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Higher Education: For What and for whom?

Domain: Higher Education Policy

**Prefer Individual paper ; but also open for discussion workshop

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Labor market, commerce and international education: What are Canada's prospects at balancing key policy priorities? (0091)

Part 2 Outline 1000 word paper (not including references)

In an era of severe budget cuts, the federal government of Canada has announced a new allocation of \$10 M, the highest to date, to develop and implement an international education strategy. In a similar vein, the Ontario provincial government announced its wish to make Ontario the destination of choice for international students, aiming to increase their enrollments by 50% across all post secondary institutions.

What lies behind this impetus to recruit more international students in Canada? Drawing on a larger study of post-secondary policy-making in the federal and Ontario provincial jurisdictions, and relying on primary documents and interviews with individuals directly involved in policy-making, this paper examines what policy imperatives drive Canada's interest in international higher education. Placing our analysis within a historical context, we identify the combination of external factors and internal dynamics that shaped decision-making from the 1990's to the present time.

Hosting international students in Canada is certainly not new; starting as early as the 1950's-1960's, the two major formative strands of internationalization in Canadian universities are considered to be development cooperation and international students (Bond and Lemasson 1999). Between 1964 and 1976, however, there was a dramatic shift in Canadian development policy that resulted in severe budget cuts in the late 1970's, directly resulting in a decline of international students on Canadian campuses (Pratt, 1996). Beginning in the mid-1980's however, Canadian post secondary institutions began seeing a shift in their interest in hosting fee paying foreign students. The first meeting of the Federal-Provincial Consultative Committee on Education-Related International Activities (FFPECERIA) (CMEC 1991) resulted in a policy document on 'Foreign students in Canada' in 1986. There was a general consensus among the provinces to fully participate with the federal government to encourage foreign student enrollments in Canadian post secondary institutions.

The importance of marketing of Canadian higher education was further formalized with the first investment made by the federal government in 1991 and the set up of an education office in Taiwan and eventually the initiation of the Canadian Educational Centers (CEC). Sergio

Marchi, the then Minister of International Trade, stated that “Education is now an industry. Canada needs to approach the international market place for education services with the same discipline and commitment that we bring to other sectors” (CMEC, 1998). An educational marketing unit was created within the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade in 1998, “a one stop shopping for education promotion” (Trilokekar, 2007) subsequently titled, EduCanada.

As a new boost to educational marketing in 2007 and as part of its Global Commerce Strategy, the Federal budget allocated an annual amount of Cdn \$1 million to develop an Education Brand for Canada (DFAIT Branding Initiative Background 2008; Tamburri, 2008). After 18 months of extensive consultations, in 2008, IMAGINE: Education in/au Canada was launched with both levels of government committed to its creation, development and management. To further Canada’s marketing efforts, five national educational associations have come together to establish the Canadian Consortium for International Education Marketing.

In this paper, we pose the following questions: does the current federal and provincial interest in international education stem from the notion that the figures being raked in as a result of hosting international students (\$6.5 million to Canada and \$1 billion in Ontario, respectively) makes for good “business sense”? Ontario’s Premier Dalton McGuinty said recently, “Australia’s third-largest industry is international education – it creates jobs, so why don’t we get serious about competing for international students.” (Toronto Star, 2011). And yet, when the Premier wrapped up Ontario’s mission to China by announcing a new Ontario Trillium Scholarship for international students – consisting of 75 scholarships of \$40,000 each year for up to four years to pursue doctoral studies – there was tremendous backlash from the opposition and several local residents. Why did the Premier consider establishing scholarships to attract the “best and the brightest” and how is it that this sentiment is not shared by the general public?

The Premier has also recently made changes to the Provincial Immigration Nominee Program to make it easier for highly skilled Ontario-trained international PhD graduates to get fast-tracked for permanent residence. At the federal level, Canada Immigration & Citizenship has spearheaded major changes with respect to visa issuance and work authorizations, and in 2007 introduced the Canadian Experience Class for international students to apply for permanent residency. What is causing these policy changes in the more recent years? Is it that “the stars are finally aligned” for Canada with growing mutual interest in the recruitment of international students and the marketing of higher education across all sectors of higher education stakeholder groups?

It is in this context and with a recognition that Canada is a relative novice in this “export industry” that a comparative analysis of the Australian experience is proposed. After commissioning two key marketing and branding reports on the economic impact of international education, DFAIT has proclaimed its ambition to replace Australia, which it sees as its key competitor, as the third largest host for international students. How did Australia embark on developing this “export industry”? How did it position itself in the international educational market? What strategies and policy approaches did it adopt and what successes or failures has it experienced? Is international education considered a public policy issue? And if so, how and in what ways does it influence public post secondary institutions? What are the core public policy issues that emanate for Canadian higher education from the Australian case?

It is the hope that through this comparative analysis of these facets of international education, deeper insight and foresight can be gained of the Canadian case. Both federal and provincial levels of government would agree that they are working towards a positive future for Canadian higher education. However, it is essential the fundamental question be asked: for what and for whom? Without reflecting on the current direction Canadian higher education is moving in and the forces pushing it along, we run the risk of ending up in an uncertain, undesirable place with more woes than worth.

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