

To stay or to leave?
An assessment of the social, economic, and political factors
that influence international students when deciding to remain in,
or leave Nova Scotia, upon graduation.

By

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Abstract

To stay or to leave? An assessment of the social, economic, and political factors that influence international students when deciding to remain in, or leave Nova Scotia, upon graduation

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This research examines critical factors graduating/recently graduated international students from Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) universities encounter when deciding to remain in Nova Scotia, move to other provinces, or return home. The 2014 "Now or Never" report identified high rates of educated international students leaving Nova Scotia. This research uses Lee's Push-Pull Theory of Migration to fill the gap regarding the factors that influence this phenomenon.

An online survey (94 respondents) and a focus group were utilized to gather information on social and economic situations, and experiences from a mixed group of international students. The results indicate that they face a series of push factors encouraging their departure from Nova Scotia, and pull factors encouraging them to stay. In both instances, factors are related to social, political, and/or economic reasons. The research highlights that these push-pull factors are not static, and will aid in understanding how political actors can move forward.

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Chapter 1

1.0 Introduction

Over the past decade, Nova Scotia has continued to receive a substantial number of international students. Approximately 10,000 international students are a part of the Nova Scotian population, almost 8,000 of which are enrolled in post-secondary institutions – a 33% increase over the last four years (Association of Atlantic Universities, 2012; 2016). Concern has been expressed, however, about the province’s ability to retain these newly educated international students. The Ivany Commission (2014) noted through their “Now or Never--A Call to Action for Nova Scotians” Report (Now or Never, hereafter) that Nova Scotia retains only 10% of international graduates each year after graduation. Nine of out ten international students leave Nova Scotia upon their graduation. There has been speculation about the underlying motivations of international graduates in Nova Scotia, ranging from i) limited access to jobs (Ivany et al., 2014); ii) a limited sense of community, due to not feeling welcome (Ivany et al., 2014); iii) and the time-frame of three years within which international students need to gain the qualifications necessary to obtain Permanent Residence through the Canadian

immigration system. Although many have speculated about these motivations, there have been no conclusive studies to speak to these issues in the Nova Scotia context.

The “Now or Never” report drew national attention and alarm due to the revelations made. While the Ivany report provides useful information on issues facing Nova Scotia, such as the population dynamics, there were only speculations as to why international students decided to leave Nova Scotia at such an alarming rate, the most obvious being prospects of job opportunities.

Nova Scotia is currently witnessing an odd phenomenon – an increasing number of international students are choosing to study in the province, yet almost all of them leave upon graduation. This is the fundamental context for this research.

1.1 Research Question

This research is guided by one research question: what are the social, economic, and political factors that influence international students when deciding whether they wish to remain in, or leave, Nova Scotia upon graduation from post-secondary institutions? The research is guided by Lee’s (1966) theory of

migration, which identifies a push-pull framework for influencing decision-making at the individual level. Through this research question, the key 'push' and 'pull' factors will be identified that are involved in the decision-making process for international students when they are about to, or when they have graduated from post-secondary institutions in Halifax, Nova Scotia. This research question will allow us to understand what is pushing up to 90% of international students from Nova Scotia and what factors are pulling them towards other Canadian provinces.

As an international student, and having interacted with numerous international students, the general consensus amongst them is that employment or a lack thereof plays a substantial role in their decision to seek residence in other provinces. As such, I believe that this study will prove that economic issues within the province lie at the fore of international students' decision-making process with regards to remaining in, or leaving the province post-graduation.

Through answering the research question, this study seeks to assist policy makers, universities, and non-profit organizations, which are striving to understand the motivations of international students who will soon, or have recently, graduated. The study also aims to provide recommendations from both the students, and those deduced from the research by the researcher, that can aid

in remedying the issue of high outmigration of international students from Nova Scotia, as cited by the "Now or Never" Report.

1.2 Researcher's Positionality

As an international student who came to Halifax in 2012 to pursue a undergraduate degree in Environmental Studies, I became familiar with the social, economic, and political landscape throughout my studies. Before graduating from my undergraduate program in the Spring of 2015, I sent out over 200 job applications between January and June, over 80% of those within Nova Scotia, and was unable to land a job; even though I had a degree from my home country, and years of experience in teaching, event planning, and public speaking.

It was based on this experience that this research was undertaken through a post-graduate degree in Geography at Saint Mary's University in the fall of 2015. The purpose was to understand why many of the international students I am acquainted with left the province after graduation or were working at the movie theatre and the grocery store, for example, and to understand if my experience was unique to me. As such, my experience aided in relating to research participants as humans, rather than "research objects" (England, 1994), and draws on the concept of inter-subjectivity, which allowed for other

international students to not only voluntarily participate in this research, but to be open about their experiences, and through our collaborative effort, be the drivers of the body of knowledge (Bishop, 2005) that will come from this unique study.

1.3 Organization of Thesis

This thesis uses empirical research to identify the social, political, and economic factors that influence Nova Scotia's international students' decision to stay or leave after graduation. This thesis is organized into five chapters. Chapter One provides an overview of the study, provides the reader with context, and the basis from which the study was developed. Chapter Two reviews key literature on migration decision-making, welcoming communities, and the immigration system in Canada. The key themes from the literature were integrated into the methods and revisited in the concluding chapter. Chapter Three explores the methods of data collection for this study. The chapter outlines the method of recruitment for both the survey and the focus group and explains the rationale for selecting the target group for both data collection methods. Chapter Four has the dual role of illustrating the results from the two data collection methods and providing the discussion of the social, political and economic push-pull factors influencing

international students to either remain or leave. Finally, Chapter Five provides a summary of the research and its implications.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

This chapter introduces the general concept of migration, its definition, and how it is operationalized in this research. Although a number of different models exist to understand migration, Lee's (1966) theory of migration is the focus. Lee's theory of migration is introduced and explained in terms of key components of push and pull factors. The relevance of Lee's theory to international student migration is outlined. This chapter will examine international students' motivations for studying overseas and the policies and attitudes of the host country towards potential immigrants.

Building on the push-pull factors, this section will introduce the relatively new concept of welcoming communities. Strategies implemented for building welcoming communities becomes a clear pull factor to attract and retain international students in the country.

The complexities of the Canadian immigration system are outlined, particularly as they pertain to Lee's theory of migration. As such, the push and

pull factors associated with the current immigration policy are identified. Recent immigration patterns in the Nova Scotia context will be presented to further examine the push and pull factors that contribute to Lee's understanding of migration.

2.1 Theories of Migration

Understanding migration holds importance for all aspects of society as it "shapes and re-shapes societies" (King, 2013, p. 6). The act of migration is not a new phenomenon. McNeill and Adams (1978) note that international migration has been woven throughout human history. Today, Castles and Miller (2009) suggest we are living in the 'Age of Migration' – annual increases in the number of people moving, the distances people move, and patterns of migrations have expanded.

There are many theories for understanding and defining migration. King (2013) noted that "migration is too diverse and multifaceted to be explained in a single theory" (p. 7). This research focuses on voluntary migration where an individual moves from one country (their home country) to another – specifically Canada, for the purpose of this research. Further, migrants in this research are international students, who voluntarily moved from their home country to Halifax,

for the purpose of acquiring post-secondary education. The focus will be on Halifax, Nova Scotia as the area of origin in the context of the Ivany Commission's (2014) report and the desire to move to new area of destination within Canada.

There are six main theoretical models of migration (Ma, 2000): (i) the push-pull model; ii) the human capital model; iii) the place-utility model; iv) the value expectancy model; v) the neo-Marxist model; vi) and the network model. For the purpose of this research, Lee's (1966) push-pull model of migration will be examined in further detail. Lee's model provides a useful platform to examine the motivations of international students upon their graduation from Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) universities. The push-pull model of migration was chosen for this study to identify the push factors that lead a substantial number of international students out of Nova Scotia, and the pull factors that influence the smaller number – approximately 10% according to the Ivany Commission's report – to remain in the province post-graduation.

Migration, according to Lee (1966), has no set definition. That being said, although Lee's theory is over 70 years old, it still holds practical and theoretical value today as Lee highlighted that in order for migration to take place four main variables must be in place: an origin, a destination, a set of intervening obstacles,

and personal factors. Intervening obstacles are variables, such as distance or the physical features of a landscape. Lee's theory then has been modified for the purpose of this research to identify Halifax, as a new area of origin for international students, of which 90% make the exodus out of Nova Scotia at the end of their studies.

Lee's theory of migration is based on identifying push and pull factors that influence the decision-making of migrants. Push factors are those indicators that encourage people to move away from their current location (see Figure 1). Pull factors are those indicators that encourage people to move to a new location (Lee, 1966; King, 2013). In addition to the push and pull factors, Lee identifies a series of intervening obstacles that also influence an individual's decision to migrate. In this research, the push factors focus on issues pushing international students away from Halifax/Nova Scotia and the pull factors relate to issues pulling international students to remain in Halifax/Nova Scotia.

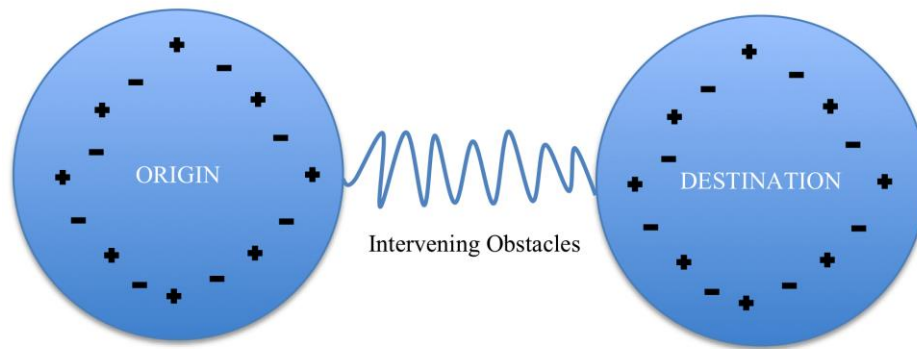


Figure 1. Lee's push-pull model illustrates the push (+) and pull (-) factors in an area of origin and destination along with the intervening obstacles that push or pull individuals to and from the respective areas. Source: Replicated from Lee (1966)

Ultimately, Ma (2000) indicated that Lee's theory suggests that push and pull factors within home and host destinations influence the "size and direction" of migration (p. 149). In that, factors such as political crises for example, may influence the movement of people from the area of origin to neighbouring countries (an area of destination) in search of refuge. As such, the direction and size of a group of potential immigrants is dependent on issues (social, economic, or political) in an area of origin. Brief descriptions of these four factors are provided below.

Factors associated with the area of origin usually act as push factors, such as crime and violence, and an unstable economy (Parkins, 2010). As Ma (2000)

suggests, the area of destination often has pull factors, such as employment opportunities, higher quality of life, and stable social conditions. Intervening obstacles could range from physical distance between the origin and the destination, to economic barriers, cultural issues, or political factors (King, 2013). These intervening obstacles, as explained in the previous paragraph, can serve as both push and pull factors influencing migration. Personal factors, a peripheral factor, depend on the "...economic status, life-stage, and personality" (King, 2013, p. 13) of the individual who is seeking to relocate. As such, an individual in an area of origin who feels economically stagnant may be pushed to a destination area that is perceived to be more prosperous.

Lee's theory of migration is well suited for this research for three reasons. First, the theory focuses decision-making at the individual level rather than a macro-level analysis. This allows an examination of individual push and pull factors which can identify themes or issues to a broader extent rather than at the individual level. Second, Lee's theory of migration was constructed with the rationale that economic factors are the most dominant. This corresponds to literature on international student migration, which is explored in the next subsection.

Lee's theory of migration continues to be utilized by researchers to study the motivations of migrants, including international students (Gorgoshidze, 2010; Yakaboski et al., 2017; Wilkins et al., 2011); this is mainly due to push-pull factors being at the fore of explaining why people move. Every location has factors that can make it desirable (pull; area of destination) or unfavourable (push; area of origin); as such, Lee's theory holds value for explaining how initiatives like welcoming communities (Esses et al, 2010) work to pull students to Nova Scotia, along with Mazzarol & Soutar (2002) on identifying the factors that influence international students to move. Then, having been in the province over the years, Lee's theory can aid in explaining the Ivany Commission's report on why such a large percentage of international students leave the province post-graduation.

2.2 International Students and Lee's Theory of Migration

Building on Lee's theory of migration, the four major factors of push/pull can be examined in greater detail to explain why international students make the move, especially from developing to more developed countries.

According to Mazzarol & Soutar (2002), international students encounter a three-step process that connects them to their potential destination and ultimately their institution of choice. The first step involves "push" factors within the potential student's home country. These factors may be political, economic,

and/or social in nature. This is then followed by two “pull” factors. The first of which is the selection of a potential destination/host country, which has several factors that make it attractive to the student, including cost of tuition, or the reputation of the university. The second pull factor is the selection of the institution. Each institution offers a suite of different programs that can attract potential international students. The selection of the institution is critical, as it includes factors such as the potential host institution’s reputation, profile, and course availability, among others (Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002).

It can be understood that in order for people to move, there has to be a reason – a motivation – for doing so. In the case of international students, there are several contributing factors that lead them to further their education outside of their home country. According to Mazzarol and Soutar (2002), a lack of access to education in Asia and Africa has played a critical role in pushing students out of that region. In Sub-Saharan Africa, for example, education for women is not emphasized and can inhibit the access they have to education (Müller, 2000), which may lead to women seeking to move to areas where education is accessible. Parkins (2010) and Kline (2003) identified immediate economic opportunities and occupational development as key pull factors for the destinations/receiving countries. Additionally, Rodriguez, Bustillo, and Mariel

(2010) stated that students are more likely to move if they see that the long-term economic benefits outweigh the cost of moving to a new country. As such, a key push and pull factor lies within economic opportunities.

Another economic factor identified in the literature is the viability of the degree program the international student decides to pursue (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). With the demand for high-skilled immigrants in Canada, international students are seeking the educational qualifications that will prepare them for employment in the host country (Kalin & Berry, 1994; Lowell & Findlay, 2001). As such, the ability of a university to offer degree programs that will prepare them for employment in the host country or area of destination is a critical pull factor.

Aside from the economics, the academic literature identifies a number of push and pull factors related to social connections in both the origin/home country and destination/potential host country. According to Mazzarol & Soutar (2002), international students are more likely to attend the university recommended by a family member or friend (pull factor), as opposed to those recommended by the agents promoting particular universities. Parkins (2010) identifies other social factors, including crime and violence that act as a push factor from the origin/home country. King (2013) also identified that access to

information about post-secondary institutions through family/friend connections in the destination/host country as a pull factor that can lead the international student to making the decision of where they wish to undertake their international studies.

According to Kalin & Berry (1994), however, there are various “ethnic attitudes” in the host country that may act as deterrents for the potential immigrant. For instance, Kalin and Berry (1994) noted that Canadians are less likely to engage the services of a high-skilled immigrant, such as a dentist or a teacher, for example, as opposed to that of a low-skilled worker, such as a plumber. Depending on where the international student decides to undertake studies, this attitude towards immigrants in high-skilled positions may lead to varying attitudes of either social isolation within the host community, representing a push factor.

Further, there are country-level policies in place that act as push-pull factors between the origin/home and destination/host countries. For the destination/host country, Canada, international students are one of the streams of economic immigrants of Canada (Lou & Hu, 2015). The Government of Canada is able to attract potential permanent residents through the international student stream by making the process of gaining employment during and after post

secondary studies attainable (Lou & Hu, 2015). Some international students are seeking economic opportunities in the destination/host country and the opportunity to work while undertaking academic studies and the potential to gain permanent residency in the destination/host country acts as a pull factor for international students.

The academic literature on international student mobility discussed herein identifies a series of both push and pull factors that international students need to address. It should be noted that these illustrations emerge from academic literature from Canada, the United States, and Europe. No specific literature from the Nova Scotia context was available. The review of literature on international student migration also confirms the relevance and timeliness of Lee's push-pull model for this research initiative.

2.3 Welcoming Communities as a Pull Factor

One of the key pull factors identified in the previous section is the attractiveness of the destination/host country for international students. Parkins (2010) noted that destinations with low crime can be a pull factor.

Welcoming communities, according to Esses et al. (2010), is an initiative that became popular during the 1990s. The notion of welcoming communities was of particular interest to local community groups interested in attracting and retaining new immigrants. A welcoming community can be defined as a destination within the Canadian context where newcomers feel valued and their needs are met, and needs to be viewed in a holistic manner (Esses et al., 2010). According to Gibson, Bucklaschuk, & Annis (2017, p. 42), "There is no universal understanding of what a "welcoming community" entails; however, it often includes discussions related to ethno-cultural diversity, civic participation, equal access to services, and meaningful employment." As such, the welcoming community plays an ongoing multidimensional role in both attracting and retaining its newcomers, which speaks to the dynamism and holistic nature of the role of welcoming communities.

Welcoming communities' major roles include their abilities of "...identifying and removing barriers...promoting a sense of belonging...meeting diverse individual needs...[and] offering services that promote successful integration..." (Esses et al., 2010, p. 9). Additionally, there are 17 characteristics of welcoming communities (Esses et al., 2010) provided, the first eight of which are: i) employment opportunities; ii) positive attitudes towards immigrants, cultural

diversity, and the presence of newcomers in the community; iii) municipal features and services sensitive to the presence and needs of newcomers; iv) educational opportunities; v) political participation opportunities; vi) opportunities for use of public space and recreation facilities; vii) fostering social capital; viii) the presence of newcomer-serving agencies that can successfully meet the needs of newcomers. The remaining seven characteristics of a welcoming community are: ix) accessible and suitable health care; x) presence of diverse religious organizations; xi) safety; xii) social engagement opportunities; xiii) available and accessible public transit; xiv) links between main actors working toward welcoming communities; xv) affordable and suitable housing; xvi) favourable media coverage and representation; xvii) and positive relationships with the police and the justice system (pp. 5-6).

It is important to note that not all 17 have to be met in order for a location to qualify as a welcoming community. As such a welcoming community needs to identify the characteristics that are missing and address them in order for newcomers to feel welcome.

According to Esses et al. (2010), welcoming communities have to work in tandem with the local government in order for the community to be successfully labelled as such. They require interdependence, which involves communication,

heavy planning, and most importantly, stakeholders that have an invested interest in seeing the area develop as a welcoming community. Therefore, as Esses et al. (2010) discussed, the main actors must be very well connected and have the same goal in mind. Further, the main actors must have a "...strong drive to receive newcomers and create an environment in which they will feel at home..." (p. 65). Halifax is currently working on its welcoming community initiative through organizations that assist new graduates with finding opportunities for networking which may lead to employment. Some of these organizations include the Halifax Partnership and EduNova with the newly launched Stay in Nova Scotia program. These programs will be discussed in detail in the *Discussion and Conclusion* chapter.

The concept of welcoming communities, according to Belkhodja (2005), means that immigrants and international students have the opportunity to fully engage in community life in the destination/host country. Strategies of building welcoming communities can be considered as an important pull factor for international students.

2.4 The Canadian Immigration System as a Push/Pull Factor

The ability to make a livelihood in the destination/host country following graduation is a key pull factor identified in the previous sub-section. Rodriguez, Bustillo, and Mariel (2010) indicated a pull factor for the destination would be those long-term economic benefits – such as finding employment in a personally favourable role – that outweigh other costs, including the overall cost of migrating. Similarly, Kalin & Berry (1994) and Lou & Hu (2015) noted that international students are seeking opportunities to prepare them for employment in the destination/host country. This section provides a brief overview of the current Canadian immigration system as it applies to international students and Lee's push-pull model of migration.

Canada's immigration system today is recognized as an "Open-Door Approach," (Van Dyk, 2016) although several barriers present challenges to potential immigrants whose aim is to get through that "open door". The aim of the Government of Canada over the years has been to increase immigration on a needs-based basis in order to bolster the economy, which was highlighted by the 1967 points-based system (Boyd & Vickers, 2000; Vineberg, 2010). The points-based system awards points for "... age, education, language skills, and economic characteristics..." rather than giving heavy consideration for the countries of origin

of potential immigrants (Boyd & Vickers, 2000). Today, the immigration system serves two main purposes: to retain highly skilled potential human capital, who can then have a path to permanent residency; and to hire low-skilled workers who have limited paths to immigration in Canada (Ali, 2014).

A report by Boyd & Vickers (2000) summarized how immigration and immigration laws in Canada have changed over the past century. Immigration policies in Canada never aimed to just replace the aging population that inhabited Canada. Instead, immigration policies, from the beginning, showed a preference towards British and American potential immigrants (Boyd & Vickers, 2000). During the late 1970s, the *Immigration Act* was revised to allow greater flexibility in the admittance of a wider group of people, including those who require admittance based on humanitarian grounds. By 1996, most immigrants (27%) were those born in Asia, and highlighted the increase of immigrants from different races and cultural backgrounds outside of the United Kingdom and the United States (Boyd & Vickers, 2000). As such, diversification and an apparent increase in minority groups and refugees became a trend in the Canadian landscape. While it is beneficial to have an increase in the number of immigrants to facilitate the economy and increasing the population, there was and still is an issue of unequal distribution of immigrants in Canada. As Lee's theory of

migration suggests, immigrants are attracted (or pulled) towards certain places where opportunities exist. This is usually within the largest urban centres in Canada: Toronto, Montréal, and Vancouver (Carter, Morrish, & Amoyaw, 2008; Gibson, Bucklaschuk, & Annis, 2017).

Today, the Canadian immigration system is complex, with multiple potential entry programs, including a stream for international students. Dobrowolsky and Ramos (2014), however, noted that the current immigration system utilizes an econocentric approach. Through this approach, the Canadian immigration system recruits for the primary purpose of economic development. This approach is not without its challenges, as it assumes there is sufficient socio-economic structures in places to retain “economic” immigrants (Dobrowolsky and Ramos, 2014). A second challenge to the econocentric approach is that areas with limited number of immigrants do not offer a sense of comfort to immigrants who have decided to relocate. Dobrowolsky and Ramos (2014) noted these two challenges are clearly evident in Nova Scotia, arguing that the number of immigrants to the province have increased but “retention rates remain among the worst in the country” (p. 6).

These experiences in Nova Scotia would represent potential push factors that would encourage international students to leave Nova Scotia, either to

pursue opportunities in other places in Canada or to return to their home countries. The Ivany Commission's report emphasized the need for Nova Scotians to be more welcoming to its newcomers, including international students. By the same measure, international students were cited as potential talent for employers in the province, and as a source for population growth (Ivany et al., 2014).

2.5 Summary

It is clear that Lee's theory of migration continues to hold relevance nearly 70 years after it was published. The focus on push and pull factors at the individual level allows for an investigation into motivations. Other academics have also demonstrated that Lee's theory of migration is appropriate for examining international students as a unit of analysis. The motivation of international students for studying overseas and the policies pursued by the host country towards potential immigrants clearly fit into Lee's theory.

The concept of welcoming communities, presented by Esses et al. (2010), provides a useful overlap with Lee's theory of migration. Strategies implemented to build welcoming communities would appear to be a pull factor that would attract and retain international students in the country.

Similarly, the complexities of the Canadian immigration would appear to also fit well with Lee’s theory of migration. The Canadian immigration system appears to serve as both a pull factor attracting international students to Canada and, at the same time, acts as a push factor, discouraging international students from remaining in a particular area of destination, particularly Nova Scotia.

The literature presented in this research operates at different scales, but are interrelated (see Table 1). At the Federal level, immigration policies and laws are created that govern how the Canadian immigration system works, and governs how provinces operate. At the provincial level, immigration programs are instituted to allow potential entry to immigrants at the provincial level based on the specific needs of each province. It is important to note however, that the application must still pass the main, federal requirements.

Table 1: Scales of the immigration system in Canada

Scales	Duties
Federal	Create immigration policies and laws
Provincial	Create and implement immigration programs
Municipal	Create and implement programs/initiatives, such as welcoming communities
Family/Friends/Networks	Information sharing and networking

Institution	Facilitate the integration of international students, provider of programs
Individual (the person)	Decision-maker regarding migration and mobility.

At the municipal level, there is the opportunity for programs and/or initiatives related to welcoming communities, as suggested by Esses *et al* (2010), to facilitate the attraction, retention, and integration of newcomers. Further, as this study focuses on post-secondary institutions in HRM, the subsequent scales are necessary for the success of the international student who wishes to settle in Canada.

The family/friends/network scale works in two ways. First, this group can work as pull factors to attract students to Halifax for university by providing information on the city, universities, and potential job markets. Secondly, the availability of friends/family/network work to either retain the potential immigrant or push them to areas where these are available. The institution scale is the first place with which the international student becomes acquainted upon their arrival. Through the institution, international students may feel welcome to attempt to remain in a location, depending on the programs in place. As such, along with the programs in place in a city or municipality, a post-secondary institution plays a

significant role in influencing an individual's decision to remain in one's new area of origin.

Chapter 3

Methods

3.0 Introduction

This research seeks to identify the social, economic, and political push-pull factors that influence international students' decision to remain in, or leave Nova Scotia post-graduation. As such, the most effective way to investigate how humans feel about various situations is to directly approach them and gather information based on carefully-formulated questions related to the population in question (McLafferty, 2010). This research employed two key methods: an online survey and a focus group. The primary data was gathered through an online survey delivered through Saint Mary's and Mount Saint Vincent Universities' international students' centres mailing lists. Dalhousie University had their survey delivered through a Facebook Group page; Saint Mary's University also shared the group via their Facebook page. The survey was sent out to 5,938 students in total, but the survey was designed to specifically target recent international graduates and international students in their final year of study, in order to understand their motivations for determining whether they will remain in Nova Scotia upon graduation. A total of 94 students participated in the online survey.

As the researcher has no control over the specificity of the individuals who received the survey, the approximately 6,000 individuals reached is not a true reflection of the number of international students who are currently in their final year of studies or who have recently graduated. As such, the 1.6% (94 of 5938) response rate exists, but would be much higher if the true number of final year students in the three participating universities was known or targeted specifically.

A focus group was also hosted in order to gain narratives and a deeper understanding of students' perspectives on Nova Scotia. A total of 9 students expressed interest in the focus group, with five students participating in the discussion. A focus group was chosen over an individual interview as it allows for a guided discussion which may prompt additional information that may not have come out through an individual interview. Further, an interview focuses on personal experiences and perceptions; however, this research is more focused on collective experiences, which makes the focus group an appropriate method of data collection (Milena, Dainora, & Alin, 2008).

As the HRM is the city of choice for most international students who choose to study in Nova Scotia, the selected universities were prime sample spots to gain insight on international students' perspectives on their decision for moving here, and what, if anything, has changed over time. This chapter, then,

provides an overview of each research method, data collection techniques, research ethics, and potential limitations associated with the research methods.

3.1 Online Survey

3.1.1 Survey Data Collection Method: Lime Survey

This research employed the use of an electronic survey tool, as the reach is wider, and the data can be analysed more easily and quickly through data analysis programs like Microsoft Excel. A computer-based program for collecting data, Lime Survey, was utilized to “intelligently” record the responses of the subjects in the study (McLafferty, 2010, p. 83). Lime Survey was selected as the survey data collection tool, as it is hosted and maintained by Saint Mary’s University in accordance with Nova Scotia’s Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, which guarantees a high level of security and privacy. The idea of intelligent recording is to ensure error-free data collection along with recording responses entered by the user or respondent.

The survey was given a preliminary trial run to ensure clarity and stress-free delivery of questions in early September 2016, before being fully administered to the actual participants for the study (McLafferty, 2010). The

preliminary trial run was completed by 17 individuals and suggestions were made for improvement, mostly around providing an accurate time for the completion of the study, and considering students who have English as a second language, with regard to some vocabulary usage.

3.1.2 Design of Survey

There were 35 questions on the survey presented in two formats: open-ended questions and fixed responses (Fink & Kosecoff, 1998 in McLafferty, 2010). The fixed format questions were useful in providing respondents with categorized options, and the researcher with a more meaningful method of analysis, as responses could be categorized accordingly. The survey should have taken each respondent an average of 25-30 minutes to complete. The initial questions focused on gathering background data, which included information on age group, majors/degrees, the year they moved to Canada, the universities they attend(ed), and when they graduated, if applicable.

The core questions followed and focused heavily on respondents' motivations for moving to Canada. The questions were delivered through a variety of formats, including the Likert Scale, which required respondents to rank the importance of the options provided, including employment, quality of life,

and access to social services, for example. This allowed for an evaluation of the value international students and graduates place on the aforementioned items.

At the end of the survey, students had the opportunity to submit their names for two additional components. First, each participant was eligible to enter their contact details if they wished to be considered for an online survey prize drawing. Second, participants could self-identify if they wished to participate in the focus group. Their contact information, in both instances, was kept in a separate spreadsheet than their responses.

3.1.3 Incentivising the Survey

The prize incentive served as a means of engaging a higher number of participants to take part in the study (Bricker, 2014) including those that may not have been initially interested to participate. At the end of the survey, students had the option of registering their contact information should they be interested in signing up for an opportunity to win a \$100 gift card. The drawback to using incentives is rooted in the motives of respondents. While some respondents may be intrinsically motivated by the topic, for example, those who were initially disinterested may be motivated to now participate, which may result in responses that are either not genuine or incomplete (Bricker, 2014).

3.1.4 Research Ethics

Research ethics clearance was required from all three HRM universities involved in the study. Each of the universities was approached in the summer of 2016. After discussions about the research, the manager of the International Centre at Saint Mary's University was asked to make initial contact with the corresponding centres at Dalhousie University and Mount Saint Vincent University. Managers of the respective international student services/centres agreed to distribute an invitation to the study and engage students through e-mail correspondences.

Saint Mary's University required a standard research ethics submission. The research ethics clearance process was 3 weeks long, and it included providing amendments to the documents. Once the research ethics process was complete at Saint Mary's University, Mount Saint Vincent University honoured the research ethics certificate issued by Saint Mary's University. Due to prior plans for other surveys geared at international students, Mount Saint Vincent University's international students' office specified a later time, such as near to the end of the fall semester, to avoid conflict with other surveys.

At Dalhousie University, a separate research ethics package had to be submitted in order to contact their international students. The time between the initial contact and clearance from Dalhousie's research ethics board's approval took approximately four months due to a number of factors, including meeting dates of the research board and navigating summer holidays. Dalhousie University's research ethics board issued a separate letter of approval for this research. Data collection for all three universities began in January 2017.

3.1.4 Online Survey Sample

The survey targeted international students in their final year of study and international students who had recently graduated, in order to understand their motivations for deciding whether they will remain in Nova Scotia upon graduation. Two methods were employed to encourage participation in the online survey: (i) an email invitation from the respective international student office at each of the three HRM universities; and (ii) an invitation delivered to Dalhousie University's international student manager to promote a Facebook group designed to invite participants to take part in the study.

Each of the three HRM universities maintain a mailing list of currently and recently enrolled international students. Each international student office was

approached to circulate an invitation to the target audience. To ensure privacy and preserve the integrity of these internal mailing lists, each international student office distributed the survey invitation to their students. In total, 5,938 students received the invitation: 2,337 from SMU, 2,986 from Dalhousie, and 615 from Mount Saint Vincent.

The first email invitation was circulated on November 17, 2016 to Saint Mary's University students and on January 18, 2017 to Mount Saint Vincent University students. Dalhousie University students were contacted through Facebook. A closed Facebook group was created on January 17, 2017 and shared with Dalhousie's International Centre. The survey's link was shared via the Facebook group page, and participants were invited to voluntarily participate in the research; the invitation was shared to a total of 2,986 individuals, with 58 students joining the Facebook group page. A reminder email was circulated on February 8, 2017 to students at Saint Mary's University, Mount Saint Vincent University, and to Dalhousie University students via Facebook. A total of 94 respondents completed the survey. Chapter 4 discusses the characteristics of the 94 respondents.

3.1.5 Data Collection

In order to keep track of the intelligent collection of the results, the data was downloaded and saved every Friday for the months of November through January, as well as the first Friday in February. Should there be any issues with accessing the administrator's page for the survey or the Lime Survey platform, the idea was that the information would have already been mostly saved, and only a week's worth of data would have been lost. Fortunately, there were no issues with the server, and all the data was secure and up to date up until closing the survey.

3.1.6 Data Analysis

The data for the online survey was analyzed using Microsoft Excel. Due to familiarity with the program, it was the most convenient method of data analysis. Using the COUNTIF function allowed for response columns to be accurately represented quantitatively, which can be translated into illustrative figures. The columns mostly consisted of pre-determined responses prepared by the researcher ("Yes," "No," "Does Not Apply," "Extremely Important," "Important," etc.). The drawback, however, was most prevalent when trying to identify themes in open-ended responses. This process was time consuming, as students had various ways by which they expressed their opinions.

3.2 Focus Group

3.2.1 Recruitment

Students were recruited using a secondary, voluntary online survey, and a careful selection process was conducted through the types of questions asked. Students were asked to identify the university they are/were enrolled in, their gender, ethnicity, their region/country of citizenship, and their contact details. Nine students, seven from Saint Mary's, two from Dalhousie, and one from Mount Saint Vincent completed the secondary survey, and each was invited to participate; however, only five respondents from Saint Mary's University demonstrated interest and committed to attending the session. Each respondent was then contacted with three possible meeting times for a focus group and were asked to select the time(s) when he/she was available.

The focus group provided international students with a comfortable, conversational environment within which they could elaborate on their experiences, with the possibility of following up on some of the answers provided (Longhurst, 2010). Additionally, the focus group provided the opportunity for group members of different backgrounds to interact (Longhurst, 2010) and relate to or exchange experiences.

The focus group session was scheduled for one hour and allowed respondents to elaborate on some of the same questions asked in the online survey. During the sessions, each participant was given an opportunity to answer each of the questions posed by the interviewer and was also allowed to elaborate if they needed to do so, which resulted in the focus group going well over an hour. The participants, however, were not deterred by the timing. Upon completion of the focus group, each respondent was provided with a "Thank You" note that provided them with details on how to follow-up with the research and to remind them that they would be contacted individually within a month to verify that the information they provided is correct. This "member-feedback" or "member checking" process is necessary for the integrity of the study and to ensure that the respondents are confident in their responses and feel that their contributions are important (Cope, 2008); it also confirms that they consent to the work being published without any form of identification attached to the provided information. Member feedback was carried out in early April 2017, with four members approving their respective feedback sheet, and one member clarifying a single statement before approval.

3.2.2 Data Analysis

The focus group proceedings were recorded via a voice recorder. After listening to the audio on a repetitive basis, a general coding system was used to organize the data based on the themes (economics, social, political), and recognized patterns in the responses. Edited transcription was done and this process ensured the integrity of the meaning of each response from the participants; additionally, there were some phrases taken verbatim from the recordings that were used for coding. Coding is described by Cope (2008) as a best practice for analyzing focus group discussions. Further, coding, he argues, allows for the researcher to make connections--including "...conditions, interaction among the actors, strategies and tactics, and consequences,"—between the respondents and their situations (Cope, 2008). Through coding, all three of the aforementioned themes were easily recognizable from the tape, making it a very useful method of analysis. Additionally, as the information from the respondents varied, and were subjective based on their personal experiences, coding was a necessary method to aid in evaluating and categorizing the data for the research (Cope, 2008).

A table was generated with three headings (Text; In vivo codes; Analytic codes) (Cope, 2008), and the coded information from each respondent was

recorded. "Text" refers to the participants' own words, which were extracted from the transcription. *In vivo* codes refer to particular phrases or words from respondents that are aligned with the theme, while analytic codes – derived from the *in vivo* codes – are those that, after further analyses, refer back to the literature or theoretical framework (Cope, 2008). For example, one participant indicated that the area was "too routine," while another indicated that they thought the area would have been more "cosmopolitan" which both refer back to the analytic code, "Social Factors." The themes from the focus group were already aligned with those of the research as the questions were designed to capture experiences from each of the themes; as such, there was no need to construct new themes.

3.3 Limitations

3.3.1 Limitations with Online Survey Data

One of the international centre managers mentioned that international centres do not keep track of the students as they progress through university; as such, it would be difficult to identify which students have completed 90+ credit hours, as required by this research. Therefore, the survey was delivered to all students on the mailing lists of the respective institutions. This could interfere

with the integrity of the survey, as reaching the target population could be problematic (Madge 2010), especially since the survey had to be sent to each student on the international students' mailing lists, and could include members who are not apart of the target group.

Additionally, as Madge (2010) highlighted, online surveys may yield lower response rates due to "online respondent fatigue." Online survey fatigue occurs when respondents become tired of the tasks set out by the survey; this situation can lead to a low complete response rate for the survey. This proved to be true for this study, as the survey was sent out to 5,938 students, but only yielded 94 complete responses, even though 124 students started the survey.

According to Bricker (2014), there is concern about the quality of the data for incentivized surveys; however, the only difference was the relative time it took for potential participants to agree to take the survey. Since an incentive does not change the *effort* that goes into responding, the incentive worked to motivate those who were not initially interested in the research to become involved. As such, data quality would not be affected (Bricker 2014).

3.3.2 Limitations with Focus Group Data

The turnout for the focus group was unexpectedly low, which could be attributed to factors such as: the positioning of the recruitment survey, as the survey was placed after the prize drawing survey, and ii) the absence of an incentive for the focus group. Further, even though participants from all three institutions volunteered to participate, only Saint Mary's University students committed to participating after being contacted by the researcher. This could be due to the focus group being hosted at Saint Mary's University, which may have led to feelings of discomfort on the part of students from the other institutions.

Throughout the focus group proceedings, participants were generally open about their responses; in doing so, however, the timing for the focus group went well over the prescribed timeframe. Additionally, there were responses provided where other respondents voiced their disagreement (respectfully), which may have influenced later responses by those who were being open. While the researcher took a neutral stance throughout the process, a reminder had to be provided that the process was not a debate but a platform to voice their experiences. Overall, the proceedings were well received and participants generally welcomed the opportunity to express their opinions about the three main themes of this research.

Chapter 4

Results

4.0 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the results from the two data collection instruments. The data for this study was reliant on two data collection tools: an online survey and a focus group. Three universities were involved in the data collection process, of which there were 94 respondents to the survey, which was distributed to a total of 5,938 students. There were nine respondents to the focus group invitation; however, only five students from Saint Mary's University attended the session.

The results will then focus on the key findings on the social, economic, and political factors influencing international students, and how these factors act as push/pull factors for deciding whether they want to remain in Nova Scotia, or leave, after graduation. The key findings will then be juxtaposed with Lee's push/pull factors on immigration, followed by a summary that connects all the factors to the main question of this research.

4.1 Online Survey

4.1.1 Sample Size and Characteristics

Dalhousie University, with the largest university campus by enrollment in HRM, has a population of over 18,000 students with 14% of the university's population being international students (Dalhousie, 2016). Of the 94 respondents, 15% reported being either currently enrolled or recently having graduated from Dalhousie University. Mount Saint Vincent University, with an international student enrolment of 11.9%, represented 6% of the online survey sample. Saint Mary's University has one of the highest proportions of international students Canada-wide at 33.8% of the entire student population (Saint Mary's University, 2016). Saint Mary's University had a response rate of 77% in the online survey (see Table 2). Two percent of the respondents decided not to disclose the name of their institutions.

Table 2: International Students at HRM Universities and Online Survey Sample Representation

University	Total Enrollment	International Student Enrollment	% of HRM's International Students	Online Survey Sample
Dalhousie University	18,500	2590	48.9%	15%
Mount Saint Vincent University	3,620	431	8.1%	6%
Saint Mary's University	6,725	2273	42.9%	77%

The online survey sample contains an over-representation of international students from Saint Mary's University and an under-representation of international students from Dalhousie University. Potential reasons for the over-representation of Saint Mary's University students may be attributed to the familiarity of international students with the researcher and support from the university's international student centre. As the researcher has worked with the international centre at Saint Mary's in other capacities, there was no issue with distributing the survey. The representation of students from Mount Saint Vincent University in the online survey sample parallels their proportion of international students in the HRM. However, under-representation from Dalhousie University could be attributed to the survey distribution method (through a Facebook group

shared by Dalhousie's International Students' page) which may not directly connect with many current students. Additionally, since the page is an "Open" page where anyone can join, the target group may have been lost among the other members of the page.

The survey gathered a somewhat balanced response rate with regard to gender, as 49 respondents identified as female (52%) and 45 as male (48%). The highest number of respondents were from Asia, representing 45% of the survey respondents (see Figure 2). Asia was followed by the Caribbean & South America, with a response rate of 25%. Africa followed with 18% and North America had a 9% response rate. Europe had the smallest proportion of respondents with 3%. There was also a respondent who self-identified their home country as "stateless." Unfortunately, the online survey did not provide an opportunity to follow up with this respondent to clarify what this response meant.

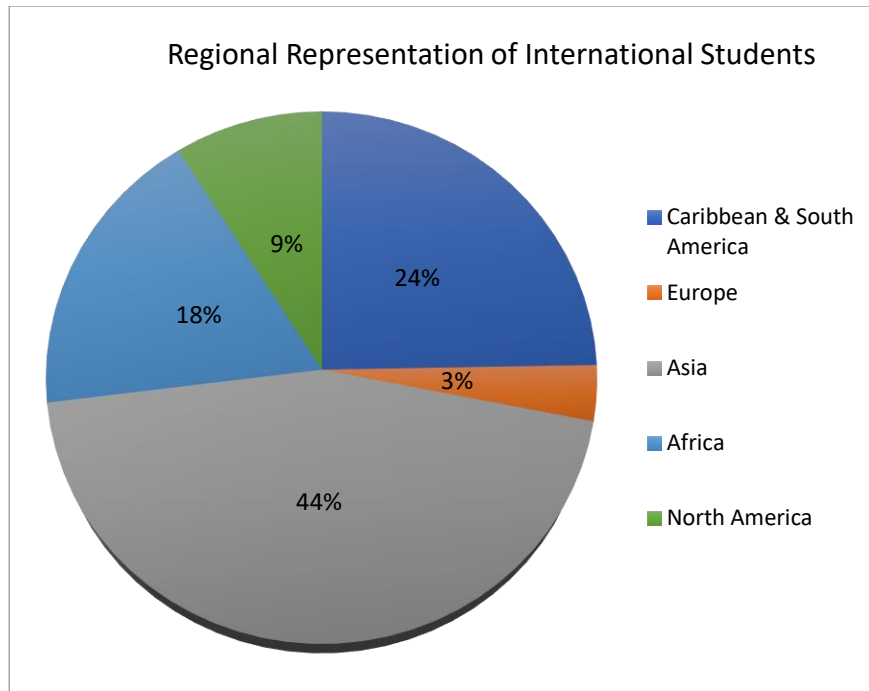


Figure 2: Regional representation of international students participating in online survey.

In terms of age cohorts, the respondents to the survey mostly represented individuals in the 20-24 year-old age cohort (71%), followed by the 25-29 year-olds (19%). The lowest response rates came from 30-35 year-olds (5%) and those who were 36+ (4%) (see Figure 3).

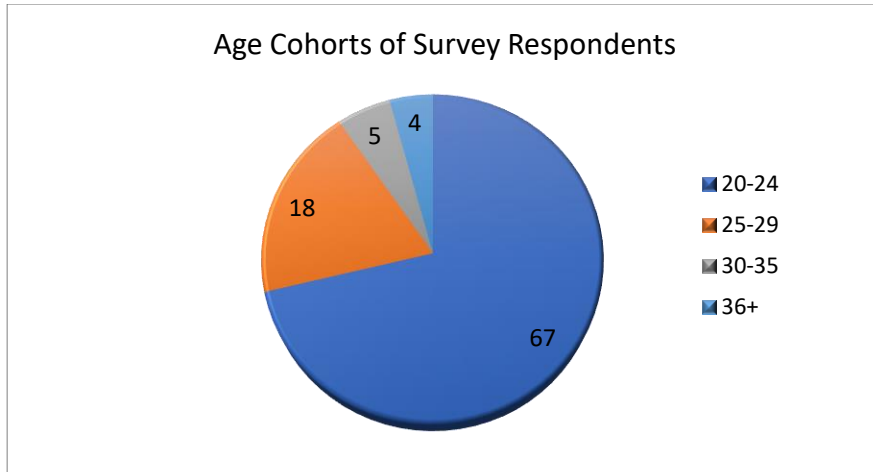


Figure 3: Age cohorts of international students participating in online survey.

4.1.2 Survey Results

Of the 94 respondents to the online survey, there was a balance between those who have completed 60-90 credit hours and those who have completed 90+ credit hours (each 35 respondents respectively). The recent graduates represented a smaller group (24 respondents) (see Figure 4).

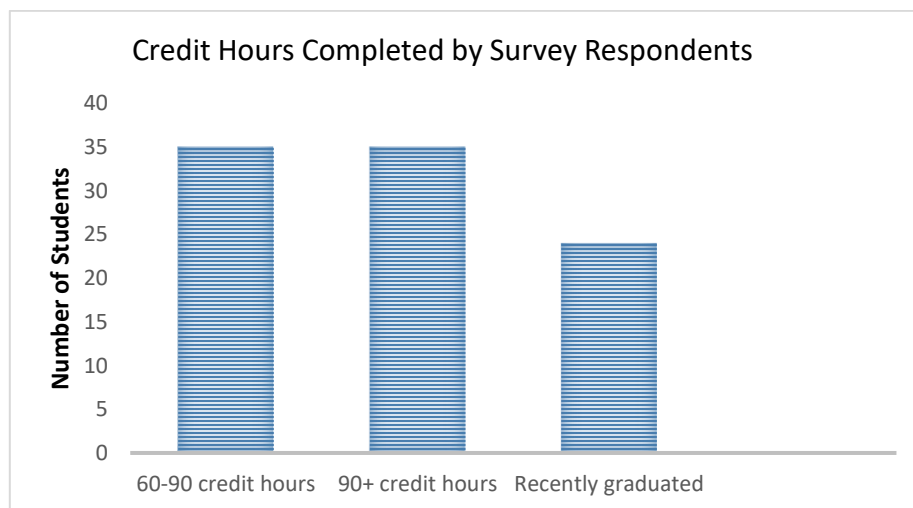


Figure 4: Credit hours completed by participants in online survey.

International students participating in the online survey showed an overwhelming interest in Commerce/Business-related degrees, as a majority of the respondents (53%) were pursuing a degree of this nature. This was followed by the Sciences (21%), which includes health sciences and engineering. Arts (16%) and graduate programs (10%) were the least popular among international students (see Figure 5).

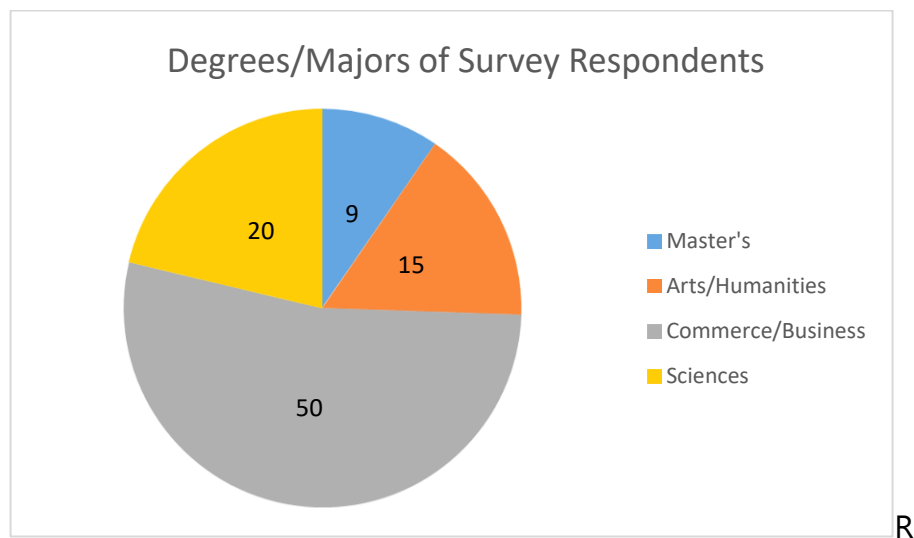


Figure 5: Degrees/Majors of survey respondents of participants in online survey.

International students mostly identified as being engaged in full-time studies (72%), while only a small group (2%) reported that they were engaged in

part-time studies. Recent graduates accounted for 26% of the respondents (see Figure 6).

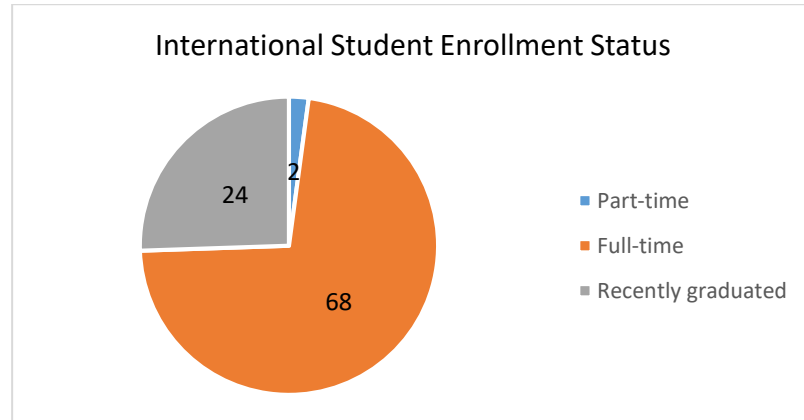


Figure 6: Enrollment status of participants in online survey.

International students demonstrated that they have international experiences in a variety of ways prior to their current studies in Canada. Most international students (78%) indicated that they have traveled to other countries, while others (24%) indicated that they have traveled to Canada before for tourism or leisure activities. A minority (14%) have studied in Canada before, while double that amount (29%) studied in other countries prior to their current studies in Canada. Further, a small group of the respondents (13%) have lived in Canada prior to attending university in Nova Scotia, while 37% indicated that they have lived in other countries before attending university in Nova Scotia (see Figure 7).

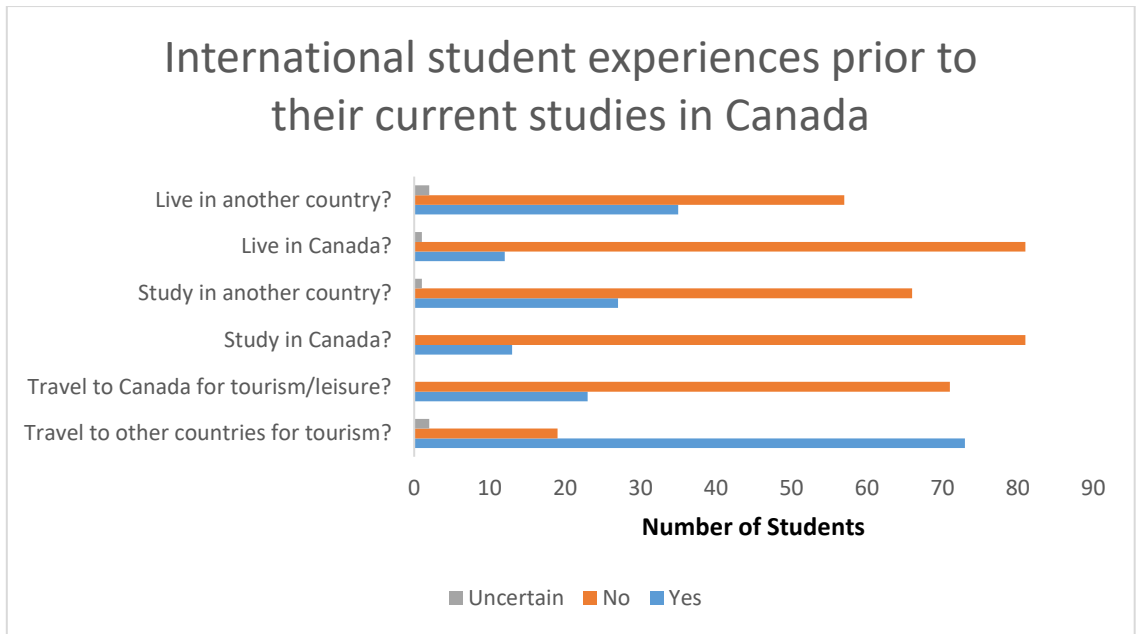


Figure 7: International students’ experiences before arriving in Canada.

To gauge the mobility of international students, the online survey asked each participant to share the frequency of visits to their home country. During the last calendar year, 44% indicated that they have traveled home once, while 34% of the respondents indicated that they have not traveled home (see Figure 8). Of the respondents indicating they returned home, 13% have traveled home twice, which was more than two times those who returned home three times (6%). Two percent of the respondents traveled home four times, while 1% traveled home five times.

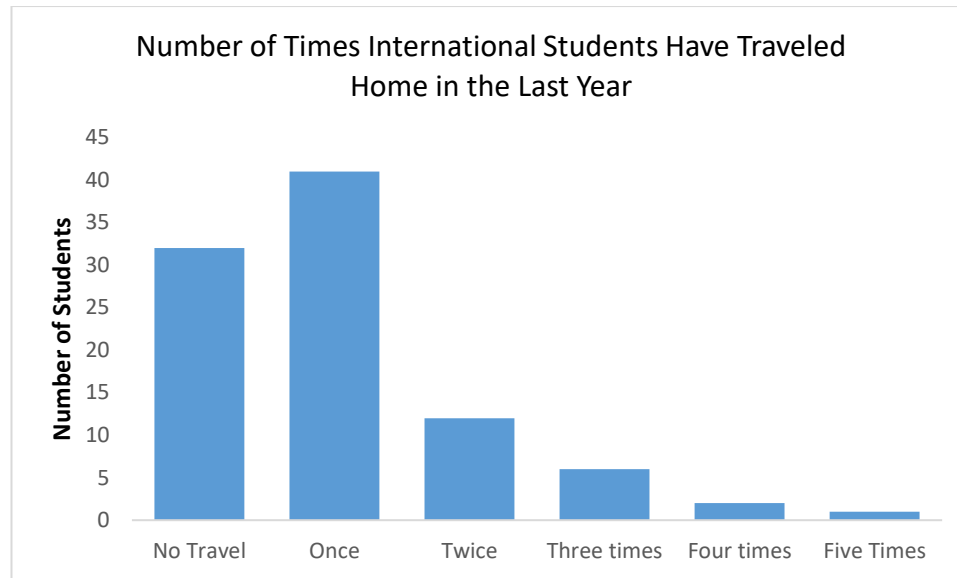


Figure 8: Frequency of travel to home country in the past calendar year.

In understanding the motivations of international students post-graduation, it is important to understand the motivations for international students to study at an HRM university in the first place. Most international students in this study (29%) heard about universities in Halifax through friends and relatives. This was followed closely by the students engaging in online research (28%) to investigate study opportunities in Halifax. Twenty-three percent of the respondents indicated that they heard about universities in Halifax through university fairs, while 17% were introduced through recruitment agencies. Other (3%) methods included a “last-minute” decision and advertisement methods

through universities in their home country (see Figure 9). There was no opportunity to follow up on these advertisement methods.

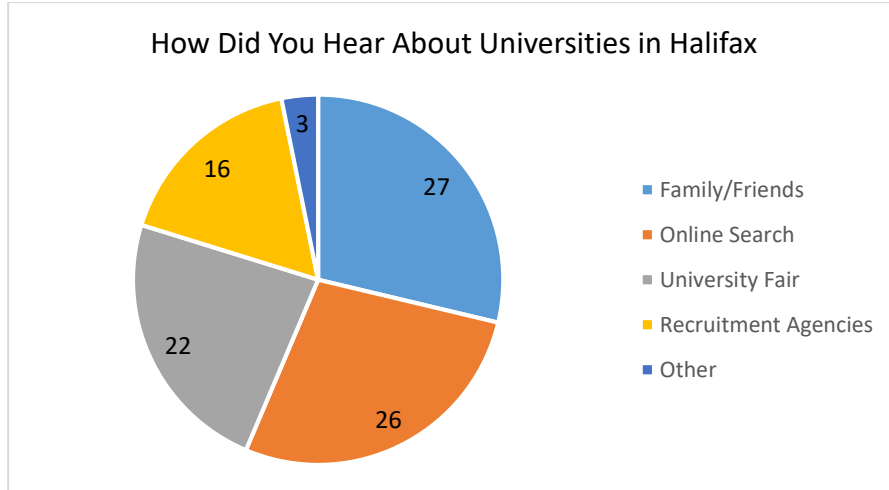


Figure 9: Methods by which international heard about universities in Halifax.

Over half of the respondents (57%) were motivated to study in Halifax due to the cost of living and tuition being cheaper relative to other provinces (see Figure 10). Other key motivations include the perceived value of international education (35%), Halifax being a small city and known for being friendly to international students (31% respectively), and the unique educational programs offered by HRM universities (26%). International students also indicated that their ultimate aim of becoming a permanent resident (25%) and having friends and relatives in the province (19%) also motivated them to study in Nova Scotia. The least popular choices ranged from Halifax being known as a multicultural city

(16%), the climate (12%), and lack of post-secondary programs in home country (10%).

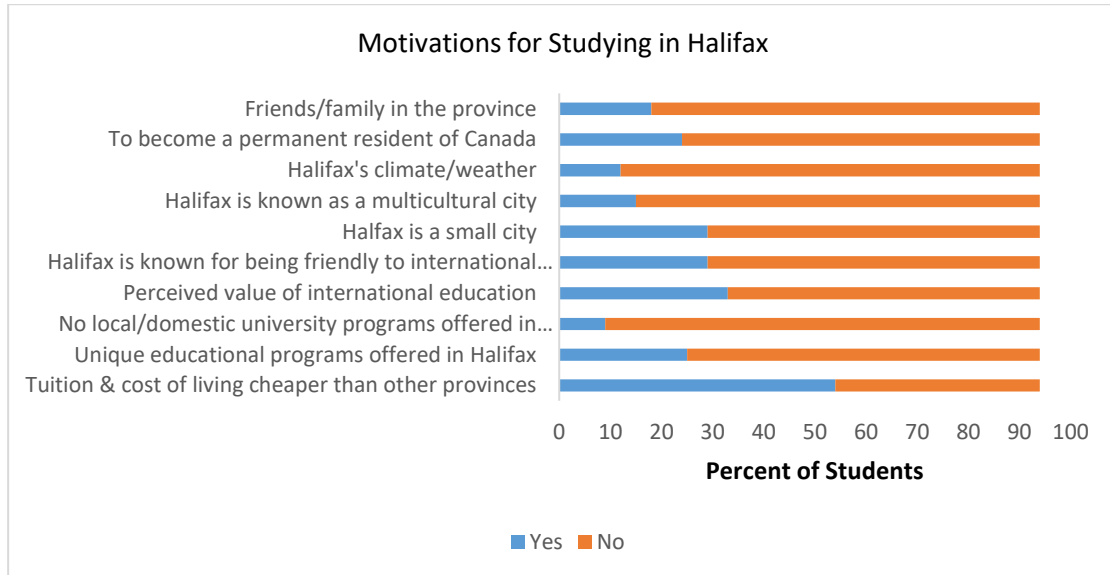


Figure 10: Motivations for International students to study at an HRM university.

In terms of connections, over sixty percent (61%) of respondents in the online survey indicated they had close friends and/or family in Nova Scotia prior to their arrival at a HRM university. The remaining 39% of international students indicated that they did not have any close friends or relatives in the province before their arrival (see Figure 11).

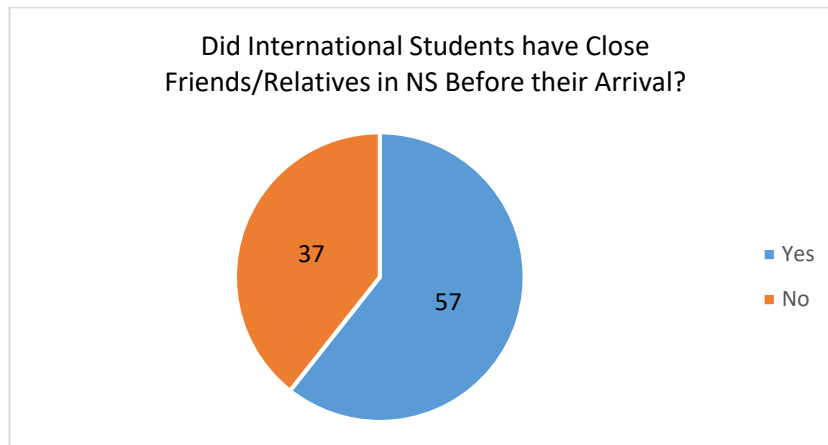


Figure 11: Access to family/friends in Nova Scotia.

On the question of post-secondary education, 54% of the respondents indicated that they had post-secondary qualifications prior to studying in Halifax (see Figure 12). A post-secondary education experience may have included credits or a completed degree that could have contributed to an expedited completion time or facilitated pursuing a post-graduate degree. All respondents with post-secondary education indicated that their qualifications facilitated their acceptance into a HRM university.

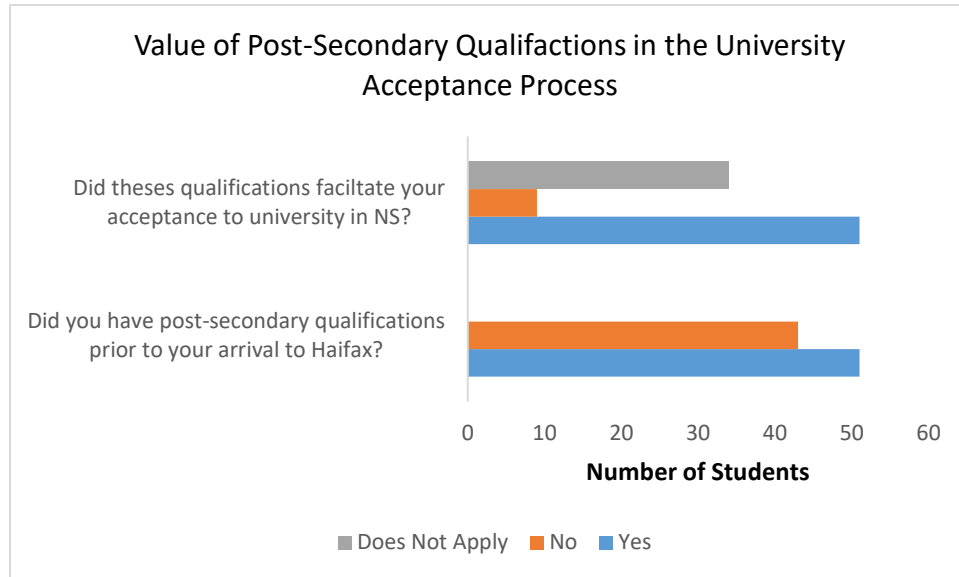


Figure 12: Value of international students' post-secondary qualifications and their usefulness in gaining acceptance to universities in Halifax.

The year 2012 is when 31% of the respondents indicated that they arrived to start their studies, while 2013 saw 21% of the respondents starting their university experience in Halifax (see Figure 13). Of the 94 respondents, 18% indicated that they started their studies in 2014, while 30% listed their opening year as "other". Other responses would represent starting years before 2012.

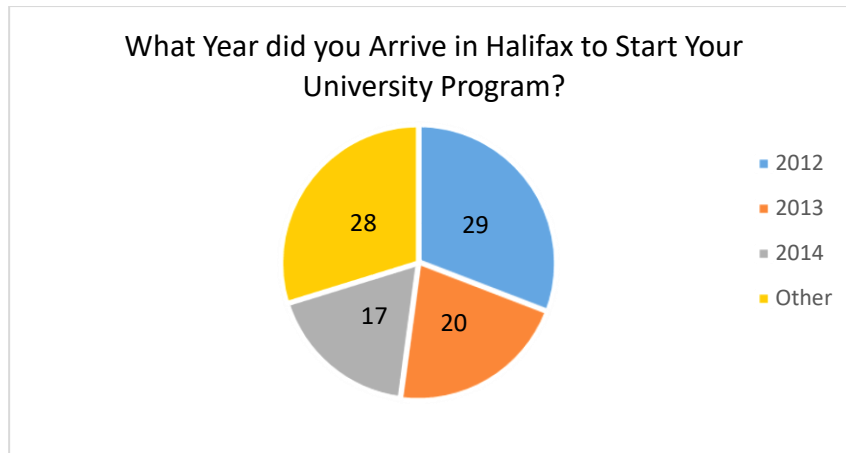


Figure 13: International students' year of arrival to Halifax to start university.

Welcoming communities, as noted in the literature review section, is an important component of immigration retention. International students found that feeling welcomed to the Halifax community (70%), having access to employment (53%), their university's international centre (70%), and orientation week (62%) were "helpful" to "extremely helpful" in their transitions (see Figure 14).

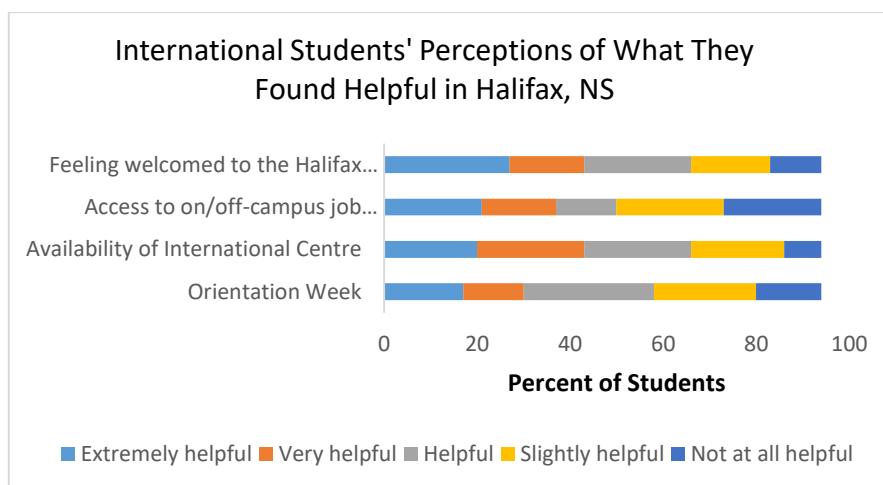


Figure 14: Perceptions of what international students found most helpful upon their arrival to Halifax, NS.

From the literature, it is understood that employment is a key push/pull factor. The majority of the 94 respondents (72%) indicated that they are actively seeking employment (see Figure 15). Slightly less than half, 47%, indicated that they were able to find employment. There were also international students who indicated that they hold more than one job (28%).

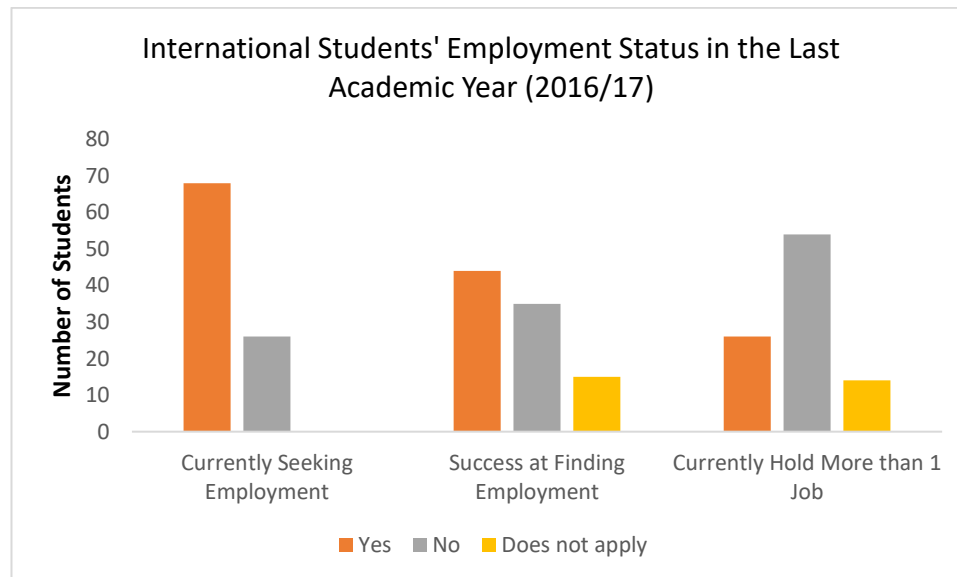


Figure 15: International students' employment status.

The employment international students engaged in can be categorized into three main categories: high-skilled jobs, co-op/intern positions, and low-

skilled jobs. International students were predominantly involved in low-skilled employment (60%) (see Figure 16). Low-skilled jobs noted by international students included fast food jobs, call centre jobs, and other service-type jobs. Approximately one-third (36%) of international students were involved in high-skilled jobs, such as those in information systems and graduate-level research, and only 4% involved in co-ops/intern positions.

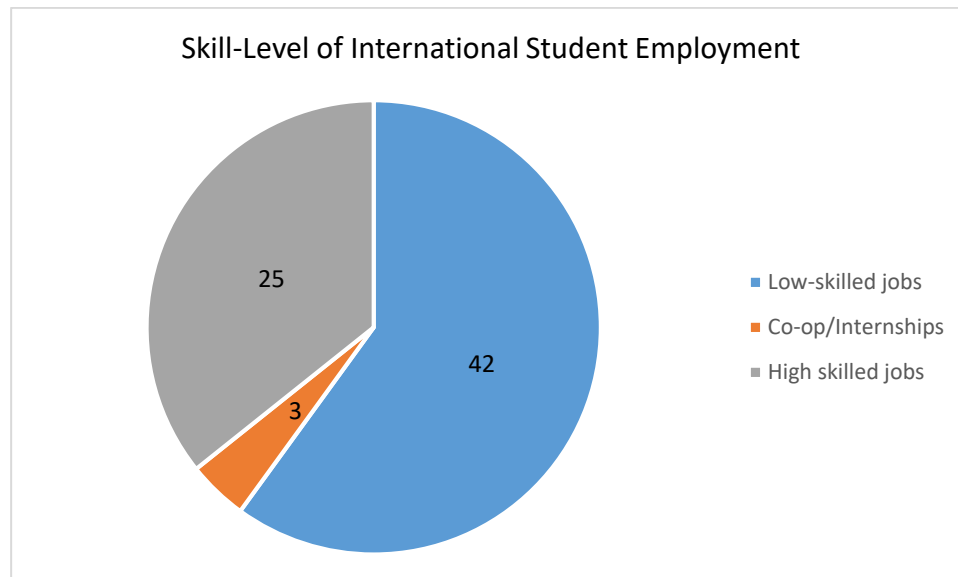


Figure 16: Skill-level of international student employment in Nova Scotia.

International student respondents were motivated to seek employment for a variety of purposes (see Figure 17). The primary purpose was to earn an income (70%), while 63% were motivated by opportunities to gain work experience. Students were least motivated by networking (33%).

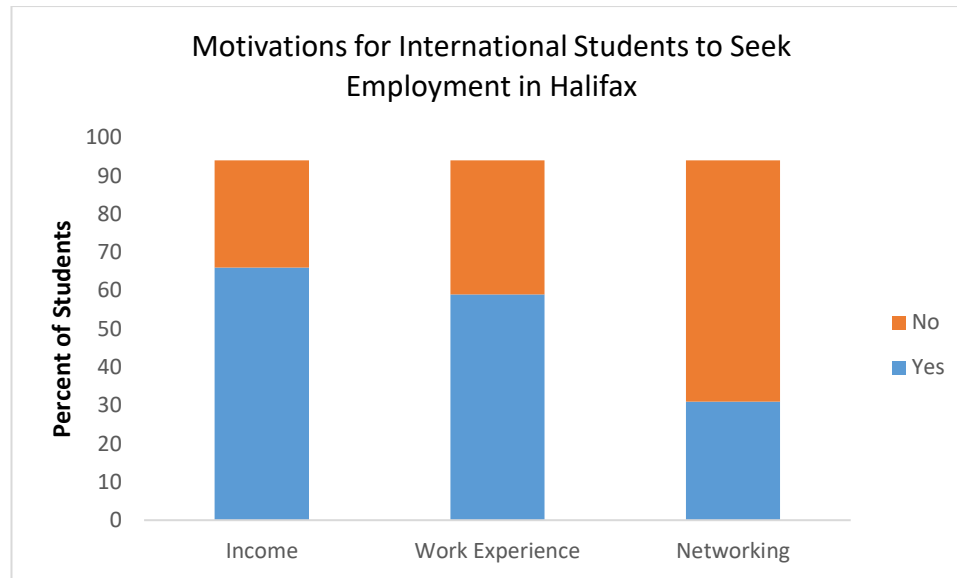


Figure 17: Motivations for international students to seek employment during their studies.

Approximately 40% of international students who held jobs indicated that they found their jobs useful to their career paths (see Figure 18). Of the 94 respondents, however, 37% were uncertain of the benefits of their current jobs, while 24% indicated that they do not find their current jobs beneficial to their career path. This uncertainty and lack of connection between employment and future career path will be explored further in this chapter.

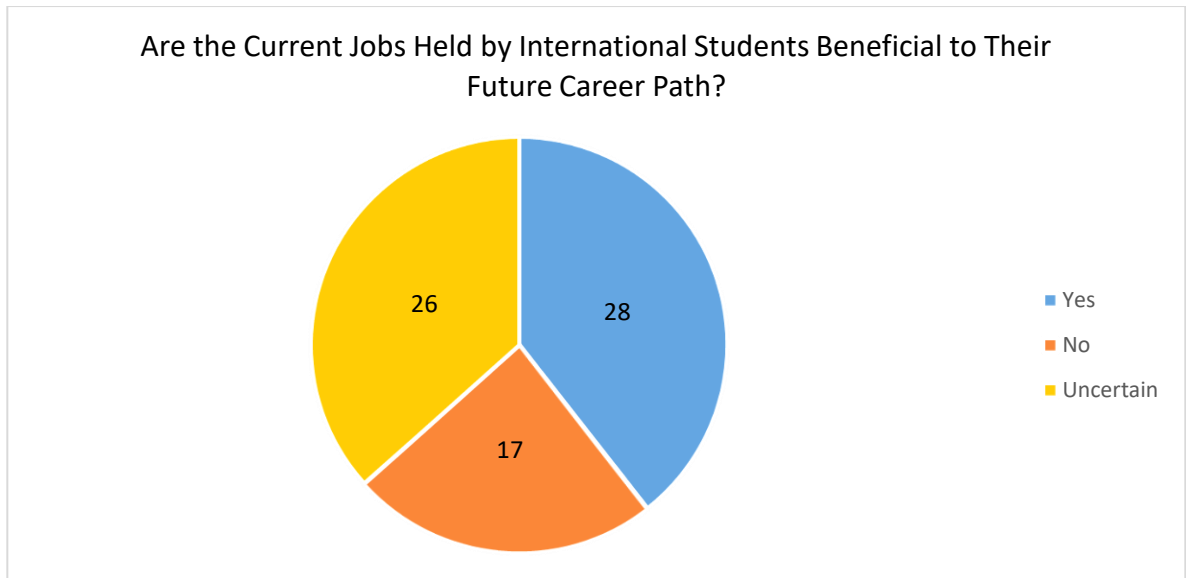


Figure 18: Usefulness of current job to future career path.

With regard to the universities providing their international students with networking opportunities, 48% indicated that their home university provided such opportunities (see Figure 19). On the other side of the coin, 35% indicated that their university did not provide adequate opportunities and 17% were uncertain.

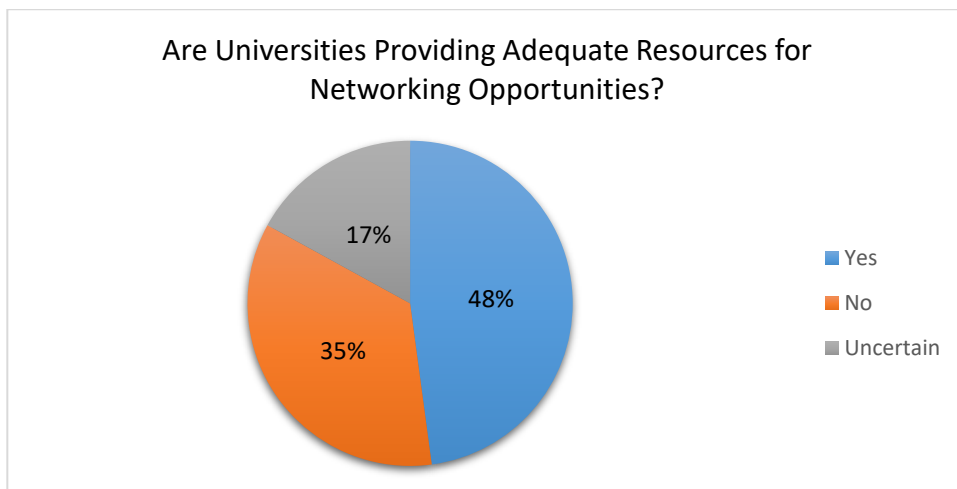


Figure 19: The universities' role in providing international students with resources for networking.

Almost half of those international students surveyed (48%) indicated that they had opportunities to network with potential employers during their studies (see Figure 20a). Of this number, 16% of international students indicated they were able to start networking in first year, while 9% indicated they started in second year. Third and fourth year networking opportunities were represented by 23% and 17% of the respondents respectively (see Figure 20b). Of the 94 survey respondents, 35% indicated that they did not have opportunities to network (Figures 20a and 20b) while 17% were uncertain (Figure 20a).

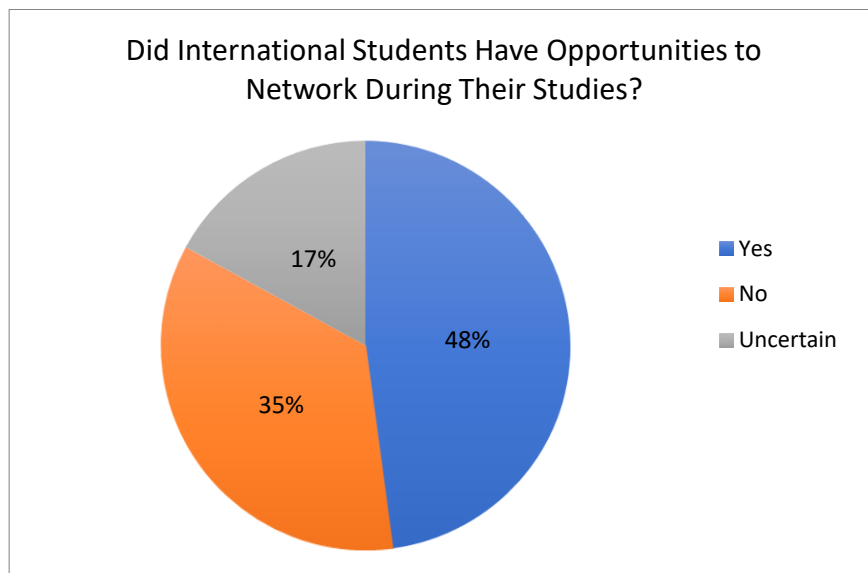


Figure 20(a): Networking opportunities for international students during their studies.

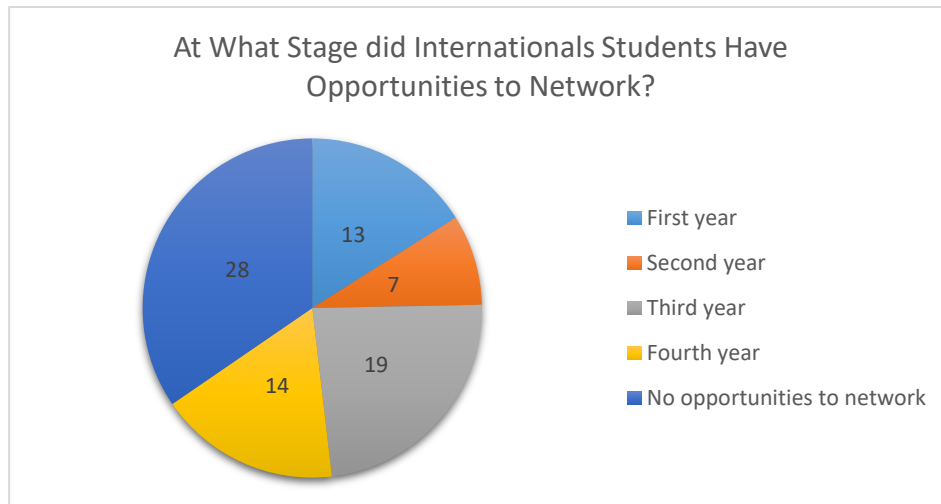


Figure 20(b): Stage of networking for international students.

To determine their future aspirations upon the completion of their degree, participants were asked if they would like to settle in either Nova Scotia or elsewhere in Canada. Over 70% of international students indicated that they would like to settle in Canada post-graduation (see Figure 21). Of the 67 respondents who indicated they would like to settle in Canada after graduation, only 42% indicated their plans were to remain in Nova Scotia.

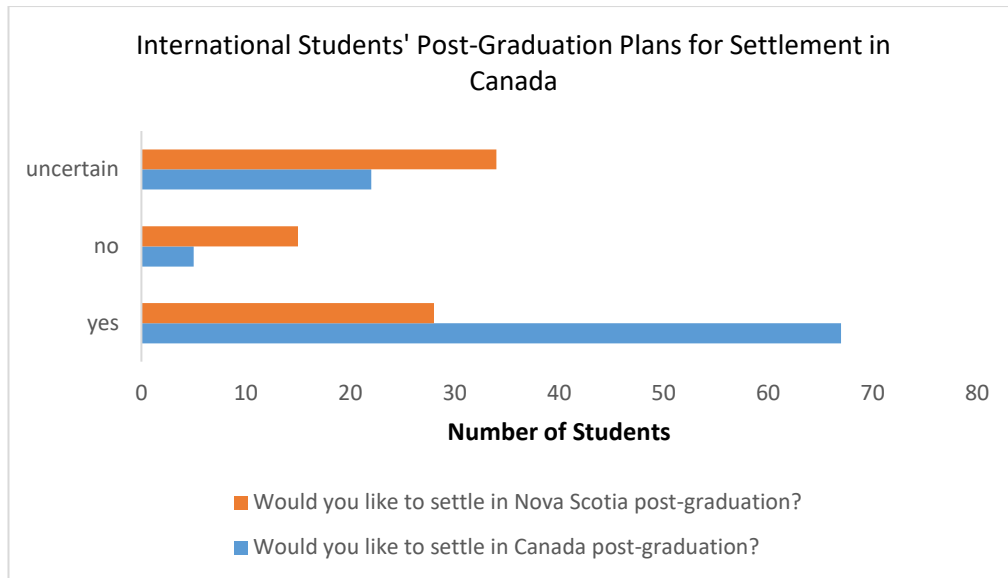


Figure 21: International students' plans on settlement post-graduation.

When examining where international students would like to settle in Canada, 63% indicated that they would prefer to settle in Ontario, while 15% considered British Columbia as their preferred province (see Figure 22). Quebec (12%), Alberta (8%) and the Northwest Territories (2%) were considered by a smaller group of respondents.

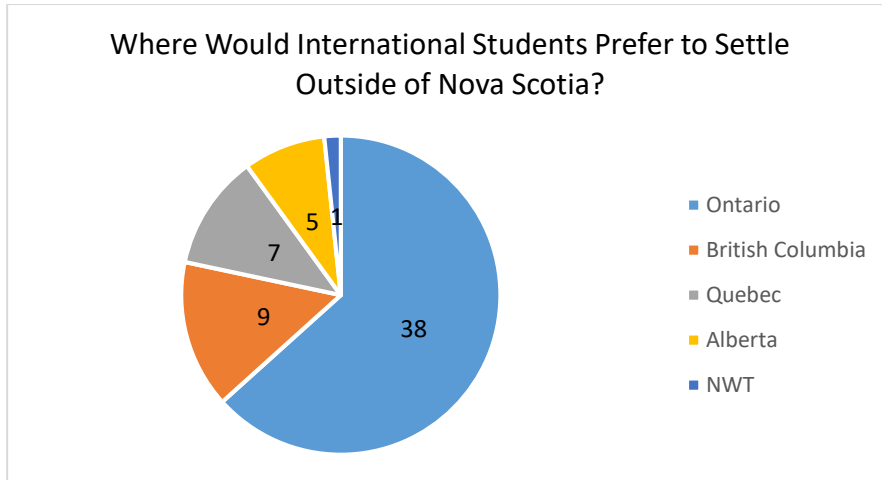


Figure 22: Provinces in which international students would like to settle outside of Nova Scotia.

International students were asked to identify their key motivations for remaining in Nova Scotia (see Figure 23) and four factors were indicated: employment opportunities (87%), quality of life (65%), safety and security of Halifax (54%), and access to health care and social supports (51%). International students were less motivated by opportunities for further education (43%), connections with friend/family (30%), and connections with other immigrants (10%).

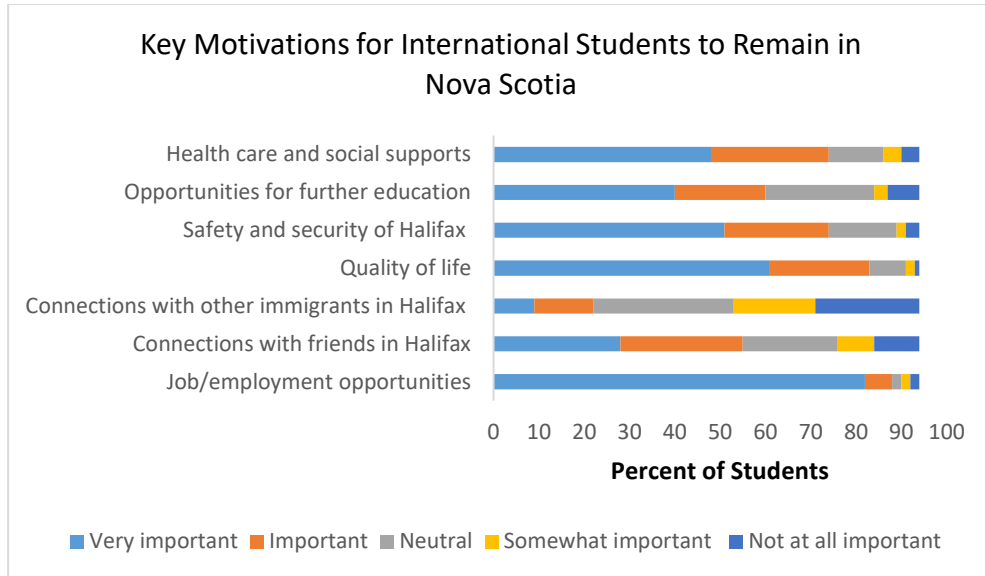


Figure 23: Key motivations for international students to remain in Halifax, NS, post-graduation

On the question of returning home after the completion of their studies, 52% indicated that family commitments would be a key motivation for returning to their home countries (see Figure 24). Forty-one percent indicated that they would be motivated to return home if there were no job opportunities in Halifax. If employment opportunities exist within their home countries, 34% of the respondents indicated that they would be motivated to return home.

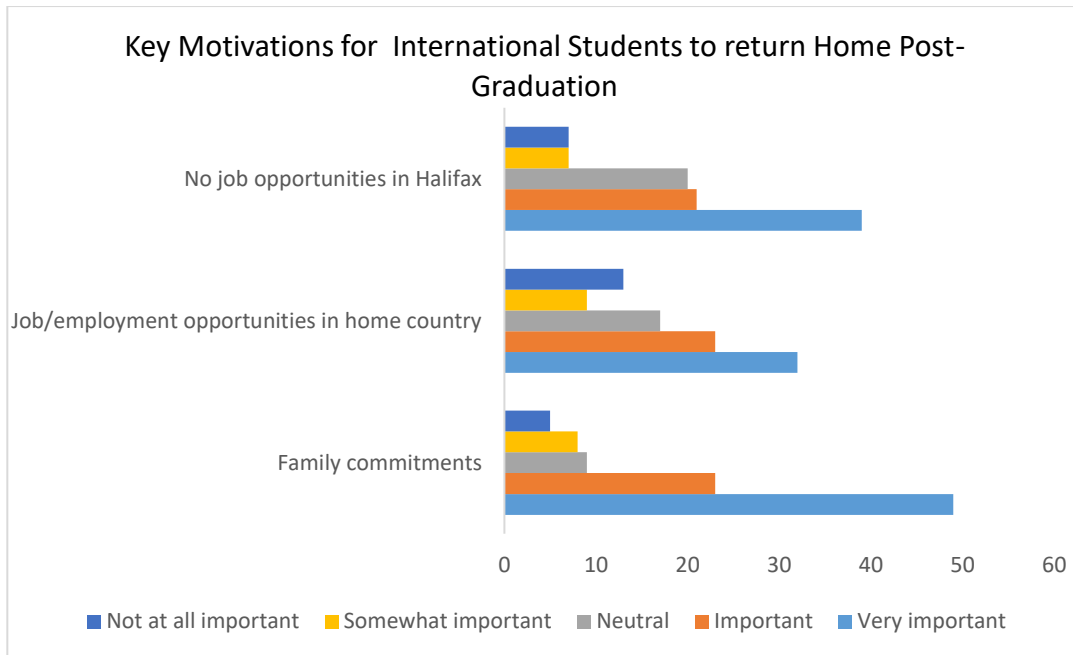


Figure 24: Key motivations for returning home post-graduation.

4.2 Focus Group Results

4.2.1 Sample Size and Characteristics

The focus group consisted of five participants representing three of the world regions found in the online survey. Three participants (60%) were female; two (40%) were male. Of the participants, four were current students (80%) and one was a recent graduate (20%) of Saint Mary's University. Within the 80% cluster, two students (40%) were completing Business degrees, while the other two participants (40%) were enrolled in graduate programs (see Figure 25).

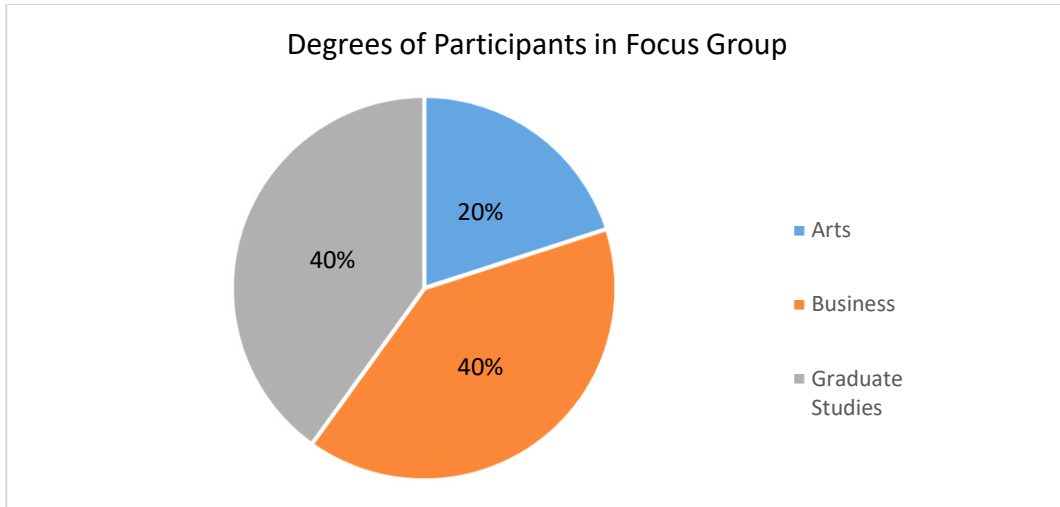


Figure 25: Degrees programs of focus group participants.

Three of the five participants (60%) originated from the Caribbean and Central America, while 20% of the participants originated from Asia and Europe respectively (see Figure 26).

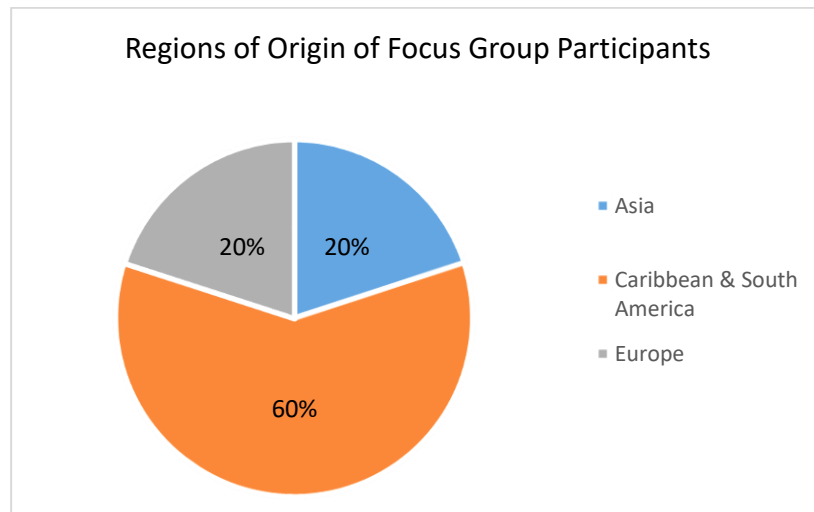


Figure 26: Region of origin of focus group participants

Finally, 60% of the participants were in the 20-24-year-old age cohort, while 40% were in the 25-29-year-old cohort.

4.2.2 Focus Group Results

The focus group session consisted of seven open ended questions, and seven follow-up questions. The focus group took approximately 79 minutes to explore these 14 questions.

Respondents were asked to identify the initial perceptions or expectations they had when they arrived in Nova Scotia, including perceptions about finding employment. Respondents were mostly drawn to the province by education, which includes the cost and reputation of the university (being friendly to international students), and the programs offered at the university. Additionally, respondents indicated that the value of an internationally-recognized degree brought them to study in Nova Scotia. Further, respondents came to Nova Scotia through recruitment strategies and through family members and friends. The pull factors bringing these students to HRM universities largely reflected the comments of the online survey participants.

Reflecting on their experiences of living in or visiting other cities, including those in developing countries, respondents generally expected more development in Halifax. Further “development” that was anticipated, according to the respondents, focused on transportation/road networks, and the city centre being more cosmopolitan, and more diverse; additionally, openness and a more welcoming environment was also expected. The weather was mentioned, as 20% of the respondents indicated that the cold “was to be expected.”

Based on the responses about their perceptions and expectations, respondents were asked to elaborate on whether their initial perceptions/expectations have changed over time. The majority of respondents indicated that their perceptions have changed over time, especially around cost effectiveness and social settings; in that respondents perceived the area to be relatively inexpensive (compared to other provinces) and expected more diversity and opportunities to engage in more social activities, outside of the routine pub atmosphere, as indicated by one participant. International students’ reference to diversity is the visibility of ethnic/cultural groups that reflect themselves and the availability of services and cultural amenities (like food, activities) that reflect their own culture. International students in the focus group mentioned that cities in

Ontario and British Columbia have areas that reflect their ethnicity, which makes those areas more attractive than Halifax.

Further, one respondent indicated that it was more cost effective to live off campus than it was to live on campus, which is a factor that has resulted in students moving outside of the university atmosphere to live among the local citizenry. In doing so, the reality of the cost of food, transportation, and general day-to-day expenses were realized and it was more than the participants were expecting when they initially moved to the province.

Having been outside of the HRM core, participants indicated a general lack of reception, a lack of "intercultural communication," and feelings of discomfort. In that, participants provided examples of feeling isolated when visiting with friends in rural areas, where they were being "watched" as they walked around the community.

Further, living in Halifax is unlike living in other cities that are considered to be vibrant. In Halifax, stores are closed early, and the area feels very "routine," where social activities are predictable, leading to a very relaxed lifestyle. As such, expectations were lowered/changed after living in the city over time.

Focus group participants noted that they were pulled to the province based on the “good things” they heard about attending university in Nova Scotia, such as attending a university with a diverse global community, or the multiplicity of programs available. Further students noted they had access to provincial health insurance after 13 months. This saves international students thousands of dollars annually by not having to buy into their universities’ health care insurance packages.

On the question of feeling welcomed upon their arrival and the factors that contributed to feeling welcomed, participants indicated that their university community played a substantial role in helping them to feel welcome. One participant, however, indicated that there was no one to offer assistance and aid with catching up with missed experiences (orientation and first day of classes, for example), and was therefore left to rely on other international students rather than members of staff. In general, participants indicated that the university has a good program in residence that helped international students feel as if they are a part of the community. However, participants expressed concerns about stepping outside of the university community, where local citizens were “professionally polite” or “polite to an extent.” Respondents elaborated on this by explaining that they find that Nova Scotians will “wave” or “say ‘Hi’” to you, but it stops there.

Additionally, respondents were concerned about questions about their accents, which they perceive as an invitation to ask “intrusive” questions that would not have normally been asked of Canadians. Further, participants cited a lack of cultural intelligence, which refers to instances of either culturally inappropriate comments, or a lack of cultural awareness as cited by participants, when they visited areas outside of HRM.

When asked about settling in the province post-graduation and the factors they would consider in making that decision, respondents expressed their interest in remaining in the province, particularly in the short term. Doing this, however, is not without difficulties, especially along the lines of finding employment within the province. Two programs, Stay in Nova Scotia and the Connector Program, were mentioned by one participant as reasons to consider staying. The Stay in Nova Scotia Program is geared at final year international students and it provides them with the tools – mentorship, workshops, networks and a workplace placement – that will equip them for life after graduation (EduNova, 2016). The Connector Program is designed to connect new immigrants with professionals in their industries (Halifax Partnership) and is not necessarily geared specifically at international students.

Participants cited climate as factor as well, as Nova Scotian winters were described by one participant as "brutal." As such, a Canadian province with milder winters would be preferred by many of the participants. Additionally, participants placed value on living in diverse cities within which they can raise their families, and areas that are more "cosmopolitan." Further, students cited issues with diversity, as the international community on the university campus is a contrast to the wider community experienced beyond the campus community, and this is seen as a hindrance to remaining in Halifax over the long term.

The university's ability to prepare international students for graduation and settlement post-graduation was placed into question and respondents were unanimously in agreement that the university did not prepare/has not been preparing them for life post-graduation. Participants cited that they need/needed assistance with navigating their preparation for life after graduation, which includes knowledge of the importance of networking from an early stage, but there was no guidance for this. As such, students were left to discover these factors at a late stage in their university experience.

Based on information from the focus group, participants who graduated indicated that as an international graduate who holds a post-graduate work permit, one does not have access to services that Permanent Residents would,

such as those provided by the Immigrant Service of Nova Scotia (ISANS), for example, as the funding for the organization does not cover international students. As such, even though one is no longer a student, there are no resources from settlement organizations to assist with networking or understanding the immigration process, and the universities are also limited with their resources, as they have a high enrollment of international students, which leaves the international post-graduate in a grey area.

When asked about the role that government organizations could play and to identify immigration programs they are aware of that target international students, respondents noted that there are no organizations in place to facilitate international students. There are currently two main programs, however, that assist students in their final year with mentorship and networking: the Connector Program through the Halifax Partnership and the Stay in Nova Scotia Program through EduNova. The Connector Program assists new immigrants, and local and international graduates with making local connections, which contributes to networking in the province. The Stay in Nova Scotia program works with final year students to provide mentorship and workshops that aid in the settlement process.

In addition, there is also the Graduate to Opportunity program, of which one participant was apart. The Graduate to Opportunity program is designed to

hire new graduates and the government would pay a portion of the salary (up to 35%) in the first year and 12.5% in the second year (Province of Nova Scotia, n.d.).

Participants expressed frustration trying to gain clarification on navigating the immigration system from local organizations that help with settlement.

Frustrations were centered on delays in getting information/responses, unanswered questions, or being redirected to legal representatives that would cost the international student to receive responses.

Focus group participants expressed that the provincial government could be more proactive in connecting with international students to discuss the issues they face. One participant labeled the government as being “out of touch with reality,” as the criteria set out for provincial immigration consideration are not aligned with the economic realities. In that, one of the criteria for immigration is securing a job, but Nova Scotia was ranked poorly (D) for its high youth unemployment rate (The Chronicle Herald, 2017). As such, internship programs or employer-funded programs targeting international graduates would be helpful according to focus group participants. Additionally, it was suggested that the government fund organizations to guide international students from the onset, not just when the students are in their fourth year or when they have graduated.

Finally, participants were asked to outline the challenges they faced when trying to gain work experience during their studies. Participants indicated they found challenges around time management issues and working within the 20-hour per week stipulation on study permits. Additionally, focus group participants found it difficult to gain meaningful experiences based on the restrictions outlined and jobs that allow flexibility with the hours. A concern raised by focus group participants is that jobs fitting these two criteria, such as on-campus jobs for example, do not usually lend themselves to the hard skills needed to apply for jobs post-graduation. Respondents also outlined that their experiences were perceived as undervalued by employers. As a result, salaries were often seen as low or below a living wage.

International students noted they also lose out on employment opportunities, as discovering the need for networking often comes either in their first year or not at all. The "1 year's experience working in..." phrase on a job description can also be a problem as noted by focus group participants. Even the most basic of entry-level positions advertised require one to have some amount of experience. The issue from this, then, is that between working one or two jobs, as indicated by the survey, to fulfill the financial obligations of living expenses, the international student may end up taking any job, usually in the service/retail

industry. As such, the focus group participants noted that graduating international students felt ill-equipped for the employment landscape they encounter at the culmination of their studies.

Additionally, with the limited categories available for students to gain skilled-worker experience as outlined by the 2011 National Occupational Classification (NOC), the hunt for opportunities that will contribute to an acceptable Permanent Residence application were noted as being very difficult. The NOC classification, according to the Government of Canada (n. d.) is, "...the authoritative resource on occupational information in Canada." This is the system used to by Immigration, Refugee, and Citizenship Canada to identify the category one's job falls under. There are five main categories: NOC 0, which refers to management occupations; NOC A, which pertains to occupations that require a university degree; NOC B, which refers to occupations that require a training certificate or apprenticeship training; NOC C, which includes occupations that require a secondary school certificate along with on-the-job training; and NOC D, which has no formal education requirements.

The NOC system therefore, works like a ticking clock for international students, as students have to apply for a post-graduate work permit, which is valid for up to three years post graduation. Students will then need to work for a

minimum of 1,560 hours in a NOC 0, A, or B position in order to be eligible to apply for permanent residence, along with passing a medical and an English or French proficiency exam. As the post graduate work-permit is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity (no extensions, unless one has already applied for Permanent Residence), there is an additional layer of pressure for international students in Nova Scotia to find employment and fulfill their work requirements. The issue of finding approved employment may also work to push students out of Nova Scotia to seek greener pastures in other provinces. As such the “Now or Never” scenario becomes appropriate to the international students’ dilemma.

While basic, minimum wage positions are readily available to students, it becomes clearer that Nova Scotia’s employment landscape, with regard to post-secondary education and qualifications (Ivany et al., 2014), is not yet ready to properly manage young professionals. International graduates therefore seek to improve their chances of employment and quality of life elsewhere in Canada, which is a major push factor outlined by both the survey respondents and the focus group participants.

The results from the focus group reinforced the key themes that emerged during the online survey of students. The focus group discussion provided an

opportunity to understand further nuances of the push and pull factors associated with the central research question of this thesis.

4.3 Key Findings

4.3.1 Assessment of Lee's Push-Pull Factors

The results of both the online survey and the focus group demonstrate that Lee's theory of migration describes the critical decision-making processes of international students at HRM universities. The key factors involved those pull factors associated with the area of destination and the "personal factors" outlined by Lee's theory, and much less so concerning the "push factors" from their home country. Intervening obstacles came out in the focus group, where students mentioned the city they had in mind (vibrancy) versus the one they experienced (routine).

International students cited a number of variables within the area of destination, such as access to employment and paths to permanent residence, along with personal factors, that play a critical role in long-term decision-making for where they wish to settle in Canada. The personal factors bordered on those factors associated with the area of destination, where students cited feeling

isolated in different situations (on campus or outside of the city), and a general lack of feeling welcomed after the initial welcome has worn off, which, based on responses from the focus group participants, can be relative.

Intervening obstacles are always at play, as things such as distance from one's home, for example, is a factor that is already in existence and so the person who chooses to relocate – in this case the international student – has to live with this decision (indifference). As such, international students did not indicate much in the way of intervening obstacles.

4.3.2 Critical Push and Pull Factors for International Students

Based on the results from the online survey and the focus group discussion, clear patterns of push and pull factors can be seen when examining the decision of international students whether to relocate upon completion of their programs. Critical push and pull factors will be organized by Lee's classifications of social factors, economic factors, and political factors.

4.3.2.1 Social Factors

From the online survey and the focus group discussion, three push factors and two pull factors are identified. The three main factors pushing international

students away from Halifax are a lack of employment opportunities, issues with isolation, and family commitments. International students generally felt welcome upon arrival at their university and gave instances where being in residence or orientation week facilitated the “welcomingness” of the area. However, this “welcomingness” was not available to students during their expeditions beyond the university walls, which, focus group participants noted is a factor that may potentially push them out of the province.

In terms of family commitments, over half of all international students indicated that family commitments would be a key motivation for returning to their home countries. Potential family commitments could range from being the sole provider of the family or being the sole parent of children who were left behind in their home countries. Each of these becomes a push factor for international students.

The two factors pulling international students to remain in either Halifax or elsewhere in Canada are quality of life and health care/social supports. Almost two-thirds of online survey respondents indicated that quality of life characteristics are key motivating factors for remaining in Nova Scotia. Quality of life characteristics may include health and safety, recreation, culture, environment, and economic opportunities. Most students indicated that quality of life

characteristics were good in Halifax and Canada, albeit not always as they originally thought. Further, over half of the international students noted health care and social supports as a pull factor.

As the same time, quality of life in Halifax can serve as a push factor – a point that came out of the focus group. Respondents indicated that Nova Scotia would not be a place where they would wish to raise their families due to the variables outlined earlier in this section, such as the lack of racial and ethnic diversity observed throughout the province, for example. This example would serve as an intervening obstacle associated with the push and pull factors outlined by Lee's theory of migration.

While the social reasons do not outweigh the economic reasons, there is a connection between wanting to feel accepted within a community and making the effort to find employment and ultimately settle in the area. Students noted in the data collection that, if they do not feel welcome in the community when they graduate, it is unlikely that they will actively seek employment in the community. The social connections tie in with the economic benefits of the areas that international students consider for settlement when they have completed their studies. The social component lends itself to networking as with a more diverse employment landscape, it is natural to feel that one's chances at gaining

employment are higher, as opposed to being in an area that lacks cultural diversity.

4.3.2.2 Economic Factors

Economic push and pull factors were by far the largest considerations raised by both online survey and focus group participants. The most common factor pushing international students to return to their home countries focused on limited employment prospects here. As reported in the online survey, 53% of international students were unable to find employment in Halifax.

Further compounding this push factor is the fact that, approximately one in three international students indicated they did not have opportunities to network with the business community during their university studies. As a result, networking to develop connections in employment fields is compromised and serves as a push factor. Other push factors (from Nova Scotia) came into play when international students cited the cost of living in Halifax.

In contrast, international students identified two key economic pull factors. First, international students are being 'pulled' to Halifax by the relatively low cost of acquiring post-secondary education and the availability of programs at HRM

universities. Secondly, job prospects was also another key pull factor identified by both online survey and focus group participants. With business-related programs leading to some of the top earning positions in the country (Frenette & Frank, 2016), it is unsurprising that most international students pursue these programs. While this decision may be personal, it follows a trend that students are looking for qualifications that will provide them with opportunities for advancement in their respective fields (Han et al., 2015). In addition to the demand for these programs, students have the opportunity to gain the skills necessary for work through co-op programs, as each respondent from the survey who identified their employment was through co-op was enrolled in a business/commerce program.

The selection of business oriented degree programs among HRM international students parallels the comments from Kalin & Berry (1994) and Lowell & Findlay (2001). International students are seeking the educational qualifications that will prepare them for employment in the host country, with business programs being seen as offering a potential for integration in the Canadian economy.

Second, the existence of two programs designed to connect international students with employers and professional networks further serve as pull factors.

Both the Stay in Nova Scotia and the Connector Program work to facilitate networking and mentorship opportunities, which work as pull factors, as it helps with not only social connections with the destination area, but also assists with the possibility of filling the economic needs of the international students. The Halifax Partnership developed the Connector Program to help new graduates improve their networking skills with local businesses, ultimately assisting one's job search. While there are more than twice the number of students than there are businesses, the program has helped to create over 800 jobs.

The Stay in Nova Scotia Program is in its first year of delivery and has a strong set of resources that will be beneficial in developing networking, personal branding, and employability skills through workshops given throughout the year (EduNova, 2016). This program has a component that will place students in a job after graduation, which is valuable for retaining human capital and economic migrants in the province, which over time could play the role of a pull factor that would encourage international students to remain in the province. However, compared to the approximately 8,000 (AAU, 2016) international students in the province, the program currently has an acceptance rate of 50 students.

In their quest for economic independence post-graduation, international students are not solely motivated by economics. While on campus, international

students tend to be in clusters of fellow international students, as noted by focus group participants and in the literature from Sherry, Thomas & Chui (2010). If this social interaction and diversity – which caters to their social needs as it did in university – is unavailable outside of the university, then international students will be left to learn an entirely new method of socialization outside of the university, for which they do not have enough time.

4.3.2.3 Political Factors

Political factors were the factors least represented in both the online survey and focus group discussion. Political factors were briefly discussed through the focus group, where international students cited the idea that there needs to be more government policies and plans developed to accommodate employment for young people, particularly international students. Focus group participants indicated that overall plans are in place for *all* recent graduates, which acts as an automatic barrier for the international student, as preference may be given to the local citizen. In applying for jobs, the applicant usually has to indicate whether he/she is on a work permit or a citizen, which may act as a filter for the selection process. The focus group discussion noted that there should be additional

incentives or policies created for employers to *want* to hire international graduates.

It is interesting that political factors in students' home countries was not raised as either a push factor out of their home country, nor a pull factor back to home country. Conversely, political factors associated with multiculturalism were noted as desired attributes for settling in Canada. These factors would be considered as pull factors for international graduates to remain in Nova Scotia and/or elsewhere in Canada. Political factors pushing international students away from Nova Scotia and Canada focused on the complex immigration system. Participants in the study noted the challenges of navigating the complex immigration system, the costs associated with the system, and the length of time to resolve questions and applications. These factors push international students away from remaining in Nova Scotia and/or Canada.

4.3.2.4 Reflection on Welcoming Communities as a Pull Factor

Welcoming communities in Canada are becoming increasingly popular, and with the Government of Canada's mandate to reach a goal of accepting 300,000 immigrants in 2017 (Government of Canada, 2017), international students are fast becoming an important component to the immigration puzzle. In striving

to become a welcoming community Esses et al. (2010) identified 17 characteristics communities need to address. Each characteristic varies in importance, as it depends on the needs of the community in its quest to accept newcomers (Esses et al., 2010). In order to successfully accept newcomers to the community and to receive the privilege of being labelled as such, a community should be able to adequately provide for the immediate needs of its new citizens. It is evident from both the online survey respondents and focus group participants that welcoming community characteristics are both a pull and push factor.

A key component for the success of a welcoming community is the availability of employment (Esses, et al. 2010). International students have a variety of jobs at their disposal; however, as indicated by the survey, however, most of the respondents indicated that their job opportunities came from within the service or retail industries. Within the walls of the university, survey respondents agree that their universities provide additional resources – that is, resources outside of the classroom – to assist them with networking and employment opportunities throughout their studies. At Saint Mary's University, for example, international students have access to co-op opportunities, and must attend a résumé-writing workshop, which assists students with the conventions of business writing and pre-employment etiquette. Students also have access to

mock interviews, the Co-Curricular Record or transcript, which provides students with volunteer opportunities, and career-building workshops that work together to prepare students for the employment landscape. Generally, as a result of the plethora of services available to international students within the walls of this particular university, they agree that this is a prime destination to pursue one's education.

Focus group participants mostly shared similar sentiments, but spoke more about living in residence. There were other participants, however, who were not pleased by the lack of cultural awareness/intelligence of some members of staff and the limited "intercultural communication" encountered upon arrival at the university. One participant reflected on an example where help was being sought due to arriving late to the university at the start of the academic semester, but was dismissed by the staff member. The student noted that there was no sensitivity to the fact that the student was not from the area, which made the student's university experience uncomfortable and leaving the student in a constant state of "culture shock."

Survey respondents and focus group participants indicated Nova Scotia meets the criteria of a welcoming community when students first arrive and are new to the province, or while they are still students in their respective post-

secondary institutions. International students would likely feel more welcome if interaction with the citizenry and potential employers was more accessible throughout their studies, and more so after graduation; this interaction over time could aid in retaining a higher proportion of international graduates.

Additionally, students' attitudes about the province changed over time, as, by the time they get to fourth year, students begin to notice the social, economic, and political challenges (as it relates to immigration) that lay ahead. Students noted that they are generally not prepared for these challenges, and therefore resort to moving to other provinces that they think either have more opportunities, are more culturally diverse, or those that have a more socially accepting environment, complete with resources to meet their needs.

4.3.2.5 Reflections on the Canadian Immigration System as a Push and Pull Factor

Canada has proven to be one of the top places for immigrants due to the perceived ease of the immigration process and the quality of life provided compared to most immigrants' countries of origin (Evans, 2016). Yet, Canada's immigration system is complex and continuously changes. The commentary received from online survey respondents and focus group participants indicates

the Canadian immigration system fits well in Lee's theory of migration. The Canadian immigration system serves as both a pull factor attracting international students to Canada, where the process for entering the country as a student is straightforward. At the same time, the system is a push factor in discouraging international students from remaining in the province, as obtaining permanent residence is tied significantly to employment in a specific position outlined by IRCC. As outlined by the Ivany Commission's (2014) report, employment opportunities are thin within the province, and there is not much value or emphasis placed on hiring qualified young people in the province.

As a pull factor, students identified the potential opportunity to remain in Canada at the conclusion of their academic studies as a reason for selecting a HRM university. In addition to selecting high-skill relevant degree programs, many international students wish to continue their residency in Canada, whether in Nova Scotia or elsewhere. As a push factor, the complications of the immigration system were seen as a 'headache'. Focus group participants complained about the large amount of information on the immigration website, the challenge of finding qualified work experiences, and difficulty in getting clear information on the system. One participant indicated that attempting to use the phone to contact Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada for clarification

proved to be futile, which is understandable, as there is an overwhelming number of potential applicants who need further guidance and information. Further, students noted many have to seek expensive legal services to prepare the required forms and documents. These factors create a larger push factor, encouraging international students to leave Nova Scotia at the conclusion of their academic programs.

Recent announcements of changes for international students by Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada will only serve to enhance the uncertainty. As of March 2017, the Atlantic Pilot Program was introduced for international students (IRCC, 2017). This program revises the jobs that can be utilized to obtain permanent residency; in that, NOC C was opened as a means for students who recently graduated from Atlantic Canadian universities to gain access to permanent residence on an expedited basis. If a recent graduate obtains a one-year contract up to 12 months after graduation in a NOC 0, A, B, *and* C position, the student is eligible to apply for permanent residence immediately. As this program is new, however, there has been no data or information regarding the usefulness, success, or feasibility of this program.

4.4 Summary

In general, international students are pulled to Nova Scotia, and pushed to other provinces post-graduation by several factors. International students were mainly pulled to the province by the cost of education and the variety of programs available; additionally, students highlighted that they had connections through family/friends, and that played a role in pulling them to the province initially. However, students indicated that various factors are at play when they are making the critical decision of choosing to remain in, or leave, Nova Scotia. Some of these factors include: lack of employment opportunities and a general lack of diversity and cultural awareness, as initially international students perceived the area to be more diverse with more opportunities.

Lee's theory also considers personal factors, but there was a common theme amongst international students who participated in both the survey and the focus group. As outlined previously, Halifax – the initial destination area – generally possesses favourable pull factors associated with post-secondary education (cost of tuition lower, diversity of programs, welcoming university community), but the area outside of the university generally left international students to consider moving to new destination area, mainly within Canada, as over 70% of the respondents were sure they wished to remain in Canada post-

graduation; however, as the focus group and survey revealed, most students who wished to stay in Canada, do not wish to make Nova Scotia their home in the long term.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

5.0 Introduction

The Nova Scotian landscape is scattered with push factors (challenges) and pull factors (opportunities) when it comes to understanding the motivations of international students upon their graduation. This study used the concepts of push and pull factors outlined by Lee's theory of migration to identify issues with the origin and destination areas to explain what motivates international students to remain in, or leave, the province post-graduation.

This chapter revisits the central research question: what are the social, economic, and political factors that influence international students when deciding whether they wish to remain in, or leave, Nova Scotia upon graduation from post-secondary school. This research question contributes to the current Ivany Report in providing a deeper understanding of what is pushing up to 90% of international students from Nova Scotia and what factors are pulling them towards other Canadian provinces.

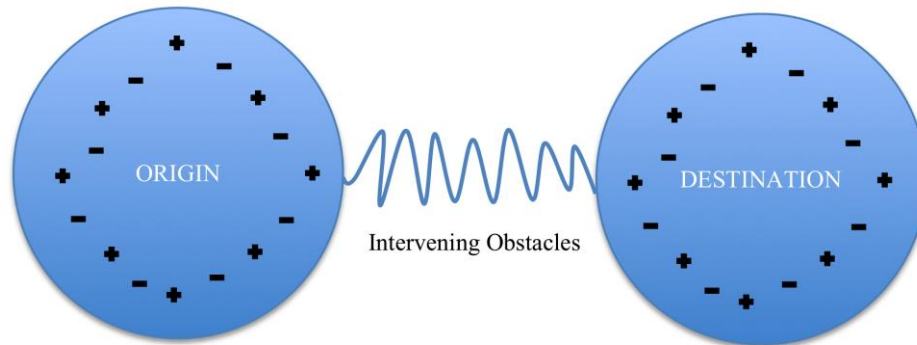
5.1 Returning to the Research Question and Concluding Comments

Lee's theory of migration facilitated the examination of the push-pull factors that influence international students' decision to remain in, or leave Nova Scotia, demonstrating the theory continues to hold relevance nearly 70 years after it was published, and within the context of the HRM universities. The focus on push and pull factors at the individual level allows for an investigation of motivations. A summary of the critical push and pull factors identified by international students are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Critical Push and Pull Factors for international students in HRM universities

	Push Factors (Reasons to Leave Canada)	Pull Factors (Reasons for Remaining in Canada)
Social	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Family commitments• Isolation while in Halifax• Quality of life	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Quality of life• Health and social supports
Economic	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lack of jobs• Lack of networking opportunities• Cost of living	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Job opportunities and wage potentials• Employment transition programs
Political	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Complexities of the Canadian immigration system	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Welcoming communities• Multiculturalism

These push and pull factors easily fit into the original model of Lee's theory of migration (see below), with push factors represented by a plus (+) sign and pull factor represented by a negative (-) sign.



When it comes to the end of an international student's academic program they need to determine whether to stay or leave. In both instances, factors may be related to social, political, and/or economic reasons. The research shed light on the fact that these push and pull factors do not remain static. Participants in the research noted their opinions changed over time, particularly with new experiences. As a result, the push and pull factors that influence international students are fluid and continually changing.

In general, people are driven by economics; international students are no different. Focus group participants, however, cited both economics and social variables as reasons why they are pulled to Nova Scotia in the first place, as they come in anticipation of better opportunities for advancement (education, employment, settlement). Unfortunately, some of these variables (employment and ultimately opportunities for settlement) act as key push factors from the province as well, as international students seek opportunities in other parts of the country post-graduation. Further, participants in the focus group cited social well-being, whether in the form of diversity or feeling socially accepted by the community, as another main factor for their unwillingness to remain in the province.

The “Now or Never” report drew national attention to the long-term economic stability in the province of Nova Scotia. The Ivany Report shed light on the phenomenon whereby an increasing number of international students are choosing to study in the province, yet almost all of them leave upon graduation. This research answers the question of what factors are encouraging international students to leave Nova Scotia upon their graduation.

The findings of this research hold many implications for universities, public policy, and the community. For universities, this research illustrates the value of

Lee's theory of migration in understanding the motivations of international students' decision-making regarding remaining in the host destination. If potential international students are not motivated to study in an area, then enrollment will drop, as students will seek to study in areas considered to be more favourable. Conceptually, this research found parallels between Lee's theory of migration, the concept of welcoming communities, and the complexity of the Canadian immigration system. Further research could be developed to refine this relationship in more in-depth. It would be interesting to expand this study to include other similarly sized Canadian cities to see if similar push/pull factors emerged. This study also holds value for universities to evaluate supports provided to international students to facilitate their transition into long-term members of the Halifax community.

From a political perspective, the findings hold potential for policy makers. First, governments should be encouraged to review the current immigration systems and strive for mechanisms to convey these systems to international students in a better way in order to alleviate confusion. Second, governments should explore opportunities to support existing programs and explore new programs that facilitate international students connecting with high-skill jobs and employers. From a community development perspective, this research suggests

that there are opportunities to introduce welcoming communities strategies in Halifax to enhance pull factors and possibly eliminate push factors. The decision-making process is not solely based on economic factors. The community, including non-profit organizations, hold substantial ability to influence international students.

To stay or to leave? This is the fundamental question that all international students in HRM universities need to ask themselves, and as I have done in the past. As demonstrated through this research, international students need to navigate a series of push and pull factors to determine their answer.

Governments, community actors, and universities can hold a substantial influence on students' decisions.

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Appendix A: Project Factsheet

Project Factsheet



One University. One World. Yours.

To Stay or to Leave: An assessment of the socioeconomic and political factors that influence international students when deciding to remain in or leave Nova Scotia, upon graduation

Nova Scotia is the only province with a negative population growth rate. To further exacerbate this issue, Nova Scotia welcomes approximately 6,000 international students, but up to 90% of this demographic leave the province of Nova Scotia upon graduation, according to studies done on the mobility of students.

This Master of Arts research is aimed at examining the socioeconomic and political factors that influence why international students have chosen to remain in or leave the province, and reasons for where they would choose settle upon completion of their program.

What are the main determinant that influence students' decision to remain or leave? What are the possible solutions to this issue of high outmigration of international students? What are the push and pull factors involved in the decision-making process?

For more information on this initiative visit <http://ruraldev.ca/jodi-ann-francis>

Appendix B: Online Survey Questions

This survey is divided into four sections: Demographics, Questions about your reasons for coming to Halifax, Questions about your experiences in Halifax since first year, and plans for the foreseeable future. Upon completion of the survey, you may enter your contact information if you would like to be considered for the prize drawing of 1 of 2 \$100 Visa Gift Cards.

There are 35 Questions in this survey, and it should take you approximately 30 minutes to respond to the questions. If you choose to discontinue, you may do so at your discretion; in this case, your survey will not be used as a part of the study.

Demographics

1. Select the gender you identify with:
Female Male Other Prefer not to say
2. Which of the following best describes you: (Check all that apply)
White

South Asian (e.g., East Indian, Pakistani, Sri Lankan, etc.)

Chinese

Black

Filipino

Latin American

Arab

Southeast Asian (e.g., Vietnamese, Cambodian, Laotian, Thai, etc.)

West Asian (e.g., Iranian, Afghan, etc.)

Korean

Japanese

Other — specify

3. What is your country of citizenship?

4. What age group do you fall into?
20-24 25-29 30-35 36+
5. Are you currently enrolled at a university in the Halifax Regional Municipality?
a. Yes
b. No If no, what year were you last registered at a HRM university? _____
6. In which of the HRM universities are/were you registered?
Dalhousie Mount Saint Vincent Saint Mary's Prefer not to say
7. To date, how many credit hours have you completed?
60-90
90+
Recently graduated (within the last six months)
8. When you first arrived in Halifax, what was your original program of study?
9. What is your current program of study?
10. Which best describes your status: part-time student (less than 15 credit hours per year), full time student
a. Has your status changed since you first started studies in Halifax? Why?
11. Prior to your arrival in Halifax for educational studies, had you ever:

Traveled to another country for tourism/leisure	Yes – with my family	Yes – by myself	No
Traveled to Canada for tourism or leisure	Yes – with my family	Yes – by myself	No
Studied in Canada	Yes – with my family	Yes – by myself	No
Studied in another country	Yes – with my family	Yes – by myself	No
Lived in Canada	Yes – with my family	Yes – by myself	No

Lived in another country	Yes – with my family	Yes – by myself	No
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The following questions are about your reasons for coming to Halifax

12. How did you first hear about universities in Halifax?

13. What motivated you to attend university in Halifax? Check all that apply.

Tuition and cost of living are cheaper

Unique educational programs offered in Halifax

No local/domestic university programs offered in country of citizenship

Perceived value of an international university education

Halifax is known for being friendly to international students

Halifax is a small city

Halifax is known as a multicultural city

Halifax's climate/weather

To become a permanent resident of Canada

Other _____

14. Do you have close relatives or friends from your country of citizenship who arrived in Nova Scotia before you did?

Yes

No

15. Did you have post-secondary qualifications before arriving in Halifax?

Yes

No

If yes, please check those that apply (If no, skip to next question):

College diploma

Undergraduate degree

Graduate degree

16. Did your post-secondary qualifications noted above facilitate your acceptance into a Halifax university?

Yes

No

Does not apply

The following questions are about your experiences in Halifax since first year

17. What year did you arrive in Halifax to start your university program?
- 2011
 - 2012
 - 2013
 - 2014
 - Other _____
18. Please rate how beneficial the following items were to you upon your arrival in Halifax with 1 being least beneficial and 5 being most beneficial.
- Orientation Week
 - The availability of an International Centre at my university
 - Access to on-campus/off-campus job opportunities
 - Feeling welcomed to the Halifax community
 - Other _____
19. During the past academic year (September – April), did you try to find a job in Halifax?
- Yes
 - No
20. If you answered yes to the above question, did you find a job?
- Yes – a full time position
 - Yes – a part time
 - No
21. Was your job based at your university?
- Yes
 - No
 - Does not apply
22. Did you ever have more than one job at the same time in a single semester?
- Yes
 - No
23. What kind of jobs were you able to find during your studies? You may list up to three sectors (E.g. Retail, Fast Food, IT)
- _____
24. What were your motivations for finding a job in Halifax?

- Income
- Job experience
- Networking
- All of the above

25. Were these jobs beneficial to your career path?

- Yes
- No
- Not Sure
- Does not apply

26. If you answered "Yes" to the above question, explain how you identify the job as being beneficial (e.g. employable skills, experiential learning, etc.).

27. Do you think your university provides you with adequate opportunities for networking in meaningful sectors?

- Yes
- No
- Not Sure

28. At what stage were you able to network with industry professionals from your field?

- First year
- Second Year
- Third Year
- Fourth Year
- I have not been able/I have not had the time to network
- Unsure

29. In the past 12 months, how many times have you returned to your home country?

The following questions will focus on your plans for the foreseeable future (up to 12 months after graduation).

30. At the conclusion of your academic program, would you like to remain in Canada?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

31. If you answered yes, do you plan to remain in Halifax?

Yes No Unsure

32. Have you given consideration to moving to another province of Canada?

Yes No Unsure

If yes, which province: _____

33. Explain your motivation or reason for your answer to the above question.

34. Please rank the importance of the following factors as a consideration for you to stay in Nova Scotia at the conclusion of your program of study, with 1 being least important and 5 being most important

- Job/employment opportunities
- Connections with friends in Halifax
- Connections with other immigrants in Halifax
- Quality of life
- Safety and security of Halifax
- Opportunities for further education
- Health care and social supports

35. Please rank the importance of the following factors as consideration for you to return to your home country at the conclusion of your program of study?

- Family commitments
- Job/employment opportunities in home country
- Job opportunities/No job opportunities in Halifax

Appendix C: Focus Group Questions



To stay or to leave: An assessment of the socioeconomic and political factors that influence international students when deciding to remain in or leave Nova Scotia, upon graduation.

Focus Group Question Guide

1. Please provide 3-4 perceptions/expectations you had when you first arrived in Nova Scotia. What were your ideas about finding a job while studying and ultimately upon graduation?

2. Have your perceptions/expectations changed? If so, could you please elaborate?

3. Did you feel welcomed upon your arrival (at your institution, in the area, in general)?

What do you think contributed to this (feeling/not feeling welcomed)?

4. Are you planning to settle in the province after graduation? What factors do you take into consideration when deciding whether you will stay or leave (a maximum of three)?

5. What role could government take to facilitate a smoother process for international graduates from universities within the province to settle? Are you aware of the current programs in place in NS for immigration to the province? What is your take on the current programs (Express Entry; Provincial Nominee, etc)?

6. Do you think you were provided with enough information throughout your program to prepare you for graduation and ultimately the path to settling in the province? What were the important factors/events/experiences leading to success?

7. What challenges do (or did) you encounter while trying to complete your studies and gain the necessary experience that could prepare you for settling in NS? How are/were these challenges overcome? Were these challenges anticipated?

Appendix D: Informed Consent: Focus Group



One University. One World. Yours.

To stay or to leave: An assessment of the socioeconomic and political factors that influence international students when deciding to remain in or leave Nova Scotia, upon graduation.

SMU REB #16-567

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February 2017

You are being asked to voluntarily participate in a focus group as part of the project entitled, *To stay or to leave: An assessment of the socioeconomic and political factors that influence international students when deciding to remain in or leave Nova Scotia, upon graduation*. The project is led by Jodi-Ann Francis, Master of Arts Candidate in the Department of Geography and Environmental Studies at Saint Mary's University.

The key objective of this research initiative to examine the main factors that affect international students when making the crucial decision of whether they should settle in the region from which they will graduate/have graduated. From July – November 2016, an online survey will be distributed through the international centres of Dalhousie, Mount Saint Vincent, and Saint Mary's University. The

results of this research will be used in my thesis on international student retention in the winter of 2017. Further information about the research project can be found at <http://ruraldev.ca/jodi-ann-francis/>.

This letter is part of the process of informed consent. It provides you information on the research and what your participation would involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any other information given to you by the researcher. It is entirely up to you to decide whether to take part in this research. If you choose not to take part in the research or if you decide to withdraw from the research once it has started, there will be no negative consequences for you, now or in the future.

You are being asked to voluntarily participate in a one-time focus group to be held at your institution. The focus group will take approximately 60 minutes (one hour) to complete. The focus groups will be held between October 2016 and February 2017. At the conclusion of the focus group there is no need for any follow up discussions.

The anticipated benefits from the project will provide insight into the factors that influence the decision-making process of international students when considering whether to remain in the region from which they gained their post-secondary education. Additionally, it will further enhance the understanding of motivations of international students which could possibly provide or influence changes to policy.

Your participation in this focus group is entirely voluntary and there will be no negative consequences if you refuse to participate in it, withdraw from it, or refuse to answer certain questions. Your participation/identity in this focus group will be confidential. All comments and answers you provide will not be attributed to your identity; comments will be generalized to prevent identification. Given the topic of research, you should be aware that although your identity will not be stated in any documentation generated from this project there is a possibility people knowledgeable of the region could potentially identify you based on your comments. Upon completion of the focus groups, responses will be stored in a

secure location for five years by the principal investigator and will be kept in strict confidence and only reviewed by members of the research team.

The Saint Mary's University Research Ethics Board has reviewed this research. If you have any questions or concerns about ethical matters or would like to discuss your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Chair of the Research Ethics Board at ethics@smu.ca or 420-5728.

If you have any questions regarding this research project, please contact me at either (902) 414-4676 or jokay21@hotmail.com.

Sincerely,

Jodi-Ann Francis
MA Candidate
(902) 414-4676
jokay21@hotmail.com

Ryan Gibson, PhD
Supervisor
(902) 420-5737
ryan.gibson@smu.ca

Focus Group Participation

- I have read and understood the description provided;
- I have had an opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered.
- I consent to participate in the research project, understanding that I may withdraw my consent at any time.
- A copy this consent form has been given to me for my records.

Focus Group Participant

Date

Researcher

Date

Focus Group Participation Consent

- Participant agrees to participate
- Participant declines to participate