

**A social resilience lens to  
universities' contradictory role in  
international students' experiences**

Christina Gabriel, Carleton University &  
Luisa Veronis, University of Ottawa



“I think a lot of Canadian universities are using international students as a cash cow... universities are incentivized to do so to generate revenue and to build more fancy buildings.” (CU-IGS#2)

“I'm not sure if it's the university in general or just my faculty, (...) it makes me feel like international students like me are just a tool of generating money.” (UO-IGS-EN #3)

# Social resilience

- Takes account of individual actions
- But also allows for a broader understanding of resilience by stressing:

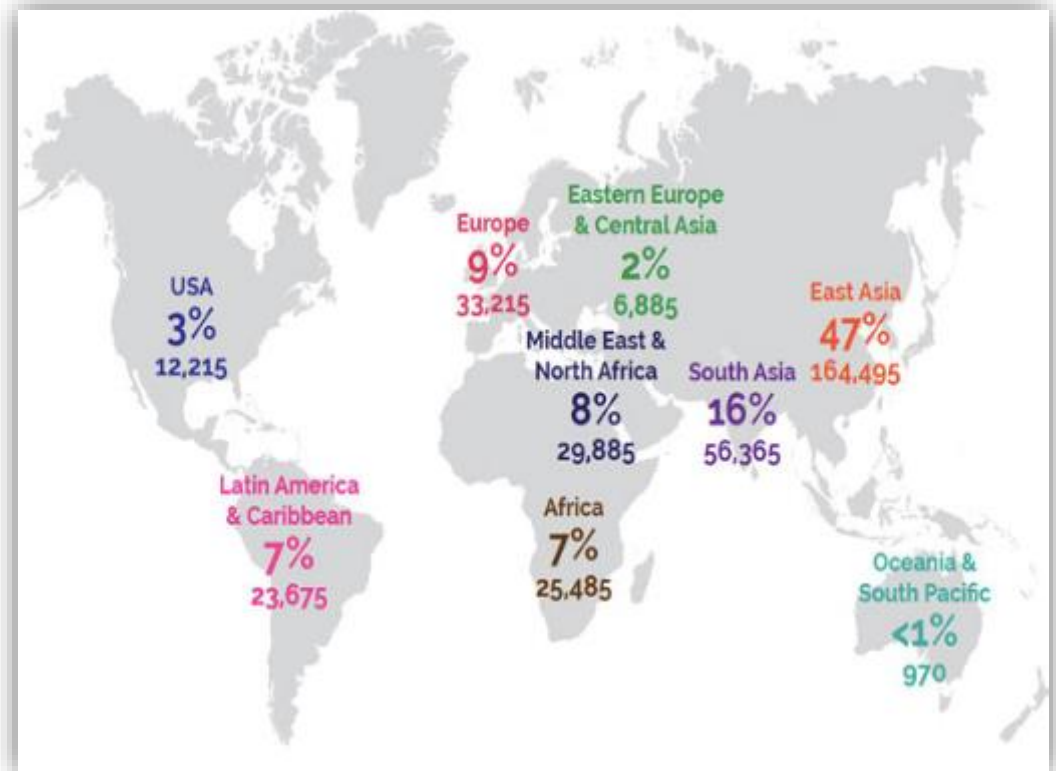
“the transformative capacities of individuals, groups and social institutions in dealing with challenges and simultaneously **recognizes how power relations and institutional structures shape these capacities**” (Preston et. al. 2021. 4)

# International Students & Neoliberal Frames

International students  
“as economic agents or  
drivers of knowledge and  
eventually economic  
growth”

International students “as  
sources of income for the  
higher education sector”

(Riaño, Van Mol and  
Raghuram 2018: 285-286)



# Academic Capitalism

“A multidimensional process of integration between higher education and the knowledge economy... this integration is based on the blurring of boundaries between higher education, states and markets and recognizes that academic capitalism is related to economic globalization, new technologies, and reduced state funding to higher education.”

(Kauppinen 2015: 337)

# EduCanada Brand

“The ‘EduCanada’ brand is intended to suggest that the high value of the Canadian educational experience is unrivalled. The brand conveys the message that Canada offers endless possibilities to international students which allows them to find the program and field of study that’s right for them.”

([www.extranet-educanada.ca](http://www.extranet-educanada.ca))

# EduCanada Branding

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# The Carleton Advantage

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Defy the conventional &  
Adventures start here

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# University Student Services

## Carleton – International Student Services Office

- Orientation Activities – Arrival
- Workshops (e.g., Making Friends in Canada, Warming up to Winter, Academic Writing)
- Online Course – Study Permit Secrets
- Global Pals (Peer Mentoring)
- Social Activities – Fall Rhapsody in Gatineau Park
- Co-op Work Permit Advice
- Ask an Advisor: Immigration Q & A

## uOttawa – International Office

- Arrival: airport shuttle
- Welcome Week
- Workshops (e.g. preparing for winter, applying for work-permit, the job search, etc.)
- Mentorship /Buddy program
- Social activities & Spend the holidays with a Canadian family
- Legal advice
- Weekly drop-in hours for academic support & immigration-related questions

# International student lived experiences: challenges & resilience

- Academic and social adjustments
  - Academics
  - Isolation and loneliness
  - Discrimination
  - Language politics (uOttawa)
- Financial hardship
- Housing
- Use of university & community resources

# Academics

The only thing that influenced me was my language because **English is my second language and I had to use that second language to navigate all the aspects of my life, especially academically.** So the academics posed a big challenge for me because of the readings, the workloads and also the classroom discussions. That always makes me perceive myself as somehow disadvantaged compared to the local students. So because of that perception **I think I would have to devote triple the time the local students spend on a courseload.** (UO-IGS-EN #3)

**I felt like I could understand everything, but I felt I could not communicate my ideas as quickly as I wanted, as I was thinking...** What was shocking for me was in the first term I had a seminar, which was presentations. I had to do four, right? It was a 15-minute presentation, then two 30-minute presentations and then one 45-minute presentation. So, it was the first time in my life that I had done an English presentation. (CU-ISG #16)

# Isolation & Loneliness

I would say that **I don't have friends among domestic people and it's very hard for international students. Like for my type of international students, we don't like parties and drinking and stuff.** It's hard for me to get enrolled in the domestic society. I think it's just a matter of time. [...] That's one of the complaints I've heard from my other friends. They say **Canadian society is very much isolated from international students.** (UO-ISG-EN #6)

Before I came here, **I thought I will be living in a really diversified culture. But I just felt there is a barrier there. There are barriers between groups of people.** And I find myself, exactly on this barrier. I have no connection to my people, and I struggle to make connections with Canadians. (CU-IGS #8)

# Housing

**For finding housing the university tried to help but it didn't work. I was checking the university housing, I was checking the tips of university but they didn't work.** So what I did was I was just checking streets nearby and I saw an ad I would call them or I would knock on the door nearby. I would knock on the door and say "do you have some renting place?" It didn't work by that time but finally I found a place near the campus which is a really good place. (UO-IGS-EN #6)

**Because I wasn't familiar with the city.... I wanted to be as close as possible to the university..... I wanted to survive the winter and I wanted to focus on studying so I didn't come to waste time looking for apartments or looking for a place to live. It's more expensive in residence than living outside.** (CU-IGS #14)

# Use of Campus Resources

I do remember is that **the international students' office was very helpful**. On the website there are a bunch of people who could be your **mentor**... Once I got here, I got the **orientation** from them for doing groceries and taking the O-Train and they also had a bunch of activities so you could also go **winter shopping** with them.” (CU-IGS#16)

Health and counselling are very good... But **Carleton has started emphasizing more on that [mental health support] for international students**, especially in the winter. [They say], do physical activity, join a fitness club, some dance club soccer team, go for counselling, if at all you need help. (CU-IGS #1)

# Use of Community Resources

**The Iranian community in Ottawa helps each other very well. I didn't expect that but I was really fascinated by seeing them. They provide many things especially to newcomers.** For example, they provided us with free pickup for the first time [we arrived] from the airport. **They put on many free workshops, English courses, these things are very good. Iranians here have a good community.** They have some events where they gather together and it's very good. (CU-IGS #17)

-Well yeah, I got to Church, and **my Church has been supporting me (...)** I was welcome and I told them what I was going through and they said **'Ok, you are home, so you don't have to feel shy or feel bad.'** They gave me all the necessary help that they could.

-What sort of help do they provide?

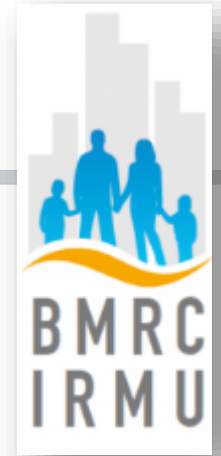
-Well one they helped me with my financial problems in terms of, how should I put it? They gave me food [groceries]. (UO-IGS-EN #12)



# Concluding Thoughts

- Decentre the study of international students
  - Complex role of universities: attract/select international students, and provide them with services
  - *Ad hoc* development of international student services
  - Service provision part of competition to attract international students
- Document international student resilience and agency
  - Trouble dominant neoliberal narratives – skills & talent
  - Lived experiences and challenges, but also resilience, resourcefulness, and agency – use of array of services both on and off campus
  - International students as “*ideal* immigrants” but important need to recognize the hardships of the multi-step migration process

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# Thank You!

## Questions and Comments

Christina Gabriel, Carleton University

Christina.Gabriel@Carleton.ca