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# EMPLOYMENT PROSPECTS OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN THE U. S. AND CANADA: SOCIO-POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

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*Abstract: While the increase of the international student population has been a significant issue on a global scale, it is rarely discussed in the context of two border countries in North America – the U.S. and Canada. In addition, attention to skilled migration as a policy preference has increased among governments in an effort to address labor market gaps arising from economic shifts and structural aging. Governments invent a list of desirable characteristics in international students, such as education, age, language, and work experience, that allows them to be able to apply for employment after graduation. Countries like Canada and Australia are able to retain these students after graduation while more restrictive U.S. policies have implications on international student decision-making and on American institutions of higher education. This article will explore the impact of immigration policies on higher education institutions' efforts in the U.S. and Canada in attracting international students to their campuses as a result of national immigration laws and priorities.*

While the increase of the international student population has been a significant issue on a global scale, it is rarely discussed in the context of two border countries in North America – the U.S. and Canada. Su & Harrison (2016) stated that the 2015 International Consultants for Education and Fairs Report showed that there were more than 5 million international students globally in 2014. Between the U.S. and Canada, in 2017, there were approximately 1.5 million international students total, with there being 1 million in the U.S. and almost 500,000 in Canada (CBIE, 2018, IIE, 2018). While different reasons have been provided for the increase in international students, such as the impact of globalization, immigration, technology, and diversity, Urban & Palmer (2016) argued that some research found that international students choose to study in the U.S. because they believe that studying in the U.S. provides them with more career opportunities and an international education and experience that will enhance their opportunities for employment after graduation (Hazen & Alberts, 2016). Other scholars averred that international education helps students gain new perspectives in their field of study, a broader and better form of education, personal development, and ability to build intercultural friendships and networks (Obst & Forster, 2007). While there are benefits for students, higher education institutions actively recruit international students mainly for financial reasons since international students pay more in tuition and fees than domestic students (Matthews & Lawley, 2011; Ross, Grace, & Shao, 2013; Thomason, 2013).

Boucher & Cerna (2014) stated that attention to skilled migration as a policy preference has increased among governments in an effort to address labor market gaps arising from economic shifts and structural aging. The International Organization of Migration (IOM) and Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) have both identified and drew a distinction between supply and demand driven migration (Chaloff & Lemaitre, 2009; IOM, 2012). In a supply-driven system (also referred to as the human capital approach), governments usually invent a list of desirable characteristics, such as education, age, language, and work experience, for international students. This policy allows international students to be able to apply for permanent residency after graduation. Also, this policy allows countries like Canada and Australia to be able to retain these students after graduation if those students choose to stay in the country of their study after graduation. The demand-driven system relies on employers to choose workers based on the actual labor needs of business corporations. The United States, however, does not have similar policies as Canada and Australia; and therefore the U.S. policy decisions have implications on international student decision-making and on American

institutions of higher education.

This article will explore the impact of immigration policies on higher education institutions' efforts in the U.S. and Canada in attracting international students to their campuses as a result of national immigration laws and priorities. In this article, we: (1) provide an understanding of the roles of international students in higher education institutions and their contributions to the local economy, (2) emphasize areas of concern where immigration policies present a challenge to the recruitment efforts of higher education institutions, especially in the U.S., (3) analyze the impact of immigration policy in the decisions made by international students when deciding which country to study, and (4) consider future implications on the institutions in both countries and the competitiveness and relevance of the graduates produced in today's increasingly globally diversified and competitive world.

## **The Socio-Political Nature of International Education: U.S. and Canada**

Mueller (2009) stated that there has been a concerted effort by the U.S. to restrict access to foreign nationals, including international students, since the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks in New York City. The increased scrutiny of international students in the U.S. since the 2001 attacks (Szelenyi, 2003) is further heightened by the recent immigration rhetoric of the present Administration thus making international students perceive the U.S. to be less welcoming (Down, 2017). A survey conducted by the American Association of College Registrar and Admission Officers (AACRAO) among over 250 colleges and universities nationwide showed that there has been a decline in international student applications, which is attributed to the current political climate in the U.S. (AACRAO, 2017). In Canada, however, Chiose (2017) reported that Canadian universities expected to witness an unprecedented jump in the number of international students on their campuses. These increases are attributed to the strategic efforts and initiatives of Canadian universities in the past three years to increase enrollment of international students. A Universities Canada (2014) report showed that several Canadian universities have come up with policies to increase the presence of international students in their campuses in order to enhance their global competitiveness, attract more internationally recognized faculty, and increase their revenue generation potential from international students.

According to the survey that was conducted across over 250 colleges and universities in the U.S. by AACRAO, 38% of undergraduate institutions that were surveyed saw a decrease in their number of international student applications, 31% of graduate schools reported a drop in applications from abroad, and 27% reported no change at all (AACRAO, 2017). The International Institute of Education (IIE, 2017) Open Doors Report found that 1,078,822 students studied in the U.S. in the 2016-2017 academic year. The report stated further that these students contributed \$39.4B to the U.S. economy during this period and supported over 450,331 jobs (NAFSA, 2017), but many fear that this contribution along with cultural exchange initiatives and activities in university and college campuses brought about by the presence of international students may be significantly reduced (NAFSA, 2017; Wermund, 2018).

The 2016 Open Doors report indicated that over 100,000 students from the Middle East studied in the U.S. and they made up less than 10% of international student enrollment nationwide. However, the 2017 AACRAO survey showed a decline of 40% in undergraduate applications from the Middle East while 31% of the institutions surveyed reported a drop in graduate applications for fall 2017 from the Middle East. Similarly, India and China both accounted for 47% of international students' enrollment in the U.S. with close to 500,000 Indian and Chinese Students studying in the U.S. in the 2014-15 academic year, but AACRAO found applications from India and China declined for fall 2017.

Unlike American institutions, Chiose (2017) reported that Canadian universities are expected to see an unprecedented rise in the number of international students. Some institutions are expected to witness a jump of up to 25% or more in admission of students from abroad.

Application from international students in Canadian universities for fall 2017 were up by double digits with record levels of interest from American students (Chiose, 2017). David Turpin, the President of the University of Alberta, attributed the surge in the number of international students to Canada to the rising tide of isolationism and exclusion in Europe and in the U.S. President Turpin further stated that the increase in the number of international students to Canada will give the universities the opportunity to build linkages that are crucial for future development when a number of the students go back to their home countries at the end of their studies.

Chiose (2017) reported that the percentage of international students who have accepted admission offers to the University of Alberta for fall 2017 increased by 27% from the previous year. University of Alberta also

had an increase of about 82% in applications from graduate students abroad. These increases are similar across Canada. For example, the University of Toronto, which has been recruiting students from the U.S., has doubled the percentage of American students who accepted an offer. Queen's University at Kingston, Ontario, has an acceptance increase by 40% for fall 2017 by international students, and Brock University at St. Catharines, Ontario, expected more than a third more international students in fall 2017. The report also showed that several Canadian universities already had plans in place to endow professorial chairs, with each receiving as much as CAD10-15 million dollars from the revenues that they make from international students on their campuses.

In addition to the current Canadian immigration policies, the current Trudeau Administration is simplifying the process of becoming a permanent resident after graduation for international students who come to Canada to study. The Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE, 2016) also reported an increase in the number of international students who studied in Canada in 2015. The report showed that 95% of international students recommend Canada as a study destination, 51% of international students plan to apply for permanent residency in Canada, 91% of international students are satisfied with their experience in Canada, 37% of international students plan to remain in Canada for further study, and there has been an 83% increase in international student population in Canada between 2008 and 2014. Also, the Global Affairs Canada (2016) report revealed that the 353,000 international students in Canada contributed CAD12.5 billion to the Canadian economy in 2015 and supported 134,950 jobs.

## Why International Students Choose to Study in the U.S. or Canada

In addition to some of the previously stated reasons that international students choose to study abroad, immigration is one of the main reasons why Chinese students come to the U.S. to study (Austin & Shen, 2016). Many Chinese students choose to study in the U.S. because of the employment, social, economic, and other opportunities that may not be available in their home country, and they believe that studying in the U.S. offers them a better employment opportunity after graduation and an opportunity to fulfill their immigration aspirations. Ugwu & Adamuti-Trache (2017) also suggested that changes should be made to the present U.S. immigration system given that many international students choose to study in the U.S. in order to fulfill their immigration aspirations. These changes may allow international doctoral students to remain and make contributions to academic research and teaching if they so choose. Finn (2003) also found that many international students, especially those in the science and engineering disciplines, prefer to stay in the U.S. after graduation, particularly those from Egypt, South Africa, and other African countries who have a higher tendency to remain in the U.S. after their graduation.

Guo & Jamal (2007) argued that Canadian universities and colleges are increasingly becoming ethno-culturally diverse along with increasing enrollment of international students. Canada's international education is aimed at linking international education to immigration such that Canada is able to retain international students to stay and work in the country after their graduation (Chen, 2017). According to the Foreign Affairs, Trade & Development (FATDC, 2012, p. 48) report, "The overarching goal of an international education is to brand Canada internationally as a choice destination for talented people from around the world for studying, conducting research and potentially immigration." The FATDC (2014) report also stated that in order to achieve Canada's international education strategy, the Canadian government is aware of the need to strengthen cooperation to leverage scholarships for international students and to increase the number of international students who choose to remain in Canada as permanent residents. In that regard, the Canadian government provides several scholarships to talented international students to enable them to come to Canada to study. An example is the Africa Leaders of Tomorrow, meant to commemorate the late Nelson Mandela's commitment to social justice and equity for international African students to pursue a Master's degree program in Public Administration, Public Policy or Public Finance in Canada. The scholarship program is fully funded by the Government of Canada and The MasterCard Foundation (CBIE, 2017).

Hegarty (2014) highlighted the importance of international students to higher education institutions in both countries. International student enrollment is of major importance to the U.S. and other countries since higher education institutions continue to depend on the revenue from international students in the face of dwindling government funding. For example, Universities Australia (2016) report stated that international students generated \$20.3 billion in export income for Australia in 2015-16, which was an increase of eight percent over the previous year. Hegarty (2014) also stated that international students are important to the U.S. because they help to bolster enrollment numbers in under-enrolled programs in higher education institutions in

the U.S., thus ensuring program continuity and consistent revenue generation streams to higher education institutions.

## **Implications for Institutions of Higher Education**

Given the data provided and the challenges that higher education institutions face in attracting and recruiting international students who may be provided with a pathway to permanent residency after their studies, in addition to the economic contributions, international networking and connections, global perspectives and views on markets and the social and cultural value that international students bring to their country of study (Mueller, 2009; Szelenyi, 2003; Altbach, 2004; Downs, 2017; El-Assal, 2016), it is very obvious that the topic is both germane and relevant not only to the global competitiveness of higher education institutions but also to today's increasingly diversified and competitive global economy. We argue in this article that there should be political intervention in U.S. immigration policies to welcome international students to the U.S. to study, live, and work to make significant contributions to the economy. The number of international students choosing to travel and study in Canada (and Australia) continues to increase, partly due to the immigration systems in both countries that provide incentives for international students to consider becoming permanent residents. Mueller (2009, p. 22) stated that "in fact, evidence suggests that there is growing frustration among many U.S. universities regarding restrictive immigration policy for foreign students." The current restrictive U.S. immigration policy which has been made tighter following President Trump's travel ban has projected a negative perception that the U.S. is not a hospitable and welcoming country for international students (NAFSA, 2017; Wermund, 2018). Canada is taking advantage of this negative perception of the U.S. to increase her number of international students coming to Canada to study and live after their studies (Chiose, 2017; Wermund, 2018). This has led to Canada's ability to produce a pool of competitive graduates with Canadian credentials who are young enough to make meaningful and productive contributions to the Canadian workforce and economy upon graduation.

Since we live in a knowledge driven world which is produced and provided by higher education institutions, the attraction of international students by higher education institutions in U.S. and Canada not only helps to increase the production and provision of knowledge, but also helps to address the challenge of an aging workforce that is being experienced in both U.S. and Canada. The Canadian strategy is to increase the competitiveness of Canada as a top choice country of destination for international students. If the U.S. does not address and consider urgent measures that will allow international students to be able to live and work after their study in the country, the U.S. will continue to lose her international students to Canada.

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