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Catalina Bobadilla Sandoval**

International Undergraduate Students and the Employability Game

June 2023

Editors:

**Antje Ellermann, Alessandra Santos, Matthew Wright and
Gaoheng Zhang**

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Abstract

This paper explores international students' orientations to employability as evidenced in their descriptions of term-time work. Undergraduate students who work often face pressures related to juggling studies and employment. We argue that international students are likely to face additional pressures related to higher education costs and the desire to open doors to migration within a context of ever-changing rules and regulations. This paper draws on Bourdieu's analogy of "playing the game" and scholarly work on employability to analyze narratives from diverse international students who strategize to develop and revalorize capitals to enhance their employability with the aim of securing a brighter future. We argue that the onus of enhancing employability does not lie solely with individual students but is rather a responsibility to be shared at different levels. Building on the work of other scholars, we offer recommendations that may contribute to enhancing the international student experience.

KEYWORDS: international students, employability, immigration, Canada, Bourdieu, capital

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Introduction

This paper explores working international undergraduate students' orientations to employability and, in particular, the influence of term-time work (i.e., part-time employment during the academic term) on their attitudes toward their careers and futures. As a group, undergraduate students who engage in term-time work during their degrees are required to adapt to the temporal rhythms of the university and their workplaces, which they navigate with more or less discord depending on their value calculations, time horizons, family background, and resources.¹ Collectively, they face the pressures of an employability discourse that requires them to work hard to facilitate a smooth transition into the labour market following graduation.² At the same time, pathways to the graduate labour market tend to be highly dependent on students' circumstances, time, and financial constraints, and therefore often vary significantly.³

The policy agenda in Canada communicates an expectation that international students (IS), in particular, will make valuable contributions to the domestic labour market.⁴ Employability pressures are often intensified for IS as a group because of significantly higher costs, possible migration aspirations,⁵ family expectations, and the invisible work of acculturation. Acculturation involves, among other considerations, learning to “play the game” within the fields of higher education and the labour markets of IS' host countries.⁶ Especially in cases where there are significant cultural differences between home and host countries, it can be challenging to negotiate threats to one's sense of identity and pressures to blend in.⁷ Adjustments

1. Alison Taylor, “‘Being There’: Rhythmic Diversity and Working Students,” *Journal of Education and Work* 35, no. 5 (June 23, 2022): 573, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13639080.2022.2092607>.

2. Leonard Holmes, “Competing Perspectives on Graduate Employability: Possession, Position or Process?,” *Studies in Higher Education* 38, no. 4 (May 2013): 548, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2011.587140>.

3. Rita Hordósy, Tom Clark, and Dan Vickers, “Lower Income Students and the ‘Double Deficit’ of Part-Time Work: Undergraduate Experiences of Finance, Studying and Employability,” *Journal of Education and Work* 31, no. 4 (July 16, 2018): 361–62, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13639080.2018.1498068>.

4. Colin Scott et al., “International Students as ‘Ideal Immigrants’ in Canada: A Disconnect between Policy Makers’ Assumptions and the Lived Experiences of International Students,” *Comparative and International Education / Éducation Comparée et Internationale* 43, no. 3 (January 6, 2015): 3, <https://doi.org/10.5206/cie-eci.v43i3.9261>.

5. Elena Netierman et al., “Should I Stay or Should I Go? International Students’ Decision-Making About Staying in Canada,” *Journal of International Migration and Integration* 23, no. 1 (April 1, 2021): 56–57, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12134-021-00825-1>.

6. Patricia Thomson, “Field,” in *Pierre Bourdieu: Key Concepts*, 2nd ed, ed. Michael Grenfell (London: Routledge, 2012), 67.

7. Lin Ge, Douglas Brown, and Douglas Durst, “Chinese International Students’ Experiences in a Canadian University: Ethnographic Inquiry with Gender Comparison,” *Journal of International Students* 9, no. 2 (May 15, 2019): 604–07, <https://doi.org/10.32674/jis.v0i0.272>.

to a foreign country may lead to high levels of stress that may affect students' wellbeing.⁸ At the same time, like domestic students, IS' backgrounds and circumstances are diverse, and their adaptation to the host country's context is affected by overlapping personal, social, and academic factors.⁹

This paper explores the narratives of a diverse group of working international undergraduate students who navigated their university experience with varying capacities to be strategic: they acquired and leveraged different kinds of capital to enhance their employability in the hope of securing brighter futures for themselves. Drawing on Bourdieu, we highlight and problematize the individualization of employability and work transitions, which disregards structures of power.¹⁰ In so doing, we invite institutions and governments to recognize the uniqueness of the IS experience as well as intra-group differences in experiences. We advocate for an approach to employability that embraces a collective responsibility for preparing students for working lives over time. Building upon the work of other scholars, we conclude with a discussion on promising initiatives for institutions and governments.

Context, Literature Review, and Conceptual Influences

We begin our discussion with a brief outline of the policy context of internationalization in higher education and, in particular, the IS-to-permanent resident pathway. We then unpack the term *employability* and discuss its importance for IS. Bourdieu's conceptual tools, which have been taken up by several other higher education scholars, are useful in understanding how IS respond to pressures of employability. Our discussion of the intersecting contexts of studies and work within the literature on youth transitions and IS provides a sense of the fields they must navigate, as well as the challenges that IS encounter in the employability game.

8. Katie Koo, Ian Baker, and Jiyeon Yoon, "The First Year of Acculturation: A Longitudinal Study on Acculturative Stress and Adjustment among First-Year International College Students," *Journal of International Students* 11, no. 2 (April 15, 2021), 289, <https://doi.org/10.32674/jis.v11i2.1726>.

9. Adedapo Tunmise Aladegbaiye, Menno D.T. de Jong, and Ardion D. Beldad, "How International Students' Acculturation Motivation Develops over Time in an International Learning Environment: A Longitudinal Study," *Journal of International Students* 12, no. 2 (2022), 519–23, <https://doi.org/10.32674/jis.v12i2.3642>.

10. Peter H. Sawchuk and Alison Taylor, "Understanding Challenging Transitions in Learning and Work," in *Challenging Transitions in Learning and Work: Reflections on Policy and Practice*, ed. Peter Sawchuk and Alison Taylor (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2010), 1–15, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/9789087908898>.

The Canadian Context and International Students

Immigration policies in Western nations have evolved over time due to aging workforces and declining birth rates.¹¹ In Canada, IS are seen as culturally well-adapted candidates for filling labour market shortages for highly skilled workers.¹² They are regarded as ideal immigrants¹³ on account of their advanced English language skills, locally recognized qualifications, locally relevant career-related training, local acculturation,¹⁴ and adaptability.¹⁵ IS are perceived as a “tool in the global competition for high skills.”¹⁶ Characterized by their high enrolment in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) programs, IS are seen as having the potential to contribute to the host country’s innovation and development should they decide to remain in the country after graduation.¹⁷

IS are also perceived as a desirable group by post-secondary institutions, which see them as a source of revenue. Between 2017/18 and 2021/22, tuition fees rose by \$42 (from \$6,618 to \$6,660) for Canadian undergraduate students and by \$7,897 (from \$25,549 to \$33,446) for international undergraduate students.¹⁸ On average, international undergraduate students’ annual tuition fees (\$33,446 in 2021/22) amount to about five times that of domestic students (\$6,660 in

11. Ather H. Akbari and Martha MacDonald, “Immigration Policy in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United States: An Overview of Recent Trends,” *International Migration Review* 48, no. 3 (September 2014): 801, <https://doi.org/10.1111/imre.12128>; Nancy Arthur and Sarah Flynn, “Career Development Influences of International Students Who Pursue Permanent Immigration to Canada,” *International Journal for Educational and Vocational Guidance* 11, no. 3 (October 2011): 223, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10775-011-9212-5>.

12. Youjin Choi, Eden Crossman, and Feng Hou, “International Students as a Source of Labour Supply: Transition to Permanent Residency,” Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 36-28-0001, published June 23, 2021, 2, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/36-28-0001/2021006/article/00002-eng.pdf>.

13. Government of Canada, “CIMM – Temporary Residents,” last modified September 18, 2020, <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/corporate/transparency/committees/march-12-2020/temporary-residents.html>.

14. Akbari and MacDonald, “Immigration Policy,” 811.

15. Anita Gopal, “Visa and Immigration Trends: A Comparative Examination of International Student Mobility in Canada, Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States,” *Strategic Enrollment Management Quarterly* 4, no. 3 (October 2016): 132, <https://doi.org/10.1002/sem3.20091>.

16. Qianru She and Terry Wotherspoon, “International Student Mobility and Highly Skilled Migration: A Comparative Study of Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom,” *SpringerPlus* 2, no. 1 (March 25, 2013): 2, <https://doi.org/10.1186/2193-1801-2-132>.

17. She and Wotherspoon, 2.

18. Statistics Canada, “Canadian and International Tuition Fees by Level of Study (Current Dollars),” Table: 37-10-0045-01, published September 7, 2022, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=3710004501>.

2021/22),¹⁹ ranging from \$22,564 to \$66,571 for different programs.²⁰ IS' contributions amounted to about 40% of all tuition fees, “accounting for almost \$4 billion in annual revenue for Canadian universities in 2018/2019.”²¹ The impact on the national economy has been far more sizeable. Direct and indirect IS contributions to the Canadian economy were on the rise prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, with annual total spending of \$22.3 billion – an amount “greater than exports of auto parts, lumber or aircrafts.”²²

Employability

Employability is a polysemous term. Holmes,²³ for example, discusses three perspectives on employability: the (dominant) possessive approach that focuses on the possession and use of graduate skills and attributes; the positional approach that regards higher education as a system for reinforcing social positioning and status; and the processual approach that examines the interaction between job-seeking graduates and employment gatekeepers. In the mainstream view, influenced by human capital theorists, emphasis is placed on “how well the individual can adapt to the demands of the labour market and subsequently invest time, effort and/or money in increasing or improving skills, knowledge or other characteristics.”²⁴ Simply put, employability, for many policymakers, is equal to “*HE qualifications + key employability skills*.”²⁵ McQuaid

19. Statistics Canada, “Fees by Level of Study.”

20. Statistics Canada, “Canadian and International Tuition Fees by Field of Study (Current Dollars),” Table: 37-10-0005-01, published September 7, 2022, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=3710000501>.

21. Statistics Canada, “International Students Accounted for All of the Growth in Postsecondary Enrolments in 2018/2019,” published November 25, 2020, par. 6, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/en/daily-quotidien/201125/dq201125e-eng.pdf?st=1VqUuPlM>.

22. Government of Canada, “CIMM - International Students - Mar 8, 2021,” last modified June 29, 2021, <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/corporate/transparency/committees/cimm-mar-08-2021/cimm-international-students-mar-08-2021.htm>

23. Holmes, “Competing Perspectives on Graduate Employability,” 538.

24. Gerbrand Tholen, “What Can Research into Graduate Employability Tell Us about Agency and Structure?,” *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 36, no. 5 (December 9, 2015): 767, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01425692.2013.847782>.

25. Michael Tomlinson and Tran Le Huu Nghia, “An Overview of the Current Policy and Conceptual Landscape of Graduate Employability,” in *Developing and Utilizing Employability Capitals: Graduates’ Strategies across Labour Markets*, ed. Tran Le Huu Nghia, Thanh Pham, Michael Tomlinson, Karen Medica, and Christopher D. Thompson (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2020), 8.

and Lindsay²⁶ argue that such narrow conceptualizations are problematic and “can lead to a ‘hollowing out’ of the concept of employability.”²⁷ Policymakers frame employability as “located within, and owned by, the individual” and this “places considerable responsibility on the individual to proactively manage their individual employability.”²⁸ Bathmaker²⁹ rightfully notes that the expectation for individuals to take responsibility for constructing their employability opportunities neglects social inequalities and unequal positioning related to social class, gender, race, and ethnicity.

Employability Through the Eyes of International Students

While employability is a significant issue for all students, the desire of many IS to keep migration options open no doubt increases the pressure to seize every available opportunity to enhance their employability. The Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE) survey in 2021 found that almost three-quarters (72.5%) of IS intend to apply for a Post-Graduation Work Permit (PGWP) and almost two-thirds (60%) of IS intend to apply for permanent residence (PR) in Canada.³⁰ Clearly, many IS are interested in remaining in Canada (either permanently or temporarily) and engaging in employment following graduation. Since many entry-level jobs require at least one year of work experience,³¹ IS are also under pressure to obtain work

26. Ronald W. McQuaid and Colin Lindsay, “The Concept of Employability,” *Urban Studies* 42, no. 2 (February 2005): 209-10, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0042098042000316100>. The holistic employability framework that they developed consists of three sets of interrelated factors: individual factors (including employability skills and attributes; demographic characteristics; health and well-being; job seeking; and adaptability and mobility), personal circumstances (including household circumstances; work culture; and access to resources such as various forms of capital), and external factors (including demand factors and enabling support factors).

27. McQuaid and Lindsay, 197.

28. Tomlinson and Nghia, “Graduate Employability,” 3.

29. Ann-Marie Bathmaker, “Constructing a Graduate Career Future: Working with Bourdieu to Understand Transitions from University to Employment for Students from Working-class Backgrounds in England,” *European Journal of Education* 56, no. 1 (January 20, 2021): 79, <https://doi.org/10.1111/ejed.12436>.

30. Canadian Bureau for International Education, “International Students in Canada,” accessed September 25, 2022, <https://cbie.ca/infographic/>.

31. Sophie Borwein, *Bridging the Divide, Part I: What Canadian Job Ads Said* (Toronto, ON: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, 2014), 26-27, <https://heqco.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Skills-Part-2.pdf>; Erica Refling and Sophie Borwein, *Bridging the Divide, Part II: What Canadian Job Ads Produced* (Toronto, ON: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, 2014), 3-11, <https://heqco.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Skills-Part-3.pdf>. Through a content analysis of 316 Canadian job advertisements for entry-level positions targeting post-secondary graduates, Borwein found that “on average, employers asked for a minimum of 1.4 years and a maximum of 2 years of work experience.” Furthermore, 89% of the employers required work experience, with 60% requiring

experience during their studies if they are to be successful in their job search after graduation.

For many IS, employability during their studies is tied to their immigration aspirations. The journey from student to permanent resident, however, can be long and arduous. Following graduation, IS may apply for a PGWP (valid for up to three years), which allows them to seek full-time employment. With the accumulation of post-graduation full-time employment experience, they may subsequently apply for PR through an immigration program such as those managed by Express Entry.³² Applicants' Express Entry profiles are ranked by the IRCC's Comprehensive Ranking System, which favours young, highly educated applicants with strong English and/or French language skills, Canadian education, and Canadian work experience; applicants with current offers of full-time employment in Canada; and those whose occupations are "in-demand" in Canada.³³ The highest ranked applicants are then invited to submit a formal PR application.³⁴ Immigration-inclined IS are pressured to secure a full-time offer of employment before the PGWP window of opportunity closes. Although IS' term-time work experience does not count for immigration purposes,³⁵ it is part of their preparation for post-graduation employment. Importantly, the PGWP may also be acquired by IS who do not wish to

job-specific experience and 29% requiring *general* work experience. As a follow-up to this study, Reffing and Borwein collected data from 103 of these employers and found that "the large majority of employers (84%) hired someone for the advertised position. Among the successful applicants, almost two-thirds (63%) had more than the maximum number of years of work experience outlined in the job advertisement" (3). Furthermore, "only 1% of hired applicants lacked work experience, despite the fact that all of the positions were advertised as entry-level" (11).

32. Government of Canada, "Eligibility for Express Entry Programs," last modified January 4, 2022, <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/immigrate-canada/express-entry/eligibility.html>; Government of Canada, "How the Provincial Nominee Program (PNP) Works," last modified September 15, 2022, <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/immigrate-canada/provincial-nominees/works.html>. Pathways to permanent residence for international students who have completed their studies in Canada include the Canadian Experience Class (CEC), the Federal Skilled Worker (FSW) Program, and the Federal Skilled Trades (FST) Program (applications for which are managed by the Express Entry program), as well as the Provincial Nominee Program (PNP), which allows each province and territory to meet their labour requirements, including in shortage occupations, through multiple "streams" tailored to attract particular groups of applicants. Provinces and territories may also select nominees for their respective PNPs from the Express Entry pool of candidates.

33. Government of Canada, "Comprehensive Ranking System (CRS) Criteria – Express Entry," last modified January 11, 2021, <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/immigrate-canada/express-entry/eligibility/criteria-comprehensive-ranking-system/grid.html>.

34. Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), "What Are the Requirements for Becoming a Canadian Citizen?" last modified July 26, 2022, <https://www.cic.gc.ca/english/helpcentre/answer.asp?qnum=355&top=5>. The journey from permanent residence to Canadian citizenship takes several more years.

35. Huyen Dam, Joyce Chan, and Sarah Wayland, "Missed Opportunity: International Students in Canada Face Barriers to Permanent Residence," *Journal of International Migration and Integration* 19, no. 4 (May 19, 2018): 897–98, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12134-018-0576-y>.

remain in Canada permanently, but would like to obtain Canadian work experience before leaving Canada to return to their home countries or to travel elsewhere.

Bourdieu's Conceptual Tools

Pierre Bourdieu's analogy of "playing the game" may help us better understand IS' orientation to employability. In Bourdieusian terms, "each social field of practice can be understood as a competitive game or 'field of struggles' in which actors strategically improvise in their quest to maximize their positions."³⁶ Like other studies,³⁷ this paper conceptualizes working international students as navigating three intersecting fields: higher education, the labour market, and immigration in the Canadian context. In the employability game, players strategically accumulate and mobilize their economic, cultural, and social capital to gain positional advantage in the labour market.³⁸ However, IS are less likely to be familiar with different aspects of the "rules of the game"³⁹ in the three fields and some are likely to experience a reduction in symbolic capital – that is, the recognition of capitals from their home country in the host country context. (The most obvious example here is linguistic capital.) While all students develop and refine forms of capital within the field of higher education over the course of their degree programs, IS face particular pressure to adapt their existing capitals to the new context and to establish their position in the fields. Again, the diversity of IS means that their symbolic capital varies widely.

Adapting Bourdieu's conceptual tools for the higher education context, Tomlinson's⁴⁰ model includes five types of graduate capital: *human capital*, the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that enhance one's employment profile; *social capital*, derived from social relations and

36. Karl Maton, "Habitus," in *Pierre Bourdieu: Key Concepts*, 2nd ed, ed. Michael Grenfell (London: Routledge, 2012), 53.

37. Ly Thi Tran, "Mobility as 'Becoming': A Bourdieuan Analysis of the Factors Shaping International Student Mobility," *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 37, no. 8 (June 10, 2015): 1272, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01425692.2015.1044070>.

38. Ann-Marie Bathmaker, Nicola Ingram, and Richard Waller, "Higher Education, Social Class and the Mobilisation of Capitals: Recognising and Playing the Game," *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 34, no. 5–6 (September 12, 2013): 739–41, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01425692.2013.816041>.

39. Maton, "Habitus," 56.

40. Michael Tomlinson, "Forms of Graduate Capital and Their Relationship to Graduate Employability," *Education + Training* 59, no. 4 (April 10, 2017): 340–48, <https://doi.org/10.1108/et-05-2016-0090>.

networks; *cultural capital*, “culturally valued knowledge, dispositions and behaviours that are aligned to the workplaces that graduates seek to enter;”⁴¹ *identity capital*, the extent of their personal investment and proactive engagement in career planning, the identity that they project through their CV, and the way in which they engage with the labour market; and *psychological capital*, adaptability in navigating uncertain terrain, resilience, proactiveness in developing contingency plans, and the ability to navigate challenges. We refer to these forms of capital in our findings to illustrate some of the nuances in IS’ experiences.

International Students’ Interest in Canada

Canada has been rising in popularity as a destination country for IS. In 2019, there were 829,405 IS in Canada studying from primary to post-secondary levels, up from 495,590 in 2015.⁴² IS represented 17.1% of Canadian university students in 2019/2020, with enrolments rising from 168,606 in 2015/2016 to 235,422 in 2019/2020.⁴³ The literature suggests that IS’ decisions to study abroad involve complex interrelated factors.⁴⁴ Primary pull factors include the quality of Canadian education and the perception of Canada as a safe, inclusive, and non-discriminatory country.⁴⁵ This perception is echoed in comparisons that some IS make to their home countries, describing the latter in terms of corruption, insecurity, unstable economies, war, political and social strife, and other situations that “pose serious threats to personal safety and security.”⁴⁶ In contrast, Canada is described in terms of social protection laws, political stability, general safety, and peacefulness.⁴⁷ Canada is believed to be a land of opportunity.⁴⁸ Perceived

41. Tomlinson, 343.

42. Government of Canada, “International Students”; Canadian Bureau for International Education, “International Students in Canada.” CBIE figures position India as the largest source country (35%) followed by China (17%); France (4%); Iran, South Korea, Philippines, Vietnam (3% each); USA, Bangladesh, Nigeria, Brazil, Mexico, (2% each); and Japan, Hong Kong, Morocco, Algeria, Pakistan, Germany, Turkey, and Columbia (1% each).

43. Statistics Canada, “Prior to COVID-19, International Students Accounted for the Growth in Postsecondary Enrolments and Graduates,” published November 24, 2021, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/en/daily-quotidien/211124/dq211124d-eng.pdf?st=5NMxU4zi>.

44. Jun Mian Chen, “Three Levels of Push-Pull Dynamics Among Chinese International Students’ Decision to Study Abroad in the Canadian Context,” *Journal of International Students* 7, no. 1 (Jan/Feb 2017), <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1125723.pdf>.

45. Canadian Bureau for International Education, “International Students in Canada.”

46. Arthur and Flynn, “Career Development Influences,” 232.

47. Arthur and Flynn, 232.

48. Chen, “Push-Pull Dynamics,” 126.

benefits of studying in Canada include English/French language acquisition (linguistic capital), acculturation (including development of social and cultural capital), and, for those seeking to gain PR in Canada, credentialism (identity and human capital), that is, the advantage of having Canadian educational credentials that are regarded more favourably in the Canadian labour market.⁴⁹ Additionally, education abroad is regarded as a means of gaining access to an “elite habitus” and gaining “symbolic membership in the developed world.”⁵⁰ IS therefore often believe that a Canadian degree will give them an advantage in the labour market of their home country.⁵¹ Other authors find that studying in Canada is perceived as “one of the best strategies” for obtaining PR in Canada,⁵² benefits of which may include Canadian citizenship, “improved access to scholarships, education and increased job opportunities,” as well as increased “ability to move in and out of Canada,” thereby keeping multiple doors of opportunity open, including plans to return to Canada at a later time.⁵³

The Field as a Site of Uncertainty and Struggle

IS tend to have much uncertainty about their future plans.⁵⁴ Following graduation, they may decide to remain in the host country, either permanently or temporarily; return to their country of origin; or move to a third country.⁵⁵ Their decisions can change over time because of their “career prospects, employment opportunities, family obligation, and immigration status” in Canada.⁵⁶ Choi et al.⁵⁷ found that IS who had gained Canadian work experience either during their studies or following graduation were better able to qualify for permanent residency. However, efforts to secure career-related work (during their studies and following graduation)

49. Feng Hou and Yuqian Lu, “International Students, Immigration and Earnings Growth: The Effect of a Pre-Immigration Host-Country University Education,” *IZA Journal of Development and Migration* 7, no. 1 (June 13, 2017): 2, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40176-017-0091-5>.

50. Alexander Gamst Page and Sobh Chahboun, “Emerging Empowerment of International Students: How International Student Literature Has Shifted to Include the Students’ Voices,” *Higher Education* 78, no. 5 (March 8, 2019): 878, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-019-00375-7>.

51. Chen, “Push-Pull Dynamics,” 129.

52. Netierman et al., “International Students’ Decision-Making,” 51.

53. Netierman et al., 50.

54. Netierman et al., 56.

55. Netierman et al., 45.

56. Netierman et al., 55.

57. Choi, Crossman, and Hou, “Source of Labour Supply,” 7.

may be deterred by IS' unfamiliarity with local labour markets along with their lack of: social networks to help them find employment; information on employment application procedures and selection criteria; (local) work experience; (local) references; and knowledge of Canadian workplace norms and expectations.⁵⁸ Additional hinderances include citizenship-related ineligibility for jobs,⁵⁹ work permit requirements, and long processing times for permits.⁶⁰ Prospective employers also tend to judge the intellectual competence of IS based on their linguistic aptitude.⁶¹ Additionally, unlike Canadian youth, IS may lack prior work experience because of employment age restrictions and norms in their home countries.⁶² Other factors also contribute to an uneven playing field for IS. For example, R. A. Malatest & Associates⁶³ found that some "internship programs were restricted to Canadian citizens and permanent residents." IS in Scott et al.'s⁶⁴ study felt that a "lack of co-operative education opportunities and ways to connect with industry professionals contributed to their relative under-preparedness for work in Canada after graduation." Studies suggest that, in the absence of professional networks (social capital), IS worry about being "sidelined in the job market and unable to find employment in their field after graduation."⁶⁵

58. Arthur and Flynn, "Career Development Influences," 233-234; Chetanath Gautam et al., "Challenges for Global Learners: A Qualitative Study of the Concerns and Difficulties of International Students," *Journal of International Students* 6, no. 2 (April 1, 2016): 515, <https://doi.org/10.32674/jis.v6i2.368>; Tang T. Heng, "Understanding the Heterogeneity of International Students' Experiences: A Case Study of Chinese International Students in U.S. Universities," *Journal of Studies in International Education* 23, no. 5 (February 15, 2019): 616, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315319829880>; Nigar G. Khawaja and Helen M. Stallman, "Understanding the Coping Strategies of International Students: A Qualitative Approach," *Australian Journal of Guidance and Counselling* 21, no. 2 (December 1, 2011): 216, <https://doi.org/10.1375/ajgc.21.2.203>; R. A. Malatest & Associates, *Barriers to Work-Integrated Learning Opportunities* (Toronto, ON: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, 2018), 13, <http://www.heqco.ca/en-ca/Research/ResPub/Pages/Barriers-to-Work-integrated-Learning-Opportunities-.aspx>; Scott et al., "Lived Experiences," 11-12.

59. Kristi Heather Kenyon, Hélène Frohard-Dourlent, and Wendy D. Roth, "Falling Between the Cracks: Ambiguities of International Student Status in Canada," *Canadian Journal of Higher Education* 42, no. 1 (April 30, 2012): 9, <https://doi.org/10.47678/cjhe.v42i1.1991>.

60. Sara Houshmand, Lisa B. Spanierman, and Romin W. Tafarodi, "Excluded and Avoided: Racial Microaggressions Targeting Asian International Students in Canada," *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology* 20, no. 3 (2014): 382, <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0035404>; R. A. Malatest & Associates, *Barriers to Work-Integrated Learning*, 60.

61. Scott et al., "Lived Experiences," 9-10.

62. Moira J. Calder et al., "International Students Attending Canadian Universities: Their Experiences with Housing, Finances, and Other Issues," *Canadian Journal of Higher Education* 46, no. 2 (August 31, 2016): 99, <https://doi.org/10.47678/cjhe.v46i2.184585>.

63. R. A. Malatest & Associates, *Barriers to Work-Integrated Learning*, 58.

64. Scott et al., "Lived Experiences," 11.

65. Scott et al., 12.

Methodology

This paper presents findings from the Hard-Working Student research project, a SSHRC-funded longitudinal mixed methods study that took place at a large research-intensive Canadian university between 2018 and 2022. The study explored domestic and international undergraduate students' term-time work patterns; their paid and unpaid work experiences in relation to academic and other outcomes; their experiences of work-integrated learning; and their work-study transition experiences over time. In this paper, we present insights from our analysis of 49 interview transcripts from 16 undergraduate IS. Our analysis overall suggests that although IS are not a homogeneous group, as a collective, they experience employability discourse pressures more intensely than domestic students who work. Our focus on IS allows for greater attention to variation in their experiences. Qualitative data were collected through focus group (FG) interviews, life mapping (LM) activities, audio diaries (AD), thematic focus group interviews, and follow-up interviews (Y2F).⁶⁶ Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and pseudonymized following written consent from students. Analysis of qualitative data included the preparation of individual Participant Portraits constructed with input from multiple members of the research team. Thematic analysis of the qualitative dataset also involved coding across the dataset and exploring emerging patterns. The 16 IS included eight males and eight females from five faculties: Arts, Science, Commerce, Forestry, and Land & Food Systems. In terms of their ethnocultural backgrounds, based on categories used by Statistics Canada, six IS were South Asian, five were East and Southeast Asian, and five were White. According to World Bank country classifications by income level, seven IS were from lower-middle-income countries; six

66. Focus group interviews delved into participants' thoughts about paid and unpaid term-time work; their personal experiences of such work; everyday transitions between work and studies; and relationships between (paid and unpaid) work and study. Life mapping activities involved participants creating visual maps of major milestones in their lives since high school and discussing how events and circumstances influenced their academic and career trajectories. Audio diaries involved students self-recording their responses to prompts immediately before and after class and work. Follow-up interviews were aimed at learning more about participants' personal circumstances in relation to (paid and unpaid) work and studies. Thematic focus groups involved deeper discussions on topics of interest to the research team. Summer follow-up emails/phone calls served as a means of checking-in with students regarding their plans for engaging in studies, paid/unpaid work, and other initiatives both within and beyond Canada over the summer.

from upper-middle-income countries; and three from high-income countries. When recruited for this study, 13 participants (81%) were engaged in jobs secured through the campus employment program. Most of our sample intended to remain in Canada following graduation.

Findings

Making the Most of Their Time

Our analysis suggests that IS without previous work experience from their home countries feel disadvantaged in the employability game that they encounter during their undergraduate years. For example, a South Asian male student explained his decision to defer seeking paid work in his first year as follows: “I was trying to level up my skills, so that I could actually get things [jobs] that I enjoy. So, even during the summers, even though I wasn’t working, I had multiple research projects. ... So that you know, once I had the skills, I could get the work that I was looking for” (FG9).

Participants from lower-middle-income countries were more likely to prioritize term-time work that was related to their studies. One South Asian student, for example, recounted a conversation with his father: “So, this summer, I discussed with my dad that I should do a job at Tim Horton’s, maybe get the kind of experience which North American kids have since high school and maybe become a better speaker, better server. And he said, ‘Why do you want to do that?’ And I said, ‘Yes, it doesn’t apply to anything’” (FG11).

Other students expressed the common belief that IS need to make the most of the opportunities available and create their own opportunities: “I feel like I am here as an international student all the way from back home and I kind of want to do everything” (FG15). Another agreed: “I am, like, in a university for three, four, five or six years at the max, so I am like, I wish to get all the experiences, you know, that I cannot get in day-to-day life and think, ‘Oh I should have tried this’ or, ‘This is so fascinating’” (LM11). Many IS participants believed that “we will never get an opportunity like this for the rest of our lives” (FG4). As expressed in these excerpts, many IS were confronted with greater freedom and choice than they were used to, which may have added to the pressure to participate in extra-curricular activities, develop employability skills, and excel at their studies. For example, some spoke about the ability to

select courses from a wide range of faculties: “The fact that you can take courses everywhere [in different faculties], which you usually can’t there [in my home country], you have to stick to one thing ... I’m always worried about regretting my choice in the future, so I want to try out lots of things before I leave” (FG6).

This drive to actively engage in campus life while honing employability skills was double-edged, however. On the one hand, these IS were more likely to take jobs that were relevant to their education and aspirations; on the other hand, it was clear that some were pushing themselves in ways that may not have been healthy: “I pick up so much that at the end of the day I am like, three jobs, two research projects, and classes. It’s way too much” (LM11). Another stated: “I have been told to, like, relax a bit,” adding that “[my peers] think I am a machine” (FG15). This IS and others were clearly trying to make the most of their time and, in some cases, make up for perceived lost time vis-à-vis Canadian students who had more work experience.

Mobility Aspirations

Migration is an important part of future plans for several IS. A White male from an African country admitted that it was central in his educational decision-making: “[My home country] isn’t looking great you know. Like if [my home country] was looking as good as Canada, there would be no need to come here, so with the situation being very unstable and indecisive, we needed to look overseas.” Similarly, a South Asian participant explained that his home country was still developing economically: “There’s a lot of difference in wages. There’s a lot of difference in opportunities. There’s a lot of difference in the kind of projects that people have and the kind of work and the kind of exposure that you could get.” It was therefore his “father’s dream” to send him to a university abroad, despite the family’s limited financial means (FG9).

Securing stable, secure, and promising futures for themselves, and sometimes for their families, emerged as a key motivation for immigration. International students, like domestic students, were aware that an undergraduate credential was just the starting point in securing this future, and term-time work was therefore critically important. In particular, IS who wish to keep doors open for immigration and international work experience face greater time pressures than

domestic students. They have until the end of their degree program and PGWP term to secure relevant employment experience, which places greater pressure on them to make strategic decisions that support their future plans.

Again, it is noteworthy that IS from lower-middle-income countries and low-income families were most concerned about this. For example, a South Asian male student shared: “I got an internship at a company in [a Canadian city]. It’s an investment company and I’ll be working as a software developer. And then the company will also, if I work there well and I do the tasks, they will also offer me a full-time job and that’s what I have in my mind right now” (Y2F22). A female student who relied on scholarships to finance her international education expressed her intention to pursue a graduate degree in the United States, but added that the exact location would depend on the funding offered (Y2F11).

For IS intending to enter the labour market immediately after graduation (around half of our sample), work experience was acquired through term-time work, unpaid employment, and/or participation in co-operative education (co-op)⁶⁷ programs or internships. Campus employment was preferred by some IS over co-op employment because it provided valuable forms of employability capital while not adding temporal or financial costs⁶⁸ to their programs. However, the campus employment program was acknowledged as being highly competitive and IS needed to be creative in developing their portfolio of paid, unpaid, and academic work. It was evident, despite the additional work of acculturation, that IS take responsibility for their employability and the work required to secure it. For example, a White student spoke about the limits of parental financial support and his need to be financially independent by the end of his degree: “So, the choices I make now are going to influence that. I need to be responsible now because my future is 100% in my hands at this point.”

More financially privileged IS had greater space and time to explore. For example, a White student who completed high school in Canada and was able to gain PR status halfway

67. Co-op placements involve full-time employment during school terms, and students generally do not take courses at this time. We therefore consider co-op as distinct from “term-time work” which, as used in this paper, refers to part-time employment during terms in which students are enrolled in courses.

68. Dalhousie University, “Co-op Program Fees,” last modified February 5, 2018, https://www.dal.ca/faculty/site/for-students/student_eligibility_and_fees.html. A table prepared by Dalhousie University indicates that co-op fees in 2018 (at various institutions across Canada) ranged from about \$1,400 to almost \$5,000 for programs with three to six work terms.

through her degree commented, “I feel like at university that’s where I can really put those feelers out, and make sure that I find something that I am good at, and find something I love and that I can then follow in the future” (FG2). This student was able to articulate different plans for international work depending on which direction she chose.

The importance of psychological capital was apparent for other participants who aspired to expand their work options globally. A South Asian male student, for example, was open to working in Canada, the United States, London, or back home: “I might go back to [an Asian country] and work there ... if I don’t have a job offer in Canada, then I might get one in US or maybe London where I have relatives so I am not particularly looking at Canada, but if I get an offer here, I will definitely pursue the PR procedure” (Y2F22). For such students, the expansive field of potential work may suggest endless possibilities; however, student narratives suggest that it can also be taxing given the work required to develop transferable capitals and to be continuously flexible and adaptable.

The Work of Acculturation

The efforts of IS to excel in studies and term-time employment while also engaging in unpaid work often meant sacrificing something—either time with family, time socializing and making friends, or time engaging in extra-curricular activities and hobbies. One participant explained, “I am very committed to the work and studying, but then I lose the sense of priority for other things. So, like, socialization or taking time out to call family, usually it goes down the list quite a bit ... that’s something I struggle with ... And I don’t see a way to, like, work around it. I find it very hard” (FG6). Another student explained that “’cause I work a lot I do not have time to hang out with my friends, or talk to my family ... it has taken a toll on [my relationships] ... because I have allotted so much time to work” (AD). In preparing themselves for the future, many worked tirelessly: “Right now, I just have three jobs, but initially during the semester, I had four jobs ... my Wednesdays are *insane*. Like, I have work starting at 9 am on Wednesday and it goes on till 8 pm without a break. Like, I do not even have 30 minutes of break in between. No lunch break, no breakfast break, no snacks break, nothing” (FG9). Another added that “working has definitely made it harder to create more time for clubs and other extra-curricular events” (AD).

While our study finds that many working domestic students also make sacrifices because of term-time work, they are not required to engage in the significant work of acculturation required of many IS, including those from privileged backgrounds. For example, a male South Asian student was unaccustomed to cooking and cleaning for himself because his mother and servants had prepared his meals in his home country (FG7). A female East Asian student with professional parents spoke about suffering from “imposter syndrome” as she struggled to communicate, to learn the university systems, and to gain her first work experience (LM17). Despite the ideal of two-way exchange between universities and IS, many participants felt the need to “mould” themselves to their new work and study environments, and this required work that was usually invisible (Y2F17).

Unlike domestic students who may live at home with their parents, a number of IS also face intense financial pressure. For example, a first-generation university student from an African country was required to constantly plan and prepare for the future:

I always am stressed about having a buffer – financial buffer, I mean – so you know, once I graduate, just in case I want to stay here for a year and when I don’t have a job, I need to have something to lean on. So, working while studying helps keep my mind at ease in that way, but again it does take up time quite a bit and mental energy, so I do get stressed, I do get quite tired. I don’t think there is much of an option in terms of not working so it’s just something, yeah, I get used to (AD).

The Unevenness of the Playing Field

Assuredly, “there is no level playing ground in a social field; players who begin with particular forms of capital are advantaged at the outset.”⁶⁹ The high cost of tuition for IS required them to be reliant on their families for support. Some noted that annual tuition fees for IS amounted to about \$40,000 to \$50,000, leading one (domestic) participant to exclaim “\$40,000 is like some people’s yearly salary [in Canada]!” (FG21). Additionally, living expenses, according to one student, amounted to about \$2,000 per month (Y2F8). The burden of their expenses weighed heavily upon some participants, and several engaged in paid employment to relieve the burden on their parents. One, for example, noted that “the stress of paying all of the bills is constantly in my mind” (AD). Another decided to forfeit her annual visits to her family so she

69. Thomson, “Field,” 67.

would be able to save some of her hard-earned money: “I think I have just accepted it. I probably will not go home until I graduate ... I knew I wouldn’t be able to because I wanted to save up” (Y2F11). Furthermore, undergraduate scholarships (for international and domestic students) are not common. One IS commented: “It’s just, like, very rare to get a scholarship after you come to [this university]” (Y2F20). Another agreed that “[this university is] very, very bad with giving scholarships” (FG17). Additionally, when financially insecure students do win a multi-year scholarship, they face the pressure of maintaining it (e.g., Y2F11).

Many IS were unaccustomed to engaging in employment due to social norms or employment age restrictions in their home countries. As a result, they felt they lacked the human, identity, and cultural capitals required to secure employment in the Canadian labour market. Some expressed surprise that many Canadian students start working at a young age: “In [my home country in Asia], you don’t really start working until you are at uni [university]; it’s not the same as here. But moving here kind of made me realize, like, ‘Wow, people have been working here since they were sixteen’” (LM5). Some noted that the discrepancy in work experience placed Canadian students at an advantage over IS in securing part-time work: “Most of the people that come to, like, the Westerner countries, they don’t have any work experience from high school whereas people who have born and brought up there, it is ingrained in them, it is pretty natural for them to work in high school” (LM10). Another noted that “part-time work back home is non-existent. It is something that is available here ... So, I would say that is also something that affects our ability to work because we don’t have that experience” (Y2F20). One student described his experience of seeking employment on campus as follows: “I have struggled a lot. Like in my first year, I applied for hundreds of positions, not receiving even one interview” (FG9).

The campus employment program enabled some IS to get a foot in the door. One participant, for example, noted that the competitive labour market made it very difficult for those with no prior work experience to construct their CVs (FG6) and thereby build their identity capital. She attributed the lack of response to her applications for off-campus jobs to her lack of prior work experience: “When you look at applications, minimum one year required ... but you aren’t allowing me to gain that one year of experience” (FG6). She was appreciative of the campus employment program, which enabled her to gain valuable employment experience. The program, however, was not without limitations. For example, students were only able to hold one

position during a given term for a maximum of 10 hours per week during winter sessions and 20 hours per week during summer sessions.⁷⁰ Whereas these limitations apply to all students, IS without prior work experience, who rely on campus employment (rather than the more competitive off-campus labour market) to build up their CVs, may be more significantly impacted by such limitations. Lack of information about campus positions can also preclude students from applying.

GPA was reported by a couple of participants as a significant factor in securing research positions on campus (FG11; Y2F21). Particularly for IS, lack of proficiency in English may contribute to lower GPAs:

English is my third language, and I am very fluent ... but there is still a lot of colloquial terms and stuff that I will never understand ... I do try to aim for a high grade but ... I just have this one language barrier, that I can't completely express what I want to say or completely show my understanding ... there is just, like, this wall there when I try to study for things, I simply don't understand it. Like I took a philosophy course and that was honestly *hell*. I had the dictionary open on my laptop all of the time (LM5).

Taken together, these findings suggest that IS may need to work harder to be successful when applying for jobs.

Co-op as a Lifeline in the Employability Game

For some IS, co-op was seen as a crucial part of the employability game since it provided the opportunity to gain career-relevant work experience (identity, cultural, and human capital) and build professional networks (social capital) that would help them secure full-time positions following graduation. Co-op was also viewed as a means of closing the work experience gap between domestic and international students and was the basis of university selection for some: “Not a lot of universities have co-op programs ... it is difficult to get work experience on your own, so I think it definitely helps. And I think just getting a degree is not enough to get a job after you graduate” (LM10). The participant added that “co-op was always a priority for me. I wanted to do that just 'cause it becomes easier for an international student to get work experience” (Y2F8). Participants also sought to acquire identity capital through co-op positions

70. Campus employment program positions were also subject to other conditions including ineligibility if students concomitantly engaged in co-op work or another campus employment program focusing on research.

as they felt these roles would relate to their studies and careers (FG4), and would therefore enable them to explore their professional preferences and better prepare for their future careers (Y2F20).

However, not all co-op positions were open to IS: “A lot of jobs, they have restrictions; for example, they only accept domestic students or permanent residents” (LM27). Another explained that “a lot of the jobs that are there, they’re all, like, government jobs and then I’m not a Canadian citizen, so I can’t even apply for most of the jobs” (LM23). In addition, students suggested that applications were time-consuming and rejection rates were high: “I applied to about 65 jobs before I got one. So, that was, like, a full-time job over the summers. Like, just applying for jobs” (Y2F17). Another participant concurred: “It’s just a lot of work ... it’s basically like taking another class, ’cause you have to be applying to 2 jobs a week” (LM23). In some cases, the lateness of job application results made it difficult for students to plan their summers (LM23). It was also clear from other IS’ narratives that some were engaging in a co-op cost-benefit analysis, weighing the cost of extending their degree with the value of relevant work experience.

Blood, Sweat, and Tears: Stories of the Heart

Amid the many struggles endured by IS to secure their futures, fear of failure, intensified by the high cost of their education, also weighed on students, including those who were supported by their parents. One female student from the United States explained: “Like, when I was worried about dropping out, I was like, what if I just move back home and work at a bookstore for the rest of my life? Like what if it was all this work, all then I was just, like, through a variety of obstacles, like, unable to be here, I, like, wasn’t cut out for it, couldn’t do it and I just had to go home and, you know, do something repetitive and mindless for the rest of my life” (FG11).

The same participant felt that the university was not concerned about its responsibility of care towards its students: “I really appreciate this study because you’re actually the first person who’s asked, you know, like, ‘How are you juggling all of it?’ because the expectation is that we just are ... We’re all trying to pay rent, trying to get our GPAs up, trying to build our resumes to

do the next thing. And because it's such, like, a consistent experience, nobody cares how hard it is because everybody's doing it, right? Like, we're all fighting for it, so who cares about your individual experience?" (FG11).

Discussion

Tomlinson and Nghia⁷¹ draw attention to the role of universities in preparing students for future employment through “employability-orientated measures, practices, and activities.” In this section, we discuss some of the findings from our study before turning to the university's role. We build upon the recommendations put forward by Tomlinson and Nghia⁷² and offer suggestions on ways in which universities may better support IS in their term-time work and in enhancing their employability following graduation.

Straddling the Present and the Future

Often, IS are discussed in academic literature in terms of statistics and trends, with less attention to the invisible work of acculturation and the pressures to develop forms of employability capital that open doors to professional employment globally. In contrast, this paper shares students' self-narrated experiences of how their high-stakes educational investment pushes them to plan well into the future. Our study explores the daily movements of students between studies and work, and the way universities contribute to their precarity.⁷³ This paper considers IS to be a *unique* group because of the political economy of the internationalization of higher education, and a *diverse* group because they come from different countries around the world and have different backgrounds. By focusing on their narratives about how they approach term-time work and employability more generally, we offer multifaceted insights into IS' experiences and suggest possibilities for institutional change.

While all students are encouraged to make strategic plans, our study suggests that IS are required to plan more. This is because of the high costs of their education, ever-changing rules

71. Tomlinson and Nghia, “Graduate Employability,” 2.

72. Tomlinson and Nghia, 10-11.

73. Alison Taylor, “Learning to Walk the Wire: Preparing Students for Precarious Life,” *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 43, no. 5 (April 18, 2022): 798, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01425692.2022.2060798>.

and regulations related to working while studying, and, for many, high-stakes immigration intentions that push them to plan several years into the future. Those who value global mobility must simultaneously imagine and lay the groundwork for multiple pathways to a range of possible futures, in Canada and beyond. As the pandemic highlighted, IS do this in a context that is highly uncertain. From participants' narratives, we learn about the significant cognitive and emotional burden of straddling the present and the future. For IS who were financially insecure, this involved placing priority on work and studies, often to the exclusion of other aspects of the university experience. This is rarely spotlighted in academic literature and is an important contribution of our findings.

Term-Time Employment and the University

Around half of our participants had tentative or concrete plans to enrol in graduate programs following their studies, and others planned to transition to the labour market upon completion of their undergraduate programs. As Bathmaker et al.⁷⁴ suggest, the rules of the employability game have changed over time and an undergraduate degree is perceived as insufficient to be competitive in the employment field. Our participants' narratives underscore a perceived "need for students to begin the process of employability development and emerging career formation early into their HE [higher education]."⁷⁵ Several IS pointed out that students who graduate without work experience (paid or unpaid) are at a disadvantage when seeking employment or admission to some professional programs. Although universities have become more involved in providing opportunities for undergraduates to gain work experience through campus employment programs, undergraduate research, co-op programs, and internships, more statistical information by type of student employment would help universities determine whether access to paid work programs is equitable, and what barriers there may be for certain groups of students (e.g., IS, first-generation university students, etc.).

It is important to point out that IS engaged in jobs secured through the campus employment program were over-represented in our sample, with 13 of the 16 IS involved in such employment. This was due to purposive sampling following our efforts to recruit domestic and

74. Bathmaker, Ingram, and Waller, "Playing the Game," 724.

75. Tomlinson and Nghia, "Graduate Employability," 10.

international participants for our study through, among other recruitment strategies, an announcement channeled to students via the student career centre. This over-representation should not be misinterpreted as implying that IS are well-positioned to secure campus employment with ease. On the contrary, our findings suggest that, particularly in light of the importance of campus work positions for IS, more attention may be needed to support them in their applications for campus employment, including providing timely information about these opportunities. For undergraduate research positions, professors should also be encouraged to consider students' diverse backgrounds in the selection process as opposed to a primary focus on GPA. Whereas co-op jobs were seen as advantageous by students seeking to acquire work experience prior to graduation, several IS reported issues such as time-consuming application processes, high rejection rates, ineligibility of IS for some co-op jobs, and the cost of the program (time and money). More research is needed on differences between IS' and domestic students' co-op experiences and outcomes to ensure that processes and outcomes are equitable.

Employment after Graduation

Many participants shared that their motivation for engaging in term-time work (part-time) and co-op work (full-time) was to enhance their employability following graduation. While our study focused on term-time work, if such work is seen as preparation for graduate employment, then other policies that aim to retain IS professionals in Canada are relevant. One way to forge meaningful long-term connections⁷⁶ between IS, universities, and the labour market would be for the university to explore a guaranteed employment program connecting graduating students to prospective employers. This would be a significant support to all students and particularly IS seeking full-time employment. Since Canada needs young, highly educated, labour market ready immigrants to sustain its economy,⁷⁷ such connections between graduating IS and industry employers could be mutually beneficial.

In exploring ways of supporting IS, universities and the government may also consider

76. Tomlinson and Nghia, 10.

77. Robert Fair et al., "Analysis on Labour Challenges in Canada, Second Quarter of 2022," Catalogue No. 11-621-M, published June 23, 2022, 4, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/en/pub/11-621-m/11-621-m2022011-eng.pdf?st=kC3QYsBj>. As at March 2022, there were over one million unfilled employment positions across Canada.

Income Share Agreements (ISAs)⁷⁸ under which IS with immigration intentions could pay tuition fees for their degree programs at the domestic student rate (instead of the international student rate), and then share a percentage of their income with the university for a specified number of years after graduating. Such approaches may help forge sustainable and equitable partnerships between IS, universities, and the Canadian government. Importantly, they may also enable IS to participate in academic and campus activities during their undergraduate years with the reassurance that the university and the government will support them in securing suitable employment after graduation. Such approaches may reduce the pressure of intensive engagement in term-time work to enhance employability.

The Ethics of Internationalization

In Canada, IS contribute to university revenues while supporting the national economy.⁷⁹ Upon graduation, around three-quarters seek to remain in Canada to gain work experience, thus further supporting the economy. Around two-thirds attempt to gain permanent residence, acting as pillars upon which Canada's aging population relies for economic strength and stability.

Indeed, ethical relationships between potential immigrants, universities, and the federal government require greater acknowledgement of the tension between attracting IS as potential immigrants, and the systems that perpetuate inequalities between domestic and international students.⁸⁰ It is also important to note that IS are a diverse group and some students need more support than others. Our participants' experiences suggest a need for more scholarships (especially for low-income IS),⁸¹ greater flexibility in the criteria for maintaining multi-year scholarships, and other supports that would enable them to participate more fully in the campus experience.

78. Heather Payne, "Paving the Way for Income Share Agreements in Canada," Juno College of Technology, published May 13, 2019, <https://junocollege.com/blog/paving-the-way-for-income-share-agreements-in-canada/>.

79. Government of Canada, "International Students." As mentioned earlier in this paper, international students' direct and indirect contributions to the Canadian economy were on the rise prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, with annual total spending amounting to CAD 22.3 billion per year, equating to economic contributions "greater than exports of auto parts, lumber or aircrafts."

80. Association of Canadian Deans of Education, *Accord on the Internationalization of Education* (Vancouver, BC: Association of Canadian Deans of Education, 2016), 6, <https://csse-scee.ca/acde/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2017/08/Accord-on-the-Internationalization-of-Education.pdf>.

81. These could prioritize in-demand professions in Canada.

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