

International Students Who Seek Permanent Residence Part II

International Students' Experiences Accessing Supports in the Guelph- Wellington Community

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Table of Contents

Summary	3
Introduction	4
Present Research	7
Findings	9
Suggestions from the Research	12
Limitations	15
Conclusion	15
References	17

Summary

The purpose of this report is to understand the experiences of International Students attending the University of Guelph as they navigate through the Permanent Residency (PR) process. It is the second part of a series in collaboration with the Guelph-Wellington Local Immigration Partnership that seeks to highlight strengths and gaps in the supports available to International Students that choose to study in Canada. The [first report](#) focuses on insights from service providers. While the focus of this study is specific to the PR process, it is important to remember that there are a number of barriers that may need to be addressed before a student decides to explore applying for PR.

The Research team developed a mixed-methods approach to better understand the experiences of International Students at the University of Guelph. In total, 227 students responded to a survey and 13 of those students participated in a semi-structured focus group session. Based on the feedback received from International Students, representing approximately 15% of the International Student population at the University of Guelph,¹ findings and suggestions were developed to ensure the PR application process is accessible to those who are interested in applying. The key findings include:

- **The majority of services are offered by the University** – but only one of these services directly relates to the PR process.
- **Efforts to meet basic needs in Canada can delay a decision to learn about the PR process**, including but not limited to: housing, food insecurity, and family reunification.
- International Students struggle sifting through “confusing” webpages, and often find that when they seek out support, people who are supposed to help them are unable to **clearly answer the questions they have**.
- International Students believe they would benefit from additional **formal** and **informal supports** that would allow them to clearly understand different processes and experiences of others.
- Overall, **the majority of respondents are satisfied with the supports that they have accessed**, but further discussion revealed that International Students are less inclined to seek out supports neither prior nor during their study period as they are focused on successfully completing program requirements.

Through an analysis of the findings, there are three suggestions that could better support International Students at the University of Guelph upon implementation as they seek to apply for Permanent Residence:

1. The development of a Permanent Residence information page housed on the University of Guelph Website.
2. The hiring of an International Student Advisor who focuses on supporting students through the PR application process.
3. The launch of peer-to-peer support groups and workshops to facilitate conversations about experiences with PR for current students and alumni.

¹ Percentage of students was calculated based on the 2018-2019 Fact Sheet available at <https://www.uoguelph.ca/iar/sites/default/files/Fact Book 2018-2019.pdf>
International Students who seek Permanent Residence Part II



Introduction

This project was conducted by the Research Shop, part of the Community Engaged Scholarship Institute (CESI) at the University of Guelph, in partnership with the Guelph-Wellington Local Immigration Partnership (GW-LIP). Local Immigration Partnerships are regional coalitions that work to strengthen the area's capacity to support and attract newcomers in the community. The goal of this research partnership is to better understand the challenges International Students face as they navigate through the permanent residency application process, what services are helpful and what is needed to provide further support. While there is notable recognition in the value of increased international student enrolment, and settlement in Canada post-graduation, this report seeks to go beyond federal and provincial policies and strategies to better understand the experience in seeking permanent residency for International Students.


This report is intended to help inform community organizations, the University of Guelph, and various levels of government on what supports International Students would find valuable as they begin the permanent residency application process. While this research report is specific to the experiences of International Students at the University of Guelph, government actors and other institutions can benefit from better understanding the pressures and supports that have the greatest impact on International Students.

International Students in Canadian Universities

In recent years, enrolment at Canadian postsecondary institutions has notably increased—largely due to an increasing international student population (Statistics Canada, 2018). A report by Statistics Canada (2018) found that the number of international student enrolments increased by 11% in the 2016/2017 academic year compared to the previous year, while the number of domestic enrolments declined within the same period. The top three reasons that International Students cite for choosing to study in Canada are: the quality of education in Canada, the nation's reputation as a tolerant society, and its reputation as a safe country (Canadian Bureau for International Education, 2018).

While these options can explain why International Students choose to study in Canada, the influx of International Students in Canada can also be explained by looking at government initiatives in this policy area. In Canada's most recent International Education Strategy, both the Minister of International Trade Diversification and the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour commented on the significant increase in International Students attending Canadian postsecondary institutions and their significant contribution to Canada's growing economy (Government of Canada, 2019). This International Education Strategy aims to increase enrolment of International Students across Canada (Government of Canada, 2019). Moving forward, the International Education Strategy has set goals to expedite the processing time for people seeking education in Canada by expanding the Student Direct Stream (Government of Canada, 2019).

Along with enhancing the process allowing International Students to complete their education in Canada, there have been efforts to make it easier for them to receive permanent residency in Canada. This may be due to the fact that International Students are seen as the ideal candidate to adjust and contribute to Canadian society as new permanent residents, due to language proficiencies and having experience in Canadian institutions for a number of years

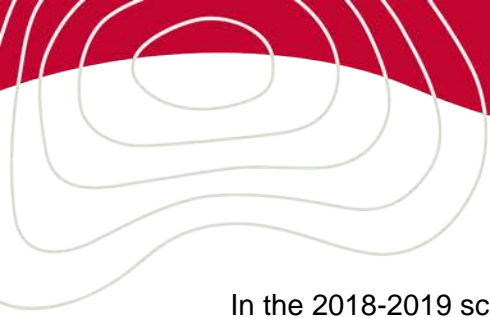


(Dobrowolsky, 2017; Canadian Citizenship & Immigration Resource Centre, 2016). This was also reflected in the changes made to the Express Entry System through the introduction of points based on level of Canadian education. If an applicant completes one or two-years of Canadian post-secondary education, they receive 15 points on their application (Canadian Citizenship & Immigration Resource Centre, 2016). Applicants with three or more years of post-secondary education, a master's, professional degree or doctorate completed in Canada are eligible to receive 30 points on their application (Canadian Citizenship & Immigration Resource Centre, 2016). These additional qualifications can prove extremely beneficial to heightening their chances of being accepted as permanent residents (Canadian Citizenship & Immigration Resource Centre, 2016). With the federal government working to increase the number of International Students on campus and International Students claiming strong rationale for coming to Canada, it leads one to wonder how different campuses or communities attract and retain their international student population.

International Students at the University of Guelph

Although the federal government has launched the International Education Strategy, public sector education falls under provincial jurisdiction, leaving room for variation across the nation. Universities across the nation have a breadth of autonomy to support International Students and encourage enrolment as they see fit. To better understand the priorities of the University of Guelph, one can assess the initiatives by looking at their most recent Strategic Mandate Agreement (SMA). Universities in Ontario enter into SMAs with the provincial government to outline the goals, initiatives, and outcomes each university is working towards. The University of Guelph developed an internationalization strategy that was included in SMA2, which is in place from 2017-2020 (Government of Ontario, 2019). This strategy is founded on four goals:

1. Internationalization and the student experience
 - Increasing International Students' access to campus and their inclusion in campus initiatives
 - Strive to increase the international undergraduate population from 4% to 8% by 2020
2. Increasing international graduate student enrolment
 - Strive to bring international graduate student enrolment numbers in line with other research-intensive universities in Canada which range from 18-20% of total graduate student population
 - At the time the internationalization strategy was developed, the international student enrolment rate was just below 15% of graduate student population
3. Enhancing international collaborations with preferred partner institutions
 - Enhance the University's capacity to mobilize knowledge and contribute to research on global issues
4. Building international capacity for growth and change
 - The University aims to provide specific supports tailored to the needs of International Students, with a focus on social, academic, and housing that enhances international student success



In the 2018-2019 school year, the University of Guelph had approximately 1,500 International Students learning on campus (Office of Institutional Analysis and Research, 2018). Between 2013-2017 the University experienced a 58.6% increase of undergraduate international student enrolment, and a 27.8% increase of graduate international student enrolment (Office of Institutional Analysis and Research, 2017). As enrolment numbers for International Students consistently rise and the University works to increase measures that support campus newcomers, it is important that their perspectives are utilized to help understand the issues that arise and what supports would be most useful to them.

Applying for Permanent Residence

While there are a number of reasons that International Students may choose to study in Canada, many of them intend to remain in Canada. With 60% of International Students across Canada intending to apply for Permanent Residence, there is a significant portion of people across campus communities that hope to build their lives in Canada (Canadian Bureau for International Education, 2018). As mentioned in the International Education Strategy, International Students that study in Canada are viable candidates for permanent residency and given their noted interest in living in Canada, support through the PR process could substantially alter students' experiences with the application.

In the province of Ontario, most International Students tend to apply for Permanent Residence under one of three programs: the Canadian Experience Class, the Provincial Nominee Program or the Federal Skilled Workers Program ("What is the Ontario", 2019). Each program has a different set of criteria, and some are only open for short periods at a time. It's imperative that International Students must be aware of the different kinds of programs, as well as when and how to apply for the appropriate stream. Rules and requirements for programs change from time to time, so someone who begins the application process must be aware of the changes and ensure that they are still eligible (Neatby & Yogesh, 2017).

Once a person has decided on the PR stream that they wish to apply to, they must obtain and complete the application forms and prepare their supporting documents and fees for submission. Processing times may vary, but most permanent residence applications tend to take anywhere between 6 and 19 months to be processed, depending on the stream and method of application an applicant chooses.²

A report by Statistics Canada suggests that, over the period of 1990-2013, roughly 20-27% of International Students become permanent residents within ten years of receiving their first study permit (Lu & Hou, 2015). In 2018 alone, 10,950 former study permit holders received permanent residency (Blatchford, 2019). Despite this being a stark increase from the average of 3,000 study permit holders becoming permanent residents annually between 2015-2017, there is a notable gap between those who hope to become permanent residents and those who do become permanent residents (Blatchford, 2019). Although there are numerous reasons why intention to apply for PR may not transfer into applying and becoming a permanent resident, it is worth noting the discrepancy between the roughly 68% of students who intend to apply for PR (Esses et al., 2018) and the 20-27% who actually become permanent residents.

² Percentage of students was calculated based on the 2018-2019 Fact Sheet available at <https://www.uoguelph.ca/iar/sites/default/files/Fact Book 2018-2019.pdf>
International Students who seek Permanent Residence Part II

Present Research

Research Objective

The present report attempts to understand the circumstances and perspectives of post-secondary International Students at UofG towards applying for permanent residence (PR). A previous report investigated the perspective of service provider organizations and how they serve International Students and their perception of challenges that International Students may face (Goh, 2019). Building from these results, the present study seeks to address the following research questions:

- What sorts of services do International Students access to help them with the application process for permanent residency?
- Are International Students satisfied with the level of support they receive in applying for permanent residency in Canada?
- What challenges do International Students face navigating the permanent residency application process?
- What services and supports do International Students feel are needed to support them in applying for permanent residency?

Methodology

The report is comprised of results collected from a two-part study. In the first part, International Students at the University of Guelph were contacted through the international student listserv, where they were invited to complete an online survey about applying for permanent residence (see Appendix A). This survey was open from September to November 2019. In total, 227 International Students completed this survey. Upon completion of the online survey, participants were automatically redirected to a separate survey page in which they were asked to indicate whether they would be interested in being contacted to participate in a follow-up focus group study. As a result, 128 participants agreed to be contacted for a follow-up study and entered a contact email.

In the second part, International Students who completed the online survey and indicated their interest in participating in the follow-up study were contacted to attend a focus group session in December 2019 or January 2020 to discuss their personal experiences with applying for PR. Within this period, four focus groups were held with a total of 13 participants. Each focus group lasted approximately one hour and was structured around a set of guiding questions which were posed by the Research Shop team (see Appendix B). A member of the Guelph-Wellington Local Immigration Partnership who is also a certified Regulated Canadian Immigration Consultant was also present at each focus group to support the research team.

It should be noted that, despite the high level of interest from International Students to attend the focus group sessions, there was a high rate of attrition at the time of the sessions, which reduced the study's expected sample size. Regardless of this high attrition rate, the purpose of the focus groups was to gain a fuller understanding about individual International Students' circumstances and experiences with applying for permanent residency. The number of participants did not

hinder the quality of responses received and the value of the perspectives brought forward by participants.

Online Survey Participant Demographics

The 227 participants (52% female, 46% male, 2% other) who completed the online survey were all International Students that were currently attending the University of Guelph. The majority (87%) of the participants also reported living in the Guelph-Wellington region.

The survey received responses from International Students from 43 different countries. The top three most common countries of origin were India (26% of participants), China (9%) and Bangladesh (6%). While the largest group of respondents came to Canada within 2019, there was also a significant spread of those who have been in Canada for more than a year. Figure 1 below shows the number of participants sorted by the year in which they arrived in Canada. Most participants (57%) were between 18-24 years of age. In terms of education, participants reported being part of the full range of programs offered by the University of Guelph, with a good representation from the Bachelors, Masters and PhD level.

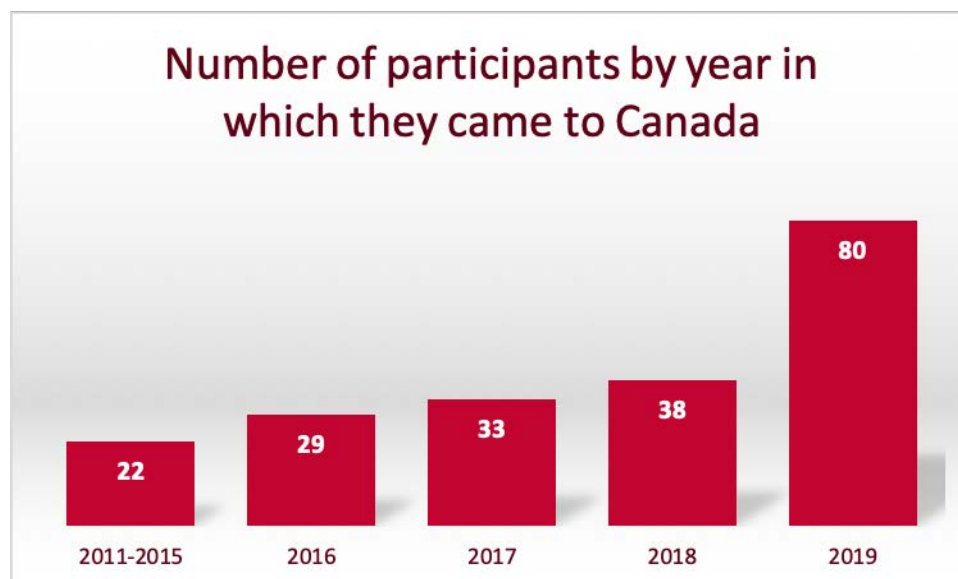



Figure 1: Survey Participants by year of arrival in Canada.

Focus Group Participant Demographics

In order to protect participant anonymity, participants were not asked questions related to their name, age, gender identity, home country, duration in Canada or program at the University of Guelph. However, demographic information was noted if participants voluntarily offered the information in their responses and will be presented in generalized statements. Given the nature of the group, most students mentioned their program, major or department within the University of Guelph. Participants were studying in a range of programs from across campus. Most participants were completing graduate-level degrees, however there were also a few undergraduate participants. A few participants came to Canada with their partners or other family



members, and hence these participants also discussed issues with obtaining visas and applying for PR for dependents. While several participants were currently applying for or (in one case) had already applied for permanent residence, some participants had not yet started their application nor done much research on the process. Overall, the sample of focus group participants seemed to be representative of the online survey participants—from which they were sampled.

Findings

Results from both the online survey and in-person focus groups are presented in the subsections below.

Services International Students Access

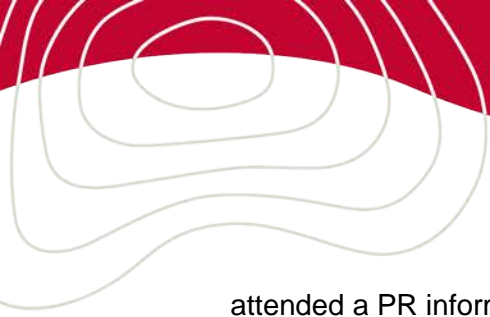
Overall, only a fraction of participants in both the online survey and focus groups stated that they have previously accessed some form of settlement support service. Half of focus group participants mentioned that they did not feel the need to access services yet, hence they had not tried to access any services. In the online survey—where 22% of participants mentioned accessing support—almost all of the responses listed that these were services provided by the university (seminars and workshops, START program, speaking with a career advisor, etc).

Some participants listed other options such as attending an information session in high school, accessing external translators, consultants, or services for banking, SIN and taxes. While not all of these services relate directly to PR applications, they are services that International Students need to support themselves while living in Canada even before applying. Participants in the focus groups predominately mentioned attending university workshops as their primary method of obtaining information about the PR application process.

When asked where they heard about these settlement support services, participants gave a range of responses. Most survey participants reported hearing about supports through speaking with an international advisor at the university, or by word of mouth from friends and family. Some other sources listed were through research online, the international student listserve, and GryphLife (a website which lists organizations and upcoming events that are affiliated with the University of Guelph).

International Students Satisfaction with Support

Survey participants who received support related to their PR applications indicated that they were either extremely (27.5%) or somewhat (55%) satisfied with the services that they received. It is worth noting that none of the participants reported being somewhat or extremely dissatisfied with the services that they received. These results were consistent with the responses given by focus group participants when they further elaborated on their experiences utilizing these support services. While focus group participants reported eventually being able to get some answers that they were seeking, they also noted that either these answers were only to general questions, or were answers that were found after spending a long time being directed to various sources. One focus group participant commented, “I think it takes a while to search for the information I am looking for but [the information searching process is] not too bad”. Another participant who



attended a PR information sessions hosted at the University of Guelph said that they were able “to learn about what the criteria and required documents [are], but I think the information provided in that session was rather limited”. The limitations of PR-related information sessions and workshops was mentioned by participants in each focus group and will be addressed in the sections below.

Focus group participants who were thinking about applying for PR but had not sought support mentioned a number of reasons for not doing so. At least two participants stated that they were not really aware of the resources that were available to them outside of a google search. Others explained that they did not have time to look into the PR application process due to their rigorous courseloads. One student mentioned that they planned to apply for a work permit after graduating, and they were planning on applying for PR a few years down the line. In that student’s words, “to look into applying for PR now would take me away from my academic pursuits”. They elaborated by mentioning how the PR application process would involve a long process of contacting people and agencies in their home country to gather documents and ensure that they had proper evaluations and assessments of their credentials before they applied. Overall, many focus group participants felt that they still had time before they would be able to apply for PR, hence they had not invested time in researching the application process. In Part One of this study, two service providers mentioned that a potential challenge for International Students was not anticipating the requirements and preventable challenges they may encounter during the PR application process. As such, if these challenges arose, some International Students were not sufficiently prepared to meet application requirements in a timely way.

Challenges International Students Face with the PR Application Process


Many unanswered questions, and nowhere to get answers

Overall, respondents of the online surveys and the focus groups indicated that the biggest challenge with the PR application process is the lack of official answers—or even general guidelines or recommendations—to any questions involving individual circumstances. Some of the most frequently asked questions were:

- Which PR program should I apply for?
- What is the fastest way to get PR?
- When is the earliest I can apply?
- Can I apply while studying?
- What counts for points?
- How do I know if I have enough points?

While the first two questions are situational, depending both on individual circumstances and the present state of PR programs based on provincial and federal governmental rulings, several focus group participants expressed their frustrations. This is largely because they have noticed a lack of examples of PR routes that other successful applicants have chosen, nor any general recommendations with which they could compare their situations to.

In addition to the number and variety of questions asked, students also stated that they did not know who could help answer their questions. While many of the participants in this study who



sought support for their applications had accessed services that were offered through the university (such as international student advisors or workshops), students in the focus group provided additional feedback related to their experiences with these supports. Much of the focus group participants acknowledged that these services were quite limited and lacked continuity. In most focus group sessions, participants mentioned that they did not go see international student advisors because they were aware that questions pertaining to their individual circumstances were beyond the scope of the advisor's knowledge.

Some participants also mentioned that information sessions hosted by the university tended to focus on the most basic components of the application process without addressing complications or contextual factors that may alter ones' experience throughout the process. One participant mentioned attending multiple sessions with the hopes of getting new information, but noticed that the university's PR information session seemed mostly geared towards new International Students—who likely were not at the stage of applying for PR yet.

Lack of a coherent website to cover basic information


Focus group participants who searched for information online noted that they faced a number of challenges with finding a comprehensive website with PR application information. Some participants mentioned that the official government website, which is maintained by Immigrant, Refugees and Citizenship Canada is “confusing” and “overwhelming”, as it contains links to many different federal and provincial programs. It also notes that requirements could be changed or updated at any time, leaving future applicants uncertain about what parameters still apply. One participant mentioned using a tool that was listed on the website to calculate points, but stated that there “were so many questions that are confusing” and that they did not know where to go at the end of all the questions. Two other participants described their situations and how procedures vary between their own process, and bringing spouses and dependents to Canada. These complexities further complicate applying for their PR as well, and they need to keep in mind that each individual's circumstances and specific requirements can vary drastically when applying for PR.

Complications with maintaining visas/permits while applying for PR

Some focus group participants mentioned that they faced difficulties with maintaining their current statuses within Canada for the duration of the PR-application process. While this was not a problem for any of the focus group participants at the time of discussion—as they were all current students at the University of Guelph—there was concern around the anticipated complication among graduation. Three participants mentioned challenges with applying for visas and PR for their spouses and dependents which greatly impacted their ability to apply for PR. For participants who wish to immigrate to Canada with their families, the PR application process can be further complicated due to the different situations that each individual who applies for PR has. Focus group participants stated that navigating these individual complications are some of the most difficult to deal with, and mentioned that this problem is compounded because of the lack of anyone or any resource to turn to for guidance about these matters. This holds particularly true for individuals seeking support for dependents and spouses, who are unable to access supports available for students at the university.

Delaying PR application supports to ensure basic needs are met

Although the focus of this research was to examine the challenges that International Students face in applying for permanent residence, participants across focus groups also raised a number of points about other challenges they faced that—while not directly related to the PR application



process—they needed to resolve before thinking about PR. For example, at least two focus group participants described the challenges they faced with finding housing when they originally arrived in Guelph. These students mentioned that they were unable to secure university housing, hence they had to stay in hotels for the first few weeks while they found other accommodations. Though it was not reflected in the data collected in this study, it is worth noting that International Students are also more likely to experience food insecurity. In 2018, 53% of students accessing the Guelph Student FoodBank reported that they were international graduate students (Perreira, 2020). It is important to consider how these additional stressors may inhibit students' ability or desire to seek out supports for a PR application.

Many participants also mentioned that, while they intend to apply for PR after graduation, they did not have the mental capacity to research their options and prepare their documents while focusing on their academic studies. Some students stated that they were only able to come to Guelph thanks to scholarships that they received, hence they needed to maintain a certain standard of academic achievements to avoid negative consequences. These requirements make it difficult for International Students to dedicate time to planning for life in Canada after completing their program.

What Services would Best Support International Students?

- **Clear website with instructions/tips to follow**
 - A clear resource that provides a one-stop-shop for students seeking to learn about the PR process
- **Someone to help**
 - Explain the process and different options
 - Give guidance regarding their specific situations (e.g. finances, qualifications)
 - Provide help with the application procedure, specifically in addressing the many questions that international students have before they begin applying
- **More comprehensive IRCC workshops**
 - Hold more advanced workshops, or workshop series, for those who have already attended the introductory sessions, concluding with all recipients receiving an information package
- **Advice from other students who successfully received their PR and those currently undergoing the process**
 - Informal settings to share their experiences and understandings of the process

Suggestions from the Research

Based on the concerns and experiences International Students expressed at various stages of this study, three suggestions stand out from the research to enhance supports for International Students attending the University of Guelph. Three additional services that International Students would find beneficial are:

1. The development of a PR resource page on the UofG Website
2. Hiring an International Student Advisor whose focus is to help students and alumni navigate the PR process

3. More comprehensive workshops delivered by the IRCC, including a Post-Workshop Information Package
4. Peer-peer support workshops for both current students and alumni to share knowledge on the PR process

Establishing a PR resource page on the University of Guelph Website

As mentioned previously many of the focus group participants expressed they use webpages such as the IRCC website and facebook groups tailored for International Students to learn more about the PR application process. However, participants expressed that the IRCC website is incredibly difficult to navigate and is a time-consuming endeavor. Given the fact that many International Students are facing daily challenges, including, but not limited to, finding affordable housing, adapting to life in Canada, and transitioning into the academic system in Canada, this website and other time-consuming resources can quite inaccessible.

To accomodate International Students and address this challenge, an easily accessible webpage indicating the basic information necessary for applying for PR would be a beneficial resource. Notably, one of the focus group participants mentioned that the University of Toronto has an accessible resource online, which they frequently visit.³ A suggestion is that the Office of Intercultural Affairs in partnership with LIP establish a webpage that contains basic and accurate information to ensure that this information is easily available to International Students. This website could have information on the post-graduation work permit and the different types of PR programs available to International Students, such as: the Canadian Experience Class, the Provincial Nominee Program and the Federal Skilled Workers Program (“What is the Ontario”, 2019). As many alumni are also looking to apply for PR, it would be beneficial to include a link to this page on the Alumni Affairs and Development website as well.

Hiring an International Student Advisor to focus on the PR process

Many of the focus group and survey responses mentioned that the international student advisor has been very helpful to them in general, and is supportive of students navigating the PR process. They did express, however, that the advisor is unable to give specific advice or answer specific questions on the PR process, as they do not have the qualifications to do so. As such, it is suggested that the University of Guelph hire an ICCRC-certified advisor in the Office of Intercultural Affairs who can support both students and alumni by answering specific questions on this process would fill a huge gap in the services currently available. As mentioned previously, this resource should be available to both students and alumni, as many of the participants in this study mentioned not planning on applying for PR until after they have completed their studies.

³ Initially, the research team did not have direct access to the webpage mentioned by the focus group participant and came across a resource hosted by the Graduate English Association at the University of Toronto that can be found here: https://gea.artsci.utoronto.ca/?page_id=690. At a later date, the focus group participant reached out to the Project Manager to provide the resource they were referring to, which can be found here: <https://www.utsc.utoronto.ca/utscinternational/permanent-residency>
International Students who seek Permanent Residence Part II

A More Comprehensive IRCC Workshop & Post-Workshop Information Package

Though students found the information sessions held by an IRCC employee at the university helpful, they expressed the information was limited and that they would benefit from workshops that build upon the first session. This limited information was a significant resource gap for those students who have already attended the introductory session. Several students mentioned that even after attending an information session, the qualifications, skills, and job requirements necessary to gain their PR remained unclear. The following quote by an IS while discussing the information session demonstrates the need for a more comprehensive workshop: “we don’t know how the process goes – we don’t know what the qualifications are, so how do we know what will help our score rise?”

The students expanded that it would be helpful if the IRCC held a sequential information session for students who already understand the basic information as learned from the first session, and would like more tangible information on the “dos and don’ts” of the PR process. Beneficial information in this second session could include which jobs would help them gain extra points towards the PR application, and which would render them ineligible to apply. The students expressed that the second information session should properly and thoroughly discuss the different PR programs, concluding with each participant getting an information package which summarizes all information discussed. The information package would also serve beneficial to individuals who do not necessarily have the capacity to apply for PR at that time, due to the many challenges that arise when migrating to a new country. This package would allow them to refer back to the information they learned when their basic needs are being met and are therefore in the right mindset to researching this process.

Launching a Peer-to-Peer workshop series to discuss the PR process

Throughout the focus groups, participants who felt they are successfully understanding the PR process acknowledged that they discuss the information with fellow International Students on campus. Further, many students indicated that they were looking forward to the focus groups themselves, as they gave them an opportunity to discuss their challenges and give one another advice on getting PR.

Focus group participants consistently spoke about the value of connecting with other International Students to share their experiences and knowledge of the PR process. Therefore, a peer-peer workshop facilitated by University staff to give International Students and alumni space to share their experiences with one another would be extremely beneficial. Ideally, these workshops would be held in a comfortable space on campus such as the University Centre, and can be facilitated by staff, student staff, or international student Peer Helpers to give students and alumni both an opportunity to discuss their challenges and also their successes. These sessions would not only build on the current information sessions available to International Students and provide them with tangible information on the PR process, but would also allow students to build connections with one another, a critical factor that enhances student experience and feelings of belonging on campus.



Limitations

There were several notable limitations to this project. First, as many undergraduate International Students are not likely to be applying for PR yet, they were rather underrepresented in our focus group sample. As a result, our results are mainly based on the experiences of graduate students, who represent 30% of the international student population at the University of Guelph (Office of Institutional Analysis and Research, 2019). While the study captures a significant portion of International Students overall, it is worth noting that undergraduate students may have had other suggestions on how to fill the service gap that would better meet their needs.

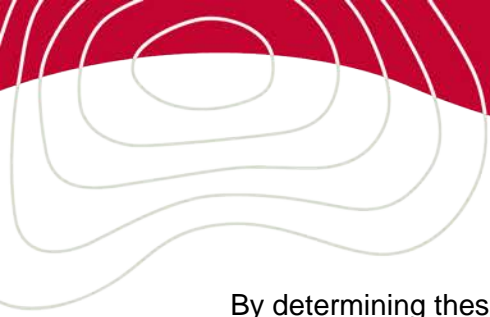
As mentioned throughout the report, individuals who are currently facing the challenges of transitioning to life in Canada such as finding affordable housing or providing for their families are less likely to attend focus groups, as they simply would not have the time to focus on the PR process. Therefore, there is a self-selection bias for both the survey and focus group, as individuals who do have the capacity to focus on the process would be more likely to participate in the study. While these issues were noted by focus group participants, it is possible that there are additional barriers International Students are facing that were not captured by the findings of this study.

Lastly, when asked about their experiences in Guelph-Wellington, many of the participants in the study expressed their main objective is to become a permanent resident of Canada, not necessarily of Guelph-Wellington. Many participants came to the University of Guelph for a specific program, or because of financial incentives, not because they were specifically looking to live in the area. Therefore, it is difficult to understand how challenges or supports may affect International Students' decision to remain in Guelph-Wellington, specifically.

Conclusion

The purpose of this project was to demonstrate the gaps in services that International Students face when navigating the PR process and how community partners, the government, and the University staff can use this information to ease this process. Our research was conducted in two steps: first, a preliminary research study determined the service providers' perspective on international student challenges to get their PR (Goh, 2019). Second, this study used a combination of online surveys and focus groups to determine the gaps as described by international students themselves.

Our findings demonstrate that International Students have found certain services to be very beneficial, including, but not limited to: information sessions held by the Office of Intercultural Affairs and support from International Student Advisors. However, we determined that International Students have many questions that go unanswered, as they reported the University is unable to give them direct advice at this time. In addition, students find online resources unclear and often time-consuming. Many have trouble maintaining their work visas and study permits when transitioning into the PR application process. Finally, International Students face many challenges outside of applying for PR, including, but not limited to, housing and food insecurity, caring for loved ones, and culture shock, which makes it very difficult to devote their time and energy into researching PR.



By determining these service gaps with the input of International Students, we recommend the following services to ease the PR process: the development of a PR Information page on the University of Guelph webpage, hiring an International Student Advisor whose focus is to help students and alumni navigate the PR process, a more comprehensive IRCC workshop and summary information package for all participants, and peer-to-peer support workshops for both current students and alumni to share knowledge on the PR process. The implementation of these new resources would not only ease the PR process, but also allow students to access information in various ways, depending on both their availability and cultural background.

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