things that you don’t want to hear.” She recalled a few university administrators back when she was still an international student, who “don’t like people who speak up” and would give her “cold shoulder,” which to her “was, uh, most unwelcoming.” Cate knew that bringing parties with different priorities and agendas together to discuss ways to advance international students’ welfare could be challenging, but she believed that this work was necessary and that all parties involved needed to be professional and focus on the common goal – the improvement of international students’ experience.

As discussed earlier, international students have different experience with, and ideas or expectations for, student services. They are in different developmental stages, and have different cognitive abilities and maturity level. Some like Kevin and Bibi were motivated to seek out relevant information about the immigration process themselves:
The staff at the international office was so surprised that I already knew everything. I gave her all the information, and she told me that most of the students who come to the international office, they don’t do this effort to look for right answer.

Others like Alef and Anna would like to see student services play a bigger and more proactive role in information dissemination: “You know, at least you can talk to somebody [at student services] that -- rather than just searching it all by yourself. It’s much harder, right, if you needed to find things out by yourself?”

While none of the interviewees expected student services personnel to do all the planning and preparation for the students, it did become quite clear through the interviews that students thought it would be helpful for universities to understand their students’ diverse expectations, and find ways to either meet or manage them. It is through dialogues that international students and student services personnel can reach mutual understanding and empathy.

Advocacy

In addition to better program delivery and communication, some interviewees would also like to see universities act as advocates for their international students in the wider community beyond the university boundary.

Kevin shared his positive opinions on the CEC immigration stream and his concerns about how the ongoing changes in the eligibility requirements might negatively affect a qualified group of potential immigrants that were international students. He further noted the need for the higher education community to get organized and advocate on the international students’ behalf:

The off-campus work permit and all that kind of stuff was engaging the international students and -- and the CEC was a big, big thing, because it was saying that, “Hey, um, why are we treating people that have studied in Canada and got work experience in
Canada exactly the same as somebody applying from outside?” Um… And the provincial nomination sort of filled that gap, but CEC fills it much better, because it says, “Hey, these people are already in Canada. They have Canadian education. They probably speak the language pretty well. They already have social ties, employment ties – all that kind of stuff. We should give these people a fast track.” So I was very happy when they brought that up: The CEC. But now if they’re planning to limit it, or change it in some way, then - - then they ought to be talking to the biggest stakeholder group, which is the international students and people that it’s gonna affect.

Kevin and Alef suggested that one small way universities could help international students and graduates applying for permanent residence was to provide certificates to students who needed proof of language competency – a requirement of permanent residence application. Both Kevin and Alef recognized that it was important for any potential Canadian immigrant to speak at least one of the two official languages, but they believed that higher education institutions could lobby the government to accept these school-issued certificates in lieu of other recognized language competency tests (e.g. IELTS, TEF). Failing that, Kevin thought that universities could host IELTS or other accepted language competency tests on campus routinely, so international students and graduates could have easier access to these assessments.

Another way that universities could act as advocates for their international students and graduates, as Anna noted, was to maintain the standard of the programs that they offered. As well,

[S]ort of related to the quality and the standard of the program is also the need for university to advocate on behalf of their students, to make sure the community knows about the quality of the students that they are producing.
Since employment is an essential requirement in permanent residence application, Anna thought that universities could put more effort into job development for its graduates and also demystifying the process and logistics of hiring international students by educating employers.

**Summary of Findings**

This study aimed at deepening our understanding of international students’ career and life planning and recognizing it as a holistic, continuous journey that is shaped by new experiences and ever-changing factors. It examined their experiences with university-workplace as well as temporary-to-permanent-residence transitions during the immigration journey. It also explored their interactions with student services in detail: What services they utilized, how they utilized these resources to navigate these transitions, and their general experiences with these services.

It began with an exploration of the factors that led the interviewees of this study to choose Canada as a study-abroad destination, which encompassed push factors from home countries, push factors from other international student-hosting countries, and finally pull factors from Canada at national, systemic or institutional, and personal levels. The interviewees generally referred to the factors at the macro- and exo-systems as major influencers in their decision-making at this early stage of their journeys.

The study then looked at why these interviewees decided to pursue permanent residence in Canada after having studied in the country for several years. The interviewees overwhelmingly cited personal reasons, i.e. their meso- and micro-systems, when explaining why they wanted to stay. Other factors associated the macro- and exo-systems (e.g. Canada’s political and economic stability, quality of life, cultural environment) remained important at this stage of their decision-making, and interviewees were able to discuss these factors with more
nuances than they did when reflecting on why they chose Canada as a study-abroad destination initially.

The interviewees then recalled the process of permanent residence application, and the decisions that they had to make along the journey. Many of these decisions had to do with career planning, general life and family planning, as well as the logistics of immigration (e.g. deciding on the proper immigration class to apply for permanent residence through). Interviewees must also constantly adapt to changes in their environments (e.g. major events such as tuition strike, changes in eligibility requirements for permanent residence application) and find new strategies to navigate their transitions.

The kinds of services and resources used to navigate these transitions were examined next. Interviewees used multiple services and resources strategically along their journeys to overcome challenges that are specific to their various transitions. These services and resources included peer networks and student groups, international office, career services, academic and faculty advising, financial aid, registrar office, as well as other student life services including health and wellness, residence, and the library.

Interviewees then discussed their experiences with these student services and resources along four main themes: Availability of services, awareness of available resources, quality of the services/resources provided, and advocacy. Availability of services concerned whether or not a particular service existed to meet students’ needs, as well as whether these services were delivered in a timely manner. Awareness of services was about whether or not students were informed of these services and resources available to them on campus through adequate and appropriate marketing efforts. When interviewees reflected on the quality of the services/resources that they utilized, they referred to the accuracy of the information that they
were provided with, whether they felt the services were delivered to them to address their concerns in a personalized and holistic manner, and whether they felt that the student services personnel that served them cared about their issues and them as individuals. Finally, interviewees would like to see universities take on more of an advocacy role, and increase the awareness of international students’ potentials and challenges in the wider community on their behalf.
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSIONS

With globalization comes increased exchange of people and ideas, both in terms of rate and scale. In a recently published document detailing Canada’s international education strategy, the federal government of Canada announced its goal to increase the number of international students from 239,131 in 2011 to over 450,000 by 2022 – effectively doubling the size of the international student population in Canada in just over 10 years (DFATD, 2014).

The document made multiple references to the contributions that international students could make to the Canadian economy. To quote Ed Fast, the Minister of International Trade:

Inviting international students and researchers into Canada’s classrooms and laboratories helps create new jobs and opportunities for Canadians while addressing looming skills and labour shortages. Perhaps most importantly, international education fuels the people-to-people ties crucial to long-term success in an increasingly interconnected global economy. (DFATD, 2014, p. 4)

This kind of rhetoric is consistent with the human capital perspective, which sees skilled workers as valuable resources in the global knowledge economy. Ed Fast’s quote is particularly illuminating because it speaks to not only international students’ potential to contribute to the Canadian economy with their participation and productivity in the workforce, but that their very presence also create jobs for others.

Not only are international students an important source of revenue for universities, their diverse experiences and cultural-linguistic skills are also assets in Canadian classrooms and workplaces. Recognizing the long-term and short-term contributions that international students can make in Canada, the federal government has put in place immigration policies that favour the post-graduation retention of economically productive and socially integrated international
students. This study focused on one of these policies: CEC immigration stream. Despite some of the recent changes made to the eligibility requirements of CEC, it remains popular with international students who are interested in applying for permanent residence in Canada after they have completed their studies.

CEC is one example of two-step immigration policies. Two-step immigration policies grant permanent residence and later citizenship to those who are already in the country as temporary residents, as opposed to others who may have never set foot in Canada before. Such policies ensure that immigrants already have economic and social ties in the country, which can ease their transitions. These policies are becoming increasingly popular in competitive immigration regimes, as different countries use permanent residence and citizenship as incentives to attract internationally mobile skilled labour, all in the hopes that these workers can give them competitive advantage in the global knowledge economy.

I argue that these trends are the results of a convergence of realist and neoliberal agendas. In a global knowledge economy, realists’ focus on international competition for power and neoliberals’ focus on the free market merge, and immigration becomes a point through which nation states, collaborating with the private sector and higher education institutions, try to win over skilled labour from around the world for their own economic development and advancement. As Shachar (2006) pointed out, this kind of “talent-for-citizenship exchange” eventually became a “race for talent,” as countries – including those that were not traditionally immigrant-receiving – either proactively or reactively emulated each other’s immigration policies to attract skilled workers.

In a policy climate in which international students are a targeted source of permanent residents for Canada, higher education institutions become essential partners of the country. In
addition to being the producers and disseminators of knowledge, higher education institutions are now also playing an indirect role in selecting and admitting potential permanent residents that can contribute to the country’s economy in the future. Essentially, universities and colleges have become one of the screening mechanisms that Canada takes advantage of when selecting and admitting immigrants. As previously discussed, changes in immigration policies also have a direct impact on higher education institutions’ ability to recruit and retain international students.

Against this backdrop of political, economic and social contexts (the macrosystem referred to by Bronfenbrenner in his developmental ecology theory), and the related immigration policies (the exosystem), this study set out to investigate the experience of the people who are at the centre of this ecosystem: International students (the individuals). The study explored the many factors that influenced these students’ career paths and life planning through their immigration journeys, and studied the way they used on-campus services and resources (the meso- and microsystems) to help themselves navigate the complex transitions and immigration process. The three research questions that this study intended to answer were: (1) How do international students describe their decision-making process when considering Canada as a study-abroad destination? (2) What factors led international students to consider immigration and ultimately seek permanent residence in Canada? (3) Which on-campus services and resources did the students seek and/or utilize to navigate the immigration process, and what were their experiences with these services?

I deliberately adopted the narrative inquiry method to allow former international students to recall and reflect on their experiences, so that their stories could be told in a complex way. This allowed me to take into account the interconnectedness of all the aspects of these students’ lived experiences, and consider these experiences and the students wholly.
This research methodology does have some limitations, the biggest one being that the results are not meant to be generalizable to the general public or the rest of the international student population. Indeed, each student’s situation is unique. This is an important limitation to acknowledge, especially since the demographic characteristics of international students are very prone to changes associated with targeted recruitment and conditions of emerging markets. Still, the storytelling of narrative inquiry does honour the individual’s experience and offer valuable insights (Caine & Estefan, 2011). We can identify the common threads of these unique stories and learn from them, allowing these insights to inform our policy making and practice.

Consistent with the findings of Ciarniene and Kumpikaite (2011), the participants of this study also primarily came to Canada because of economic reasons. Many of them felt that there were not enough job opportunities in their home countries, or in foreign countries where they had also considered studying. Since they felt that overseas study and work experience would increase their employability in any country, they ultimately decided that they would come to Canada – a relatively prosperous and welcoming country.

Canada’s political stability also appealed to some interviewees, who were concerned about the instability and conflicts at home. Some were also concerned about the volatile relationships their home countries had with other potential host destinations (e.g. the United States), and how these international tensions would affect their experiences as international students in those host countries. Since Canada has relatively positive relations with many nations, it seemed like a more welcoming destination to the interviewees than other potential host countries. Some interviewees also cited the ease of immigration as a reason they picked Canada as a study-abroad destination, which Shachar (2006) had speculated would be the case. Overall, Canada’s status as a regional and international “middle power” (Trilokekar, 2010)
seemed to have worked in its favour to attract the participants of this study to come here for their studies.

For the quality of the programs and the reputations of the institutions that they would have access to in Canada, interviewees also thought that the costs associated with studying here (e.g. tuition fees, living costs) seemed to be lower than if they had gone to study in other major host countries of international students, such as the United States. They also appreciated the ease with which they could access information about Canadian institutions and their programs online and through various channels (e.g. overseas information sessions, Canadian Education Centres).

After having studied and lived in Canada for a number of years, the interviewees were more informed about the country when they decided to immigrate and apply for Canadian permanent residence. All of them had developed important personal connections and ties in the country, and had their own social networks (e.g. spouses, friends, colleagues, and extended family). As well, they had formed habits and routines (e.g. hobbies and sports activities) that were rooted in the Canadian way of life, and had become accustomed to the country’s social norms and customs. This sense of belonging and stability was a major force in grounding the interviewees, and convincing them to pursue permanent residence in Canada.

Of course, the socio-economic and political reasons that the interviewees cited when deciding to study in Canada were still relevant when they decided to immigrate. All participants commented on the quality of life that they enjoyed in Canada, including social welfare, access to education and health care, as well as public infrastructure. All these would not be possible without the economic prosperity and political stability that Canada enjoys, for which the interviewees had great appreciation.
The actual transitions from universities to the workplace, as well as from being temporary to permanent residents, involved much planning. The participants of this study all had to find ways to fit and prioritize their various life plans, including but not limited to decisions concerning their careers and continuing education, families, and of course, immigration. As Goodman et al. (2006) rightly pointed out, multiple transitions such as those experienced by the participants of this study could add to the stress of the individuals going through these transition, so most interviewees emphasized the importance for them to start planning these transitions early, and to find the most expedient and appropriate immigration stream to immigrate through.

Understandably, employment was the biggest consideration for the participants of the study when they were planning their immigration, since it was the main eligibility requirement for permanent residence applications through the CEC immigration stream. Related to the employment and career planning were academic planning – picking a field of study that was interesting to them as individuals but also in demand in the labour market – as well as choosing a supportive employer who understood and was supportive of their immigration process.

For support in navigating the transitions and immigration process, the interviewees sought help from multiple on-campus services and resources, demonstrating their resourcefulness and agency. Peer networks and student groups – formal or informal – played the biggest role in supporting the participants of this study. Interviewees found emotional and practical support in peers who had first-hand understanding of their own situations and issues, be they related to settlement in Canada, job search in the country, or the immigration process itself. The participants felt safe sharing their own challenges and problems with these peer networks, which acted as an excellent source of information and referral for those who were new to the country or looking to apply for Canadian permanent residence.
The international office also played an important role in helping international students and alumni transition and find relevant information. Even though all the interviewees acknowledged that international offices were limited in how they could practically assist the students with the immigration process, the interviewees nonetheless found the information sessions and one-on-one advising provided by some international offices to be helpful and valuable. In addition to resources related to immigration, some interviewees also considered the international office as a main entry point and a source of general information when navigating the larger higher education institution or system, highlighting the in loco parentis role that the international office played for this particular student population.

Since employment was an essential eligibility requirement for immigration through the CEC stream, many interviewees also took advantage of the career services available on campus: career planning, job search strategies and preparation, and job fairs. Since international students were unable to work off-campus without work permits, a few of the interviewees also found the on-campus work opportunities offered through work-study programs, faculty connections, and the human resources departments of their universities to be an excellent way to gain Canadian work experience.

Other important services that interviewees took advantage of included academic advising, financial aid, registrar’s office, as well as health and wellness services, residence, and the library. These services all contributed to the overall academic and personal success of the interviewees as former international students, enriching their experience or helping to ease some of their practical and emotional challenges.

The experiences of the study participants neatly demonstrated how they intentionally utilized student services available on campus to enrich their own 4 S’s as defined by
Schlossberg’s (1989) transition theory. Throughout their journeys, these former international students constantly assessed their situations and selves (e.g. the reasons why they decided to stay in Canada, current processing time for different immigration classes, the participants’ family status), and the amount of control they had over different transitions. Based on their needs, they then strategically sought help from specific services and resources that were available on campus, which provided the support and strategies (e.g. emotional support, practical advice, trouble-shooting) that these students needed to navigate the multiple transitions. Some of these services and resources also helped these students re-evaluate their unfolding situations and selves, so that pertinent decisions could be made along the journey, and appropriate actions taken, despite the ever-changing circumstances. Student services’ ability to help the participants of this study address their concerns through exploration, understanding, and coping was consistent with what Egan (2007) suggested and proposed.

In terms of the interviewees’ experience with these on-campus services and resources, all interviewees pointed to the importance of having adequate services and resources available in a convenient and accessible manner. Many were concerned that the universities’ ability to advise students on matters related to temporary residence renewal was increasingly being restricted. They would also like to see the universities put more effort into developing alumni engagement and mentorship opportunities, which were at the moment absent, so that current and former students could be more connected.

Interviewees also acknowledged that even though some services might be available to the general student population, international students might not have access to these services (e.g. certain off-campus work placement programs) by virtue of their status. As well, interviewees would like to see services made available in a more timely fashion, such as having early access
to academic advising and information about the options to immigrate, and post-graduation access to career services and legal or immigration-advising services.

In addition to the availability of services, the interviewees also discussed the students’ awareness of these services. They would like to see their universities be more proactive in promoting the existence as well as the value of these services and resources. The interviewees suggested launching better marketing campaigns (e.g. visible advertisements around campus, more regular email communications with international students), and better outreach efforts that would educate international students about how these services and resources were relevant and valuable to them. They suggested that it might be worthwhile to collaborate with student groups so that international peers could educate each other on the existence and value of these resources.

The interviewees spent a lot of time commenting on the quality of the services and resources that they took advantage of when they were students. In particular, they stressed the importance of the provision of accurate and updated information. The Canadian immigration system is currently undergoing many changes, and the interviewees would like to see student services at the universities play a more active role in directing students to sources of official information (e.g. CIC website, professional registration bodies) early on in their journey as international students, and encouraging them to become familiarized with these resources. The interviewees would also like the universities to be more transparent with certain labour market information (e.g. graduates’ fields and rates of employment) so they themselves could make more informed decisions when planning their careers.

Another point that the interviewees raised when discussing the quality of the services they received had to do with the degree of personalization of these resources. Despite the differentiated model that is dominant in today’s field of student affairs and services, in which
different departments would deliver services based on their areas of expertise (Sullivan, 2010), the participants of the study wanted student services personnel to have some knowledge in functional areas beyond their own functional areas, as well as some understanding of the different student populations. As the interviewees pointed out, there were many connections between their different needs (e.g. academic planning and career planning would go hand-in-hand, and they were in turn related to immigration planning). The interviewees would like student services personnel to assess the students’ challenges and provide services more holistically – a call that was echoed by scholars and practitioners in the field in recent years (ACPA & NASPA, 2010; Fisher, 2011; Roberts, 2012; Seifert & Billing, 2010; Strange, 2010; Sullivan, 2010). Having an appreciation for the interconnectedness of students’ challenges would also help the student services personnel understand the root causes of the students’ problems, and services and resources could be tailored accordingly to address the students’ concerns and needs, in a way that was appropriate to their readiness to learn and absorb the information.

All of this required the service providers to exercise empathy. The interviewees really enjoyed working with student services personnel who cared about their unique situations. Without a sense of trust and rapport, the interviewees felt that it would be difficult for students to share their stories and seek help. They encouraged student services personnel to be more aware of the international students’ contexts and their diverse expectations, so that the services and resources provided could be more student-centred and user-friendly. This might entail engaging in dialogues with students, as well as communicating with other student services departments on campus to share information as Ellis-Bosold and Thornton-Orr (2013) and Ouellette (2010) proposed.
Last but not least, some interviewees hoped that universities, as powerful institutions in the community, could act as advocates for their international student body. This could mean lobbying the government to implement international student-friendly immigration policies and procedures, or promoting the employability of their graduates through job development and relationship building with employers.

**Implications for Student Services Providers and Policymakers**

Higher education institutions’ student services play an important role in serving a diverse group of students, supporting their learning and various transitions in their adult lives. The field has evolved from the traditional in loco parentis framework into a more differentiated and decentralized model, characterized by the different departments with their different functions and expertise.

While this kind of division of labour by functional areas has many advantages (e.g. efficient service provision, development of expertise among practitioners), there is a recent push in the field to reconsider students as holistic beings, and their issues and challenges as interconnected rather than disparate and separate (ACPA & NASPA, 2010; Fisher, 2011; Roberts, 2012; Seifert & Billing, 2010; Strange, 2010; Sullivan, 2010). The stories as told by the participants of this study showed just how complex life planning is in reality. Student services personnel need to be aware of this complexity, and work with each individual student in a way that would reflect this awareness, too. They need to acknowledge the contexts within which these multi-faceted international students live.

To be able to provide services more effectively and holistically, and better represent international students’ interests, communications and collaborations between different departments and on-campus service providers are key. Interviewees pointed to international
offices, career services, and student groups as the most obvious partners in such collaborations. However, considering the variety of services that international students take advantage of, various other departments could and should also be involved. Many researchers and practitioners in the field of student affairs and services have called for more of these cross-departmental communications as well in recent years (Ellis-Bosold & Thornton-Orr, 2013; Ouellette, 2010; Seifert et al., 2011).

In the interviews, the participants of this study referred to all of the eight roles that educators of adult learners should adopt as proposed by Champagne and Petitpas (1989). Most of the interviewees agreed that universities generally did a good job in these five areas: provision of specialized services, education, information provision, program planning, and counselling. However, the consensus seemed to be that universities could improve on networking/mentoring (particularly with alumni connections), referrals, and advocacy.

Still, for those interested in pursuing permanent residence after their graduation, the rather recent enactment of Section 91 of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, as well as the ongoing changes in the eligibility requirements of the different immigration streams, have made it quite difficult for international students to navigate the immigration process, or to seek help and advice from student services while doing that. The transitions from universities to workplaces, as well as from temporary to permanent residents, have become much more complex and harder to navigate because of external factors that universities and their international students have little control over. The situation is constantly in flux.

Of the 4 S’s (situation, self, support, and strategy) proposed by the Schlossberg’s (1989) transition theory, it would seem that international students interested in applying for Canadian permanent residence had little control over the situation, where the immigration policies and
procedures were concerned. However, the interviewees of this study were all very self-sufficient and resourceful, and they were able to utilize student services provided on campus in such a way that they felt like they had a better understanding of their self, received adequate support, and came out with improved coping strategies.

But what of the international students who aspire to make similar transitions but are less self-reliant and less informed about these resources? What roles can student services play in helping these students through their transitions? Indeed, is it student services’ responsibility to help all these students with their exploration, understanding of, and coping with their individual situations, as Egan (2007) suggested? Especially given international students’ own awareness and perception that they were the “cash cows” for their universities, what kind of expectations – realistic or otherwise – do they have for the services and resources on campus?

Forbes-Mewett and Nyland (2013) made the argument that Australian universities ought to provide adequate support to international students through adequate funding, because of the revenue that this student population generated for these institutions. These researchers noted that when universities’ recruiters and representatives promised to provide an excellent educational experience to their students, full-fee paying international students and their parents expected their tuition fees to go towards teaching and other support services, rather than research activities that were further removed from their academic learning and positive experience in these institutions. Therefore, Forbes-Mewett and Nyland argued that Australian universities had the responsibility to keep their promises to these international students, who were facing more tangible challenges associated with adjustments compared to their domestic peers, and provide sufficient support to increase retention and academic success in this student population.
As Canada’s federal government and higher education institutions work towards actualizing their ambitious goal to almost double the number of international students in the country in just over 10 years by 2022, they too must grapple with the issues of funding, service provision, and institutional responsibilities, the same way that Australian institutions have done. The participants of this study were certainly vocal about their expectations that Canadian universities should strengthen the student support infrastructure that they had for their international students. Indeed, some of the interviewees had preconceived notions about what services they could and should receive from which student services departments. For example, as a former international student but also an employment advisor, I was personally struck by how some interviewees wrongly assumed that career services were purely a post-graduation job placement service. Just as Govender et al. (2012), Marriott et al. (2010), and Roberts and Dunworth (2012) found in their studies, international students and student services personnel often had mismatched perceptions and experiences of the services provided.

As the number of international students continues to rise in Canada, student services personnel must confront the variety of expectations and personal contexts their students come from, and find ways to effectively manage these expectations by educating the students about the functions and roles of the various student services departments, encouraging students to be their own agents of change, and of course, continuing to improve the services and resources provided on campus to suit the students’ ever-changing needs. It can be a delicate balance to strike, and a difficult task to accomplish. As Roberts and Dunworth (2012) asserted, in order to bridge this gap in perceptions and expectations, student services personnel must communicate more often with students, so that services could be more aligned with students’ expectations and actual
needs, and students could gain a deeper understanding and appreciation for the purposes and intentions of the services that were being offered.

Still, a few realistic and valuable suggestions did come out of this study that student services could immediately consider and quite easily implement. First of all, the importance of one-on-one advising is not to be underestimated. Many interviewees were very concerned when they found out how Section 91 could affect the temporary residence permit advising that they themselves took advantage of as students. Even though generic information provision, particularly online, is necessary and a very efficient way to serve the students from the universities’ perspectives, students do prefer having the opportunities to work with advisors face-to-face, one-on-one, so they can receive information that is a little bit more tailored to their situations and questions. Some interviewees suggested hiring immigration lawyers or consultants as in-house staff in international offices so that this kind of advising service could continue, while others thought that universities should liaise with the federal government and other stakeholders to find ways for current international student advisors to continuing providing such service.

Secondly, considering the importance of peer networks and student groups to international students, universities should explore meaningful ways to engage their vast network of alumni. International students can sometimes feel isolated, because their regular support networks are back in their home countries. Finding ways to connect them to those who can understand their situations and challenges intimately may help them feel more secure and supported. Students may also get plenty of practical advice and assistance relevant to their situations from such mentorship.
Lastly, echoing the call to treat students as whole individuals, the interviewees called on student services departments to engage in more cross-departmental communication and collaboration. These liaisons and cross-training should also include informal groups such as student and alumni groups. The key here is to build a community consisting of subject experts or specialists from various fields, but that also has a good understanding of the complex contexts, circumstances and situations of the students it serves.

**Contributions to Theories and Directions for Future Research**

This study used Bronfenbrenner’s (1993) developmental ecology theory to situate international students’ experience with various transitions associated with the immigration process. The theory proved to be an excellent framework within which international students’ interactions and experiences with student services could be studied in a contextual and nuanced manner. As student services personnel strive to understand their students’ needs and provide services in a more holistic way, Bronfenbrenner’s theory will prove to be a valuable tool with which these personnel can consider various macro and micro factors that exert an influence on their students’ lives.

The study confirmed the findings of previous research that investigated the push and pull factors involved in immigration decision-making and student mobility. The participants of this study were both international students and immigrants, and the economic, political, social and personal factors that they cited as the primary reasons they chose to come study and subsequently settle in Canada were largely consistent with existing literature around push and pull factors. There was an interesting and nuanced finding that emerged from the current study: When the participants recalled the factors that led them to decide to choose Canada as a study-abroad destination, they mostly pertained to the general economic and political situations of
various countries (i.e. the macro- and exosystems), but when they reflected on the reasons for applying for Canadian permanent residence, many of the factors they cited were socio-cultural in nature, or involved relationships they had established in Canada (i.e. the meso- and micro-systems). The way that international students and immigrants choose to migrate and settle in other countries, including the nuances that are involved in this decision-making process, is an area that deserves further research.

Immigration is a transition that involves multiple transitions. Schlossberg’s theory proved to be a useful framework within which we could study these transitions. Goodman et al. (2006) acknowledged that transitions were subjective, and the dimensions that participants of this study discussed when reflecting on their experiences during transitions naturally fit the 4 S’s as described by Schlossberg. One of the criticisms of Schlossberg’s theory within the field of psychology is that there are not many psychometric instruments designed to measure the 4 S’s involved in the transition, and how these dimensions change during the process, thus making it difficult to determine the theory’s validity with quantitative research methods (Evans et al., 2010). The current study shows that perhaps the best way to understand the nuances involved in transitions and Schlossberg’s theory is through qualitative research.

As discussed in the literature review, research studies around student experiences and services – particularly those that take into account the complex reality within which international students live – are still quite scarce in Canada. As Canada and its higher education institutions begin implementing the new international education strategy, and welcome a major influx of international students in the next decade, research about the complexity of international students’ experiences and their interactions with their institutions’ various departments is not only timely but also vital. I therefore repeat Arthur and Flynn’s (2011; 2013) call for more research that
specifically explores the international students’ experiences of various transitions, their career and life planning, as well as their help-seeking behaviour and interactions with the student services that are available on campus.

Finally, having adopted the narrative inquiry approach to study international students’ experience with student services when they navigate through transitions and the immigration process, I find the approach very appropriate for getting at the nuances of individual experiences. The storytelling allows the students and their situations to be considered holistically in the research process. While large-scale student experience surveys such as the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) are valuable tools to measure the experience of many students efficiently, these surveys tend to obscure the nuances in the experiences of students, particularly those from certain minority groups (Hernandez, Mobley, Coryell, Yu & Martinez, 2013; Kahu, 2013). As the field of student services continues to advance, and accountability becomes increasingly important in higher education institutions, I hope that practitioners and researchers alike will find ways to incorporate more of this kind of qualitative data in their studies and program evaluations, so that the data better reflect the complex lived experiences of the students these institutions are meant to serve.
References


The Bangalore paradox – outsourcing and IT in India; India’s IT and outsourcing industries. (2005, Apr 23). *The Economist*, p. 82.


UK must not isolate itself from research world. (2010, October 7). *The Times.* Retrieved from http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/opinion/letters/article2755952.ece


Appendix A

Research Participants Recruitment Notices and Communication Scripts

Facebook/LinkedIn Wall Posts

SEEKING RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

My name is Wincy Li, and I am a current student in the M.A., Higher Education program at OISE, University of Toronto. I am looking for research study participants for my thesis research. My project aims to learn more about international students’ experience with the Canadian immigration process and university student services. I would like to talk to you if you:

(1) are a former international student, and
(2) graduated from a Canadian university, and
(3) have, since graduation, applied for Canadian Permanent Residence through the Canada Experience Class (CEC) immigration stream?

If you are interested in participating, or want to learn more about this project, please email me at wswincy.li@mail.utoronto.ca. I would appreciate it if you can forward this message to people you know who might be interested as well. Thanks!

Email Message to Key Individuals and Mailing Lists

Dear (name),

Hope you are doing well!

I am working on a research project to learn more about international students’ experience with the Canadian immigration process and university student services. It is for my Master of Arts (Higher Education) thesis research, and my supervisor is Prof. Tricia Seifert at OISE, University of Toronto.

As you know, the career and life planning of international students often intersects with their decision to stay in their host countries or to return to their home countries after their graduation from universities. This research project aims to find out more about the lived experience of former international students: How they made the decision to immigrate to Canada, services they used to help them in the process, etc. Their experiences will provide insights into the sort of student services international students need in order to achieve certain goals that are crucial to their immigration process. We can also evaluate whether these services are helpful, and how they can be improved, through their experiences and feedback.

Currently, I am recruiting interviewees who:
(1) are former international students, and
(2) graduated from a Canadian university, and
(3) have, since graduation, applied for Canadian Permanent Residence through the Canada Experience Class (CEC) immigration stream.

The interviews will be conducted in person or via Skype, and it will take 1-2 hours. As participation in the study is voluntary, participants will be given a $5 gift certificate to a local coffee shop as a small token of appreciation for their time. I am hoping that with your personal network of international students/graduates, you will be able to help me disseminate the message widely. If you know someone who may be interested in participating, or want to learn more about this project, please encourage them to email me at wswincy.li@mail.utoronto.ca. Thank you!

Regards,
Wincy Li

Email to Potential Participants Who Have Expressed Interest in the Project

Dear (name),

Thank you for your interest in my research project!

As mentioned in the advertisement/post, I am working on a research project about international students’ experience with the immigration process in Canada and student services provided by their universities. Here is some background information about the research:

The career and life planning of international students often intersects with their decision to stay in their host countries or to return to their home countries after their graduation from universities. This research project aims to find out more about the lived experience of former international students such as yourself: How you made the decision to immigrate to Canada, services you used to help you in the process, etc.

To confirm, you must meet the following criteria to participate in the project:
1. You are a former international student who has graduated from a Canadian university, and
2. Since your graduation, you have applied for your Canadian permanent residence status through the Canadian Experience Class.

During this interview, which will take 1-2 hours, you will reflect on your past experiences – successes and challenges. You will be given a $5 gift certificate to a local coffee shop as a small token of appreciation if you decide to participate in the interview. You will have the opportunity to review the questions prior to the interview, and will have the opportunity to review and comment on the transcript of your interview after.
If you agree to participate, please let me know and we can schedule our interview either in-person or via Skype. Of course, if you have further questions, please don’t hesitate to ask!

Regards,
Wincy Li

Email to Individuals Who Have Expressed Interest After Recruitment Closes

Dear (name),

Thank you very much for your interest in my research project! Unfortunately, the participant recruitment for this study is now closed.

If you have further questions about my research project, please don’t hesitate to ask.

Regards,
Wincy Li
Appendix B

List of Listservs/Groups Contacted for Study Participant Recruitment

United World College (UWC) network:
- Mountbatten UWC Alumni electronic list
- UWC Alumni Facebook group
- UWC Toronto Facebook group
- UWC Alumni Network LinkedIn group

Simon Fraser University (SFU) network:
- International Club Alumni Facebook group
- International Students Group Facebook group
Appendix C

Interview Protocol: Questions for the Semi-Structured Interviews

1. What brought you to Canada for your study?

2. You have applied for (or attained) the Canadian permanent residence since your graduation. Can you tell me why you decided to immigrate permanently to Canada?

3. What were some of the things that you had to do or consider when you were planning your immigration?

4. Did you use any services or resources provided by your university to help you plan for your immigration? If so, what were they?

5. Did you find these services and resources helpful to you with your immigration planning?

6. Can you tell me which services you found the most helpful to you, and why?

7. Can you tell me which services you found the least helpful to you, and why?

8. If you have the power to make changes to the student services/programs at your university, what are some of the improvements you would like to see, and why?

9. Do you have any suggestions for student services personnel who are working with international students in general? And what about those students who intend to immigrate in particular?

10. Please feel free to share any of your last thoughts and comments that are relevant to your experience with career/life planning, immigration, or with your experience with the student services as an international student.
Appendix D

Informed Consent Form

<<To be put on OISE/UT letterhead>>

Thank you for offering to participate in this project. This letter explains what is involved so you can make an informed decision about taking part. My name is Wincy Li. As a student in the Master of Art, Higher Education program, I am conducting the following research project at the University of Toronto under the supervision of Professor Tricia Seifert:

International Student's Experience with the Canadian Immigration Process and Student Services Provided by Their Host Universities

The career and life planning of international students often intersects with their decision to stay in their host countries or to return to their home countries after their graduation from universities. This research project aims to find out more about the lived experience of former international students such as yourself: How you made the decision to immigrate to Canada, services you used to help you in the process, etc.

As a former international student who has graduated from an undergraduate program in a Canadian university and has since successfully applied for Canadian permanent residence through the Canadian Experience Class, you will be interviewed for this project. During this interview, you will reflect on your past experiences – successes and challenges. We hope to gain some insights into the kind of services that supported you as you made the decision to immigrate to Canada and embark on this process.

This project will help the scholarly community understand if and how universities’ services support international students. The research may help higher education institutions gain insights into the international student experience and reflect on ways that student services can be improved to accommodate the unique needs of this growing minority group on Canadian campuses. As a participant of this study, you may find the opportunity to narrate and reflect on your experience and accomplishment enjoyable and cathartic. Hopefully, you can gain a deeper understanding of your experience through this reflection as well.

Participating in the interview will take 1-2 hours. You will receive a beverage or a $5 gift certificate for your time. The audio of the interview will be recorded and then transcribed with your permission. Your name, the names of other people and places will be replaced with pseudonyms to protect your confidentiality in the final report. You will be invited to review and edit the transcript of your interview. You will at no time be judged or evaluated based on your responses, and you will at no time be at risk of any physical harm.

Navigating through bureaucracies can be onerous and emotionally draining for some, and there is a slight chance that you may feel upset recalling your past experiences with the immigration and help-seeking processes. Should that occur, please inform the interviewer immediately.

Only the researcher and the supervisor will have access to the data, which will be stored only as encrypted files on password-protected devices and/or secured cloud storage –notes taken during the interview will be transcribed electronically and stored securely immediately following the interview, and the hard copy of these notes will be shredded immediately. The hard copy of this Consent Form will be stored in a locked cabinet in the researcher’s residence. All electronic notes and recordings will be permanently deleted electronically after five years.
Before you start the interview, I would like to reassure you that as a participant in this project you have several very definite rights:

- Your participation in the interview is entirely voluntary.
- You are free to refuse to answer any questions.
- You are free to withdraw from the interview at any time without any consequences. If you choose to exercise this right at any point in time during the interview, the notes and audio recording of the interview thus far will be destroyed accordingly.
- Excerpts from the transcript of this interview may be included in published accounts, but under no circumstances will your real name or identifying circumstances be included.

If you have any questions related to your rights as a participant in this study, or if you have any complaint or concern about how you have been treated as a research participant, please feel free to contact my supervisor, Dr Tricia Seifert (416-978-1840; tricia.seifert@utoronto.ca), and the University of Toronto Office of Research Ethics (416-946-3273; ethics.review@utoronto.ca). You can have access to the final report, which will be located in the OISE/UT thesis collection and can be accessed electronically in the University of Toronto Research Repository (T Space) at https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/handle/1807/9944, when the study is complete.

Primary Researcher: Wincy Li
Master of Arts Student, Higher Education
Department of Leadership, Higher, and Adult Education
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE)
University of Toronto
#6-277 – 252 Bloor St. W.
Toronto, ON M5S 1V6
Phone: 647-262-9932
Email: wswincy.li@mail.utoronto.ca

Supervisor: Tricia Seifert
Assistant Professor
Department of Leadership, Higher, and Adult Education
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE)
University of Toronto
#6-226 – 252 Bloor St. W.
Toronto, ON M5S 1V6
Phone: 416-978-1840
Email: tricia.seifert@utoronto.ca

I would like to express my appreciation for your participation in this project. By signing below, you are indicating that you fully understand the conditions above, you are willing to participate in this study, you consent to being audio taped and transcribed, and you have received a copy of this letter.

__________________________ (Signature)
__________________________ (Printed name)
__________________________ (Date)

Please initial if you would like a summary of the findings of the study upon completion: ___
Please initial if you agree to have your interview audio taped and transcribed: ___

Please keep a copy of this form for your record.
Table 1

*Demographic Information of the Study’s Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants (Age)</th>
<th>Alef (24)</th>
<th>Anna (28)</th>
<th>Bibi (23)</th>
<th>Cate (31)</th>
<th>Harry (30)</th>
<th>Kevin (31)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Country of Origin</td>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>Togo</td>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>Colombia</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous Study-Abroad Location</td>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>France</td>
<td>United States</td>
<td>United States</td>
<td>Norway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University’s Location</td>
<td>Ontario</td>
<td>British Columbia</td>
<td>Québec</td>
<td>British Columbia</td>
<td>British Columbia</td>
<td>British Columbia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field(s) of Study</td>
<td>Human Biology &amp; Economic Geography</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Economics</td>
<td>Communication Studies</td>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>Earth Sciences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td>Retail Business Analyst</td>
<td>Early Childhood educator</td>
<td>Graduate Student</td>
<td>Graphic Designer</td>
<td>Software Developer</td>
<td>Environmental Scientist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permanent Resident (PR) Status</td>
<td>In process</td>
<td>In process</td>
<td>Attained</td>
<td>Attained</td>
<td>Attained</td>
<td>Attained</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applied for PR with Spouse?</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>