

International Students' Views of Transition to Employment and Immigration

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Acknowledgment

Funding for this study was awarded to the first author from the Prairie Metropolis Centre.

Abstract

This study explored international students' views and experiences of transitioning from school to employment with the goal of permanent immigration. A semi-structured interview with critical incidents was used to assess the career transition experiences of 14 graduate international students from university to employment and permanent immigration to Canada. Data were analyzed using a constant comparison method and critical incident protocol. Despite the fact that most students had not obtained a job after completing their educational programs, the majority felt as though the decision to remain in Canada to work and eventually immigrate was a good one. Students' expectations about better job prospects were unmet while their expectations about an enhanced quality of life in Canada were met. Students recommended that Canadian employers be more open-minded about hiring people with international experience and see the benefits of a diverse workforce. The international students hoped that those employed in career services will help future students to build networks and meet prospective employers. Students advised future international students to educate themselves about Canadian culture, how Canadians interact, and the Canadian work environment. Implications for career services and career counselling are discussed.

Canada's immigration policies are linked to our country's position in the new global economy that is characterized by knowledge, information, and technology (Chen, 2008; Statistics

Canada, 2005). Immigration policy now permits international students to work in Canada while they are students and for three years post-graduation. These changes to employment policies were made to increase the qualifications of international students for immigration under the Canadian Experience Class (Citizenship and Immigration Canada [CIC], 2008). International students have specific skills and assets that make them preferred immigrants for the labour force (Hawthorne, 2006; Industry Canada, 2002). They bring experience and contacts from their home countries coupled with the skills that they acquire through their Canadian education.

Minimal research is available about the career development experiences of international students (Arthur, 2007). Available literature has typically focused on their adjustment issues, or preparation for re-entry to the home country, with few sources to guide a comprehensive view of international students' career development (e.g., Arthur, 2003a, 2007; Leung, 2007; Singaravelu, White, & Bringaze, 2005; Shen & Herr, 2004, Spencer-Rodgers, 2000). Policy changes that encourage international students to work in the host country where they study open up the scope of options. Enhanced opportunities to enter the Canadian labour force are connected to broader decisions about whether to gain experience and return home, or to pursue permanent immigration. International students face decisions that are more complex than where to work; their career decision-making includes deliberation about factors in both home and host cultures, making lifestyle choices, and reflection about a preferred future (Arthur & Flynn, 2011). It is timely for career services personnel and career counsellors to consider the influences on international students' career decision-making about pursuing employment and permanent immigration to Canada.

The purpose of this study is to investigate international students' transition experiences from university to employment and permanent immigration. First, a brief literature review is provided to expand the rationale for examining the career development of international students. Second, the approach taken to documenting international students' experiences is outlined. Third, the results of this study are described, including exemplars from interviews with international students. Finally, the discussion addresses considerations for future research and practices to support international students who decide to pursue the option of staying in Canada.

International Students And Desirable Skilled Workers

In 2009, Canadian universities were host to more than 178,000 international students (FAITC, 2009). Canadian universities attract international students from more than 200 countries; the top 10 source countries are China, the United States, France, India, South Korea, Iran, Japan, Hong Kong, Mexico, and Pakistan. At the institutional level, international students bring financial benefits and promote intercultural learning. International students pay substantially higher tuition fees than local students, up to four times more than local students, and supply a revenue stream for budgets in higher education. It is estimated that international students contribute \$6.5 billion to Canada's economy annually (AUCC, 2010). As well, international students strengthen an institution's culturally and intellectually diverse learning environment. International students also enhance contacts for future recruitment and business contacts (Arthur, 2003b; Francis, 1993; Knight, 1994). The prospect of permanent migration to a foreign country is



used as a marketing strategy to recruit additional international students. For individuals born in war-torn or impoverished countries, this is a major incentive (Ziguras & Law, 2006). Such prospects have attracted many students to choose Canadian institutions to pursue their academic and broader career goals.

From a global perspective, international students are considered attractive migrants for several key reasons (Ziguras & Law, 2006). In most economically developed societies, the birth rate is declining and the population is aging, creating opportunities for young, skilled workers to fill vacated positions. In filling such positions, international students increase a country's pool of highly skilled workers, thereby supporting economic development. International students bring expertise regarding labour practices and customs from their home countries and, as a result of their education in the host country, acquire valuable local experience (Ziguras & Law, 2006). International students who have been educated at local institutions may be more desirable to employers than those who have a foreign education but lack local experience.

Increased efforts to recruit international students and changes in Canadian immigration policy have implications for international students' immediate and long-term career decisions. Some international students may endeavour to study abroad with the intention of returning to their home countries with marketable skill sets. Other students may be set on remaining in the host country to gain valuable foreign work experience, build international relationships, or immerse themselves in the host culture and language. Permanent immigration may be the long-term goal of some international students who often have a plethora of career- and/or familial-related motives for this decision (Arthur, 2007).

As students are approaching the end of their educational programs career-related issues may surface that pivot around their decision to return home, their intention to gain additional experience in Canada prior to returning home, or their plans to gain additional work experience and pursue permanent immigration. As previously mentioned, some international students decide to re-

turn home after the completion of their studies. These students may seek assistance with career services such as job search approaches and strategies for transferring their educational experiences to their home countries (Shen & Herr, 2004; Spencer-Rodgers, 2000). Other students will investigate employment opportunities in the host country. For some students, the motive to secure employment in Canada is to enhance their expertise and credentials so as to be considered marketable employees upon their return to their home countries (Arthur, 2007). The current study is concerned with the experiences of international students who actively seek employment experience for the purpose of pursuing permanent immigration to Canada.

The Current Study

The aim of the current study was to build on our knowledge of the transition and employment experiences of international students who remain in Canada after completing their educational programs. More specifically, the study examined how international students' general and career expectations were met as well as how the job search and acquisition of employment unfolded. As Canadian immigration policies change in ways that create expanding options for international students, it is important to understand how they navigate such changes. The primary research question addressed in this study was the following: How do international students studying in Canada view the transitions from student to employee and/or immigrant? Three secondary questions were addressed, 1) How were students' expectations about better job prospects and enhanced quality of life in Canada met or unmet?; 2) How were students' immigration decisions influenced by their experiences to date; and, 3) What recommendations would international students make for Canadian employers, those employed in career services, and future international students?

Method

Participants

The participants in this study were students previously recruited for a study on the topic of influences on the career

development of international students. Participants were 14 undergraduate and graduate international students at a large Western Canadian university. Eleven were men and the ages of the students ranged from 22 to 38 years, with an average of 28.7 ($SD = 4.64$). Students came from the following countries: China (6), Mexico (2), India (2), Saudi Arabia, Bangladesh, Iran, and Taiwan. Length of time studying in Canada ranged from 0.5-7 years, with an average of 3.01 ($SD = 1.82$). Five of the 16 participants were married and four reported having a partner.

Procedure

This study involved follow-up interviews with international students who were initially interviewed in the last semester of their university program. Participants were initially recruited from the institution's Centre for International Students and Study Abroad (CISSA) during their final year of academic studies. Any international student who subscribed to the CISSA listserv was contacted via e-mail. The participants were recruited from the institution's Centre for International Students during their final year of academic studies. Prospective participants were contacted from the Centre via a general message sent out to all international students on their e-mail list-serve. This e-mail included information about the purpose of the study and the compensation for participation. Students were asked to arrange a time with the second author to meet and be interviewed for up to 1 hour. A total of 26 responses were received, 19 of whom were originally interviewed due to budgetary considerations.

In the current study, phase two, all of original participants were presumed to have completed their educational programs and thus were contacted for a follow-up interview. The second author contacted each participant via e-mail and arranged a time for the interview to be conducted over Skype, a software application that allows video conference calls to be made over the internet and recorded. Sixteen of the 19 international students agreed to be interviewed for a second time, which was approximately 6 months after the first interview. Of



these 16 students, just two were undergraduate students. Due to the potentially differing career goals of undergraduate and graduate students, and this disproportionate ratio, these two students were excluded from the study. As a result, a total of fourteen graduate student interviews were included in the analysis and results. Each interview was audio recorded via the Skype software. In both phases of the study, each student was compensated \$30 for his or her time. Permission for both phases of the study was obtained from the Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board at the university where the research was conducted.

The Interview Process

A semi-structured interview was the method of inquiry in this study. This interview involved fourteen open-ended questions as well as inviting participants to offer a descriptive critical incident (CI). The CI related to participants' decisions to pursue immigration to Canada. The choice of using this qualitative methodology is compatible with the need to understand process issues in career development (Merchant & Dupuy, 1996). The Critical Incident Technique is derived from the case study method and early work of Flanagan (1954). It has been used in research on the experience of cross-cultural transitions (e.g., Arthur, 2001; Pedersen, 1995), and in career development research (e.g., Amundson, Borgen, Jordan, & Erlebach, 2004; Arthur, Collins, McMahan, & Marshall, 2009). Critical incidents offer snapshots of participants' experiences as they recall situations that stand out for them and that are meaningful in relation to the topic of inquiry. The interview questions, found in the Appendix, were posed in English by the second author. Each interview lasted between 20 and 30 minutes. As well, the second author discussed the interview with each participant after the fourteen questions had been asked. Participants were invited to add any other information they felt contributed to their experiences as international students. All interviews were transcribed verbatim by a professional transcriptionist, who had signed an oath of confidentiality regarding use of interview material.

The main prompt for the CI, that encouraged participants to choose a unique, outstanding experience, was: Give an example of a situation (i.e., an important event, something that happened, or something that you learned, any situation that you feel was important for you) that helped you to decide to pursue employment/immigration to Canada. The following open-ended questions were also posed to provide some structured parameters for the CI and to encourage participants to elaborate on their descriptions.

1. What were you doing/thinking/-feeling?
2. What was your role in this situation?
3. Who else was involved?
4. What stands out for you about this situation?
5. What was going well for you in this situation?
6. What difficulties were you experiencing in this situation?
7. What did you learn from this situation?
8. How do you see this situation as related to your plans and decision-making to work in Canada and/or immigrate to Canada?

Data Analysis

The data collected from the fourteen open-ended interview questions were analyzed using a constant comparison method (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Guba & Lincoln, 1981) and frequency analysis. The second author started by reading each participant's answers in full; she then created a series of tables to index the frequency of participants' responses to the 14 questions. She compared participants' answers, noting commonalities in language such that some answers could be considered the same. For instance, question ten was "Do you plan on immigrating to Canada when your post-graduation work permit expires? Why or why not?" Those who answered "Yes" to this question provided reasons such as "better life than home country" and "social benefits". These answers were considered together and termed "enhanced quality of life".

The approach to analyzing the critical incidents was the same as reported

for the first phase of the study (Arthur & Flynn, 2011). To recap, the procedures from Flanagan's (1954) and Butterfield, Borgen, Amundson, and Maglio's (2005) prescribed protocol were followed. The focus of the analysis was placed on how the data in the study could inform career counsellors and campus support services of international students' views of their transitions and experiences from students to employees and immigrants to Canada. The second author read through the transcribed critical incidents twice, highlighting general factors that related to the purpose of the study. Constant comparison was used to group similar incidents together and code the data into themes. A second coder (i.e., the first author) reviewed the emerging themes in relation to portions of each transcript, to guard against coding drift. Any discrepancies about data coding were negotiated until consensus was reached. Two additional steps were taken to enhance the trustworthiness of themes that emerged from the data analysis. The first author examined 25% of the CIs to establish the level of agreement between what the second author thought was a critical incident and what she thought was a critical incident. In order for a theme to be considered valid, critical incidents from a minimum of 25% of participants had to relate to that theme.

Results

Some of the outcomes of this study, including employment status, difficulties in transitioning, expectations, and desire to immigrate at the time of the interviews have been summarized in Table 1. The results from the open-ended interview questions are presented next, followed by the critical incidents. Numbers in brackets indicate the number of participants. Selected quotes from participants are offered to illustrate key influences on international students' transition experiences. To recap, the interviews were deliberately scheduled approximately 6 months from the end of the previous academic semester to capture students' experiences with securing employment and how they viewed their prospects of life in Canada.



Table 1

Summary of Employment Transitions, Expectations and Desire to Immigrate

Participant	Employed? (Y/N)	Difficulties in transitioning to work	Career ↔ Life expectations:		Desire to immigrate? Y= yes N= no U= unsure	Recommendations for Canadian employers:
			M= met U= unmet N= neither			
1	Y	Discomfort in the Canadian work environment	Career N	Life M	Y	Do not discriminate
2	N	Finding or retaining a job	M	M	Y	Recognize skills
3	N	Lack of daily structure	U	U	U	Appreciate the acculturation process
4	Y	N/A	M	M	Y	Do not discriminate
5	N	Discomfort in the Canadian work environment	U	M	Y	Recognize international experience
6	N	N/A	U	M	U	Do not discriminate
7	N	Less autonomy	U	N	U	Recognize skills
8	N	N/A	M	M	Y	Recognize international experience
9	Y	N/A	N	M	Y	Appreciate unfamiliarity with workplace
10	N	Increased responsibility	U	M	Y	Do not discriminate
11	N	Lack of hands on skills	N	M	Y	Appreciate logistical constraints
12	Y	Lack of daily structure	U	M	Y	Do not discriminate
13	N	Lack of Canadian work experience	U	M	Y	Recognize skills
14	N	Finding or retaining a job	M	N	Y	Recognize international experience

Employment Status

Of the 14 participants, 28% (four) had secured a job since graduating, two were employed full-time and two were employed part-time. Forty-three percent (six) of participants reported being unable to secure a job and 28% (four) had not yet completed their educational programs. Of the four participants who had obtained employment, two had a job that related to their field of study. When asked if this job was what he or she had expected to be doing, one of the four employed participants indicated that this was his or her expected job. Those who had been unable to secure employment were asked what they had been doing to obtain employment. Most (six) had reviewed job web sites; others had consulted with mentors or those in field (three), or had prepared their resumes and covering letters (two).

Transitions

The majority of participants (seven) believed that a lack of experience was the most difficult aspect of the job search. As well, not having Canadian citizenship or permanent residency (PR) status (two), and a lack of connections or network (two) made this process dif-

ficult. When asked to describe the most difficult aspect of the new workplace, those who had secured a job believed that language barriers (1), instability in funding in the non-profit sector (1), the workplace culture (1), and insecurity about skills or lack of skills (1) were problematic. In the words of W. (age 27) "I haven't done such work before and then, I think I'm lacking some of the skills you know." D. (age 38) stated "If I have to speak online there are some problems for me because sometimes they speak too fast and I can't understand. And sometimes I have serious accent and they don't understand me."

Participants were asked to describe the difficulties in transitioning from students to employees or applicants. Difficulties included the necessity of finding or retaining a job (2), a lack of daily structure compared to student life (for applicants; 2), and an uncertainty about (or discomfort in) the Canadian work environment (2). In the words of C. (age 22), "But when I graduate, you finally find that you have to depend on yourself. You cannot lose your job, otherwise you cannot survive." Another participant, W. age 27, stated how the lack of structure in the workplace was a challenge.

"Well, I think the major thing is that when you were a student, you kind of were being assigned work once in a while by your professor. And there is a deadline and it's very clear what the deadline is, but now when I become an employee, I have to sometimes run different projects by myself and I have to make a very clear guideline or schedule for myself in the aspect of how to organize the whole project or the whole task."

Participants believed diversified, well advertised career fairs (3) and having a network (2) would have been helpful during the job search. As well, having Canadian experience or an internship (2) would have been helpful. One participant noted "Even though Canada is kind of an immigrant country, but I think it's not always easy to immigrate or work as a foreigner and support ourselves" (N., age 27).

Expectations

Participants were asked about their expectations and how they had shifted over the course of the progression from student to job applicant or employee. When asked at this point in time if they think remaining in Canada was a good decision for themselves and their families, 64% (11) said yes, 35% (5) were unsure, and 0% said no. Those who answered yes believed that Canada offered a better quality of life (3), cited familial reasons (2), were attracted by career incentives (1), or had made an extensive investment in Canada. According to A. (age 25), "In India, if the person goes for work, he goes in the morning at eight o'clock and he comes back the next day at nine o'clock. Here it's simpler. If I work, then you can give more to your family. This is the biggest thing; you have time for your family and for yourself." Those who were unsure stated that there was an economic recession in Canada (2), that there were ample jobs in the home country (1), this decision depended on job they would obtain (1), and that hard work is necessary anywhere (1).

Fifty percent (7) of participants believed that their expectations about better job prospects or enhanced opportunities in Canada were unmet, 28% (4) believed they were met and 21% (3) believed they were both met



and unmet. Those who believed their expectations were unmet stated that jobs related to their major were scarce, there was a greater chance of promotion at home, their perception of opportunities had changed, or that there was currently an economic recession. Those who believed their expectations were met because of the friendly people (1), good salaries (1), or by the fact that friends had gotten jobs (1). According to W. (age 27), whose expectations were unmet, *"While I was looking for a job and I clearly understand what I am capable of doing, then I changed my expectation. I kind of lowered my expectations"*.

Regarding the quality of life in Canada, participants were asked similar questions. When asked if their expectations about an enhanced quality of life in Canada were met or not met, 78% (11) stated they were met, while 14% (2) believed they were both met and unmet, and 4% (1) believed they were unmet. Those who believed they were met stated reasons such as the existence of work-life balance (3) and personal freedom (1). One participant noted *"I had a good life in Iran. But if I want to compare, I had a bigger house, I had a better car. But these are just, like material things, right? Here in Canada we have more peace of mind. You don't worry much about your daily life; basically it is calm and friendly"* (A., 36). As stated by another participant, L. (age 26), *"We decide to stay because of the lifestyle and the environment and not necessarily the job opportunities. Because actually there are a lot of opportunities in our home country, which is China."* Those who believed they were both met and unmet stated that it depended on their permanent residency status (1) or were unsure how to compare their current expectations to their previous ones (1).

Immigration Plans

Participants were asked about their current plans for immigration to Canada. The majority of participants, 78% (11), planned to immigrate to Canada when their 3-year post-graduation work permit expired. Reasons for immigrating included an enhanced quality of life (4), career incentives (3), the

possibility of becoming a permanent resident (4), the freedom provided to move between countries (3), and familial incentives (3). In the words of H. (age 27), *"I'm looking for a safe, stable life."* Twenty-one percent (3) were unsure if they would immigrate, for these students the decision depended on the job market.

When asked if their decisions to immigrate had been strengthened or weakened by their work (or job search) experiences to date, 42% (6) reported that their decisions had been strengthened. Reasons included: having secured a job, it made sense given one's career goals, and familial incentives. Thirty-one percent (5) stated that it neither strengthened nor weakened their decision. According to B. (age 29), *"I don't think it's a factor because even when I am not an immigrant right now, I still want to work in Canada for a while."* Twenty-one % of participants (3) believe their decision to immigrate to Canada had been weakened. Reasons for weakening in decisions included dependence on job prospects and permanent residency status.

Critical Incidents

Participants were asked to give an example of a situation (i.e., an important event, or something that they learned, etc.) that helped them to decide to pursue employment/immigration to Canada. The second author constructed two themes that described the influences on these international students' intentions to pursue employment and/or immigration to Canada post-graduation. The first theme was *career/education* the second was *lifestyle/familial*.

The career/education theme described 64% (9) of participants' critical events and included perceived and realized career opportunities, viewing others' career-related successes, substantial educational investment, and supportive faculty. In the words of R. (age 33), witnessing others' success motivates one to pursue personal goals.

Some classmates have already found a job and then they someone encourage you to keep going because like that's the hardest part somehow. Once you're doing something

that you like, then you're more satisfied with the income that you might have. I mean everything starts to get better."

Another participant spoke of her educational investment as a critical influence.

... I guess one of my main reasons why I would want to work here is because like ever since I've been studying, like I've been moving my savings for like graduation and all those things. I would want to work here and earn Canadian dollars. Because if I go back to India and like the currency is entirely different, so I would rather kind of make up for all the investments that I have put in the education while I was in Canada. So it just makes sense for me to work here" (J., age 26).

Encouragement and support from academic advisors, such as supervisors was meaningful, as noted by J. (age 27).

I would say my professor helped me a lot, so if would pick one significant event, I would say he took me to two class conferences. And I see a lot of things in these conferences and met a lot of people. And I feel very confident after those conferences because I feel that I could learn a lot and I could meet a lot of people in this environment and I could contribute a lot to the society.

This example illustrates how assistance to make initial contacts and begin the network process enhances confidence for pursuing career goals.

The *lifestyle/familial* theme encapsulated 36% (5) of critical incidents in participants' decisions to stay. A major influence was the high quality of life offered in Canada compared to participants' home countries. According to A. (age 25), *"What I think... is the quality life between India and here. Like here, medium class or low class person can enjoy the things that a high class person can in India. And I am living here like a high class person can live in India."*



Some participants noted the possibility of achieving a work-life balance as critical in their decision, while others noted how their relationships with Canadians was strongly related to their views of lifestyles. "I think people always—the friends I know and the life in Canada overall" (L., age 26). The possibility of sponsoring one's family was critical in M.'s (age 24) decision.

Being in school, you can apply for many scholarships and other stuff. So if you are a landed immigrant and another thing is that once you become the permanent resident, it only takes three years to get the citizenship because you have already spent one year in the school, so it gets counted. That's one thing. Another thing is that you can sponsor your family if you are a PR. So I can sponsor my parents, so that they can come here and stay with me."

These examples show how relationships in both home and host cultures are key influences for international students as they consider lifestyles afforded in their home countries and cultures in comparison to Canada.

Recommendations

Based on their experiences, participants were asked to provide some recommendations for Canadian employers, campus support services, and incoming international students. A summary of the recommendations if found in Table 2.

When asked what they could tell Canadian employers anything, the majority of participants (5) advised these individuals to refrain from discriminating against students' international status, lack of citizenship, or poor English proficiency. As well students suggested employers get to know international students' skills and qualifications (3) and to recognize that international experience is a valuable asset (3). According to W. (age 27) stated "I would say for the Canadian employers well, be more open-minded and be more inclusive of the diversity of the employees in your company or organization." B. (age 36) noted, "Some employers really don't know what it's like to immigrate or work

in a different country...but some people, if they have experience working outside of Canada or different places or even immigrated here, they usually are more sympathetic to me."

When it came to those employed in campus support services, participants recommended that these personnel help students build networks and meet prospective employers (5). "So to arrange the opportunity to let students know the employers and to know who they are going to work for" (J., 27). This is explained by another student "Canadian students here have a nice network of family and friends. For us it's totally different. We have a network, but we left it at home" (A., 36). As well participants noted a lack of information specifically for graduate students (4) and suggested that personal help students get pre-graduation work experience and/or internships (4). This is exemplified by B.'s (age 29) comment: "They don't really have some program to help graduate students to find an internship or a volunteer job or something

like that." In J.'s (age 26) statement, there is also a plea for services that help international students to transition into the labour market:

I think for graduate students especially, because most of them are international students and most are graduating with PhDs or Masters. I find because the undergraduates are mostly Canadians. Graduates as compared to undergraduates have more difficulty in finding a job because they are not really familiar with how to find a job in a different country and those things. So I would suggest that the Career Center should like have some special grants or something, a special department to look after the graduate students. Yeah, and connect them to the employers.

Finally, participants were asked to make recommendations to other international students wishing to stay in

Table 2

Recommendations for Employers, Student Services, and Incoming International Students

Participant	Recommendations for Canadian employers:	Recommendations for campus support services:	Recommendations for incoming international students:
1	Do not discriminate	Info specifically for graduate students	Educate themselves about Canadian culture, Canadians, Canadian work environment
2	Recognize skills	Help students build networks, meet prospective employers	Proficiency in English or French
3	Appreciate the acculturation process	Info specifically for graduate students	Educate themselves about Canadian culture, Canadians, Canadian work environment; Pre-graduation job research
4	Do not discriminate	Greater promotion of services	Pre-graduation job research ; Proficiency in English or French; Pre-graduation part-time employment
5	Recognize international experience	Help students get pre-graduation work experience/internships; Continued support post-graduation	Proficiency in English or French; Be confident in interviews; Do not get discouraged regarding jobs
6	Do not discriminate	Help students build networks, meet prospective employers	Educate themselves about Canadian culture, Canadians, Canadian work environment; Pre-graduation job research
7	Recognize skills	Info specifically for graduate students	Pre-graduation networking, ask those in the field; Proficiency in English or French
8	Recognize international experience	Help students build networks, meet prospective employers	Pre-graduation job research; Pre-graduation networking, ask those in the field
9	Appreciate unfamiliarity with workplace	Help students get pre-graduation work experience/internships	Educate themselves about Canadian culture, Canadians, Canadian work environment
10	Do not discriminate	Info specifically for graduate students; Do not be fearful of giving advice re work policies	Educate themselves about Canadian culture, Canadians, Canadian work environment
11	Appreciate logistical constraints	Help students build networks, meet prospective employers; information on permanent residency status	Pre-graduation job research; Pre-graduation networking, ask those in the field; Do not get discouraged regarding jobs
12	Do not discriminate	Do not just direct students to websites	Educate themselves about Canadian culture, Canadians, Canadian work environment; Pre-graduation job research
13	Recognize skills	Help students build networks, meet prospective employers	Educate themselves about Canadian culture, Canadians, Canadian work environment; Pre-graduation networking, ask those in the field
14	Recognize international experience	Help students get pre-graduation work experience/internships	Pre-graduation job research; Do not get discouraged regarding jobs



Canada post-graduation. First and foremost, participants advised potential international students to educate themselves about Canadian culture, Canadians, and the Canadian work environment (6). As well pre-graduation job research was noted as a very important task (5) as was pre-graduation networking with those individuals in the students' fields (6). J. (age 27) advised future international students to be proactive about ways to make the transition to working in Canada.

I would tell them, of course, the official language is English and French, so at least they have to be very fluent in either English or French. If they could, they could learn the other language as well, because it will be very helpful. And also, for the students, they have to know more about the culture and the working culture in the companies. Because it's a little bit different from the culture in China or in India or other countries. So yeah, they have to do all those researches by themselves to fit in the environment."

The emphasis in this recommendation for incoming international students is to be proactive about learning about Canadian culture, enhance language skills, and to become informed as much as possible prior to arriving to Canada.

Discussion

The choice to remain in a foreign country after completing one's studies is an exciting prospect, yet it is a decision that pivots around employment prospects. The international students in this study were willing to embrace the risks associated with remaining in Canada following their degree completion to forward important career, lifestyle, and familial objectives. The primary incentives for studying abroad are usually related to academic and career goals (Arthur, 2007) and the students in this study noted key struggles not only in finding a job but in showcasing themselves to potential employers. Most of the international students interviewed in this study were unable to secure stable employment within six

months after completing their educational programs. Students believed that a key piece missing from their repertoire of skills was work experience. This finding is reflected in the literature; it has been demonstrated that international students have relatively greater needs for work experiences than job exploration or career planning (Leong & Sedlacek, 1989; Spencer-Rodgers, 2000). Students believed that the existence of a network would be helpful in obtaining employment. Students felt as though they were at a disadvantage compared to their Canadian counterparts when it came to knowing about or securing coveted positions. Programming through university career services and international students' centers might look at addressing this concern by better connecting students with potential employers in their communities. As well, previous research has indicated that relevant work experience, in the form of internships or teaching assistantships, enhances students' career foundations, helping them to establish a network (Shen & Herr, 2004).

Students noted the most difficult aspect of transitioning from a student to a (potential) employee was the increased level of responsibility. This finding may be of interest to career counsellors in preparing students for the realities of the work world prior to degree completion. It appears as though the structure and consistency of student life was not paralleled in students' roles as potential employees and employees. This transition might be particularly difficult for international students from East Asian cultures who are accustomed to hierarchical relationships and may be uncomfortable questioning an authority figure or clarifying their role in a new workplace (Hong & Domokos-Cheng, 2000). Counsellors might adopt a psycho-educational approach for helping students to understand aspects of the Canadian workplace. Although expectations will vary according to each occupational environment, counsellors can help students understand general expectations and how roles will be different as an employee compared to a student.

Students were secure in their decisions to remain in Canada and to eventually immigrate. Further, these decisions were strengthened by their ex-

periences of living and studying in Canada. This outcome speaks to students' optimism and desire to continue to pursue long-term career goals despite barriers and challenges. This is reflected in the critical incidents, many of which were centered on education/career. Students were willing to withstand immediate difficulties in the face of long-term academic or vocational interests. A comparatively higher quality of life was critical to students- this was reflected in both the critical incidents and the interview responses. Perhaps this incentive combined with the possibility of enhanced career opportunities strengthened students' decisions to remain in Canada after completing their educational programs. This finding has been reflected in the literature, as the international students in Shen and Herr's (2004) study viewed the prospect of a better living and working environment in the United States as an incentive to remain in that country.

Students provided a series of recommendations for Canadian employers, personnel in career services, and international students interested in studying in Canada. These valuable suggestions can be examined and implemented in several domains. There must be a stronger connection and increased communication between Canadian universities and Canadian employers. In the views of the participants in this study, Canadian employers are somewhat closed to the prospect of hiring international students and may be discouraged by students' accents and lack of Canadian citizenship. As well, students believed employers do not understand or appreciate their international experience. If taken in a stronger light, the experiences of some international students in this study was that employers preferred to hire only Canadian students and were negatively biased against hiring international students. This raises questions about the responsibility of the institutions that recruit international students to ensure that students looking to remain in Canada receive a fair chance of obtaining sustainable employment. University-based personnel, including academic staff and career services staff have roles to play in educating Canadian employers about what international students can offer as potential employ-



ees. Brochures, websites, or presentations may be used to highlight, for instance, students' multilingual skills, knowledge of foreign economies and market trends, or their familiarity and comfort working with individuals from diverse cultural groups. Furthermore, an emphasis must be placed on the long-term benefits of hiring an individual with multi-national experience. Such benefits include establishing and strengthening global relationships and enhancing business communication through students' global perspectives and multilingualism.

International students can be an integral part of the burgeoning relationship between Canadian universities and Canadian employers. The international students in this study were keen to meet prospective employers, partake in internships, and obtain pre-graduation work experience. Students can participate in creating and updating the resources presented to Canadian employers. They can create profiles on promotional websites and speak during presentations about their experiences and marketable skills. This is an opportunity for students to become more creative and promote their international and local experience in an interesting and relevant way to employers. As well, it might be helpful for employers to have a standard means of evaluating students at the end of their work terms and internships. This will provide students with constructive, practical feedback to prepare for the job acquisition process.

Finally, the students in this study advised international students planning on studying in Canada to integrate into the Canadian culture and conduct pre-graduation research on potential job opportunities. This advice to incoming international students might be most effectively distributed through presentations given by experienced international students during student orientation. As well, counsellors assisting international students can examine students' bicultural realities to understand how clients internalize and adhere to the Canadian culture in light of their own cultural identities and values (Miller, 2007; Tsai, Ying & Lee, 2000). Counsellors may use a cultural formation approach to explore the culturally situated self and

how transitions impact career choice and development (Arthur & Popadiuk, 2009).

Considerations for Future Research

This study provided many insights into international students' views and experiences of transitioning from full-time university students to potential employees and immigrants. The results provide a foundation from which others may explore how the international students at their institutions are adjusting to the transition from students to potential employees or immigrants.

One major limitation in this study was its small sample size. The results of interviews with fourteen international students representing eight countries were explored in this study. This is a relatively small number compared to the total number of international students studying at the institution where the study was conducted. Further, the participant pool consisted largely of graduate students, most of whom were studying engineering or science. The danger in using a small participant group is that the codes and themes generated may not necessarily speak to the diversity of the student population. The participants in the study were volunteers who had a particular interest in the topic of inquiry.

Further investigation is warranted to more fully explore international students' experiences of transition. First and foremost, a study of a larger scale is warranted. A multi-institutional study that captures the experiences of a large number of international students from a variety of countries would provide valuable information on the transition issues these students encounter in their endeavours to work and immigrate to Canada. The outcomes of such inquiry could be used to inform institutional policies and services to support international students' career development in the transition from school to work.

As well, it would be useful to compare international students' perceptions to those held by Canadian employers. The students in this study, for instance, believed that Canadian employers were somewhat closed to hiring international students. It would be worth examining if, in fact, international students are at a

disadvantage or advantage compared to their Canadian counterparts in terms of their employability, and particularly the value placed on international experience by employers. This information would help researchers target the actual barriers and facilitators for making the transition from school to work.

Most international students felt as though the decision to remain in Canada and to eventually immigrate was a good decision and this decision was strengthened by their experiences to date. Students' expectations about better job prospects were unmet while their expectations about an enhanced quality of life in Canada were met. In conclusion, we hope that this study may be used as a launching point for further inquiry into understanding and improving the transition experiences and eventual success of international students who pursue employment and permanent immigration to Canada.

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Appendix

Interview Questions

1. Have you been able to secure a job since graduating?
2. a. If yes to #1,
 - i) What is your job?
 - ii) Is your job/position related to your field of study?
 - iii) Is this job what you expected to be doing?
2. b. If no to #1, what have you been doing to obtain employment?
3. What was (is) the most difficult aspect of the job search?
4. What has been the most difficult aspect of the new workplace? (If applicable)
5. What has been the most difficult aspect of the transition from student to employee (or applicant)?
6. Describe what would have been (would be) helpful in making the job search easier.
7. At this point, do you think remaining in Canada was a good decision for yourself and/or for your family? Explain.
8. How were your expectations about better job prospects/enhanced opportunities in Canada met/ not met?
9. How were your expectations about an enhanced quality of life in Canada met or not met?
10. Do you plan on immigrating to Canada when your 3year post-graduation work permit expires? Why or why not?
11. Has your immigration decision been strengthened or weakened by your work (or job search) experiences to date?
12. If you could tell Canadian employers anything, what would it be?
13. If you could tell campus support services anything there services, what would it be?
14. If you could tell other international students wishing to stay in Canada post-graduation anything, what would it be?