Dreaming Big, Coming Up Short:

The challenging realities of international students and graduates in Atlantic Canada

BY

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Abstract:

This paper relies on interview data emerging from interviews with 50 international students, recent international graduates, and policy and service providers at four urban centers in the Atlantic region. We focused on participants' understanding of emerging policy avenues to permanent settlement in the provinces, as well as students' willingness and perceived challenges in pursuing settlement in the Atlantic region specifically, and Canada more generally. We found that international students are generally attracted to universities in the region by comparatively low tuition and cost of living rates, institutional agreements such as the 'Two Plus Two' programs, as well as social networks that provide potential migrants with support and confidence. Students are also attracted by policies that allow them to work during and after their studies, and that provide accompanying family with work-permits as well. This is particularly important as many students attracted by lower tuition and living costs seem to be more financially vulnerable. Our data indicates that although an overwhelming majority of students are interested in settling in Canada, participants encountered some obstacles in entering the Atlantic Canadian labour market post-graduation, as many found networks of employment that are not open to them. In some cases, students and graduates reported being discriminated against based on race and accents. Moreover, we found that negative experiences with social isolation and limited availability and quality of jobs during their studies impact further decisions to attempt settlement, mostly acting as deterrents in students' settlement in the Atlantic region.

List of Abbreviations:

AAU - Atlantic Association of Universities

CBIS - Canadian Bureau of International Education

CEC - Canadian Experience Class

CIC - Citizenship and Immigration Canada

FSWC - Federal Skilled Worker Class

IELTS - International English Language Testing System

ISIS - Immigrant Settlement and Integration Services

MPHEC - The Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission

NB - New Brunswick

NL - Newfoundland and Labrador

NS - Nova Scotia

PEI - Prince Edward Island

PNP - Provincial Nominee Program

TOEFL - Test of English as a Foreign Language

Introduction

Purpose of the Study:

This paper investigates the experiences of international students and graduates studying, working and living in the Atlantic provinces. We focus on this population's understanding of emerging policy avenues to permanent settlement in the provinces, as well as their willingness and perceived challenges in pursuing settlement in the Atlantic region specifically, and Canada more generally.

The study addresses impacts of ongoing efforts to foster the retention of highly-skilled international graduates in provinces traditionally associated with out-migration of youth (Murphy and de Finney, 2008; Akbari and Sun, 2006), low retention rates of immigrants- particularly those highly-skilled (Akbari, Lynch, McDonald and Rankaduwa, 2007), and an aging population (Statistics Canada, 2012). In light of this approach, the study also broaches labor market integration issues, investigating the success of international graduates to secure jobs in competitive economic sectors in the four provinces.

This study is the first of its kind to investigate these dynamics as they appear in relation to international students and graduates in Atlantic Canada in a comparative perspective. Notably, the study's methodology and approach replicates Chira's PhD research, which mainly focuses on interviews conducted in Halifax with international students and graduates. In addition, studies that investigate settlement efforts on the part of universities and community actors have been previously conducted in Moncton, NB (Belkhodja and Wade, 2011) and Halifax, NS (Chira, 2011), as well as across the Atlantic region (Chira and Belkhodja, 2012), although no students or graduates were interviewed in these studies. Our current study complements those regional initiatives.

Nationally and internationally, most studies of international students are preliminary in as much as they tackle various singular dimensions of the fast-paced policy shifts that currently define the legal status of international student migrants in developed economies such as the UK (Cavanagh et al., 2008), the USA (Dreher and Poutvaara, 2011), Australia (Hawthorne, 2011), Germany (Klabunde and Bilecen-Suoglu, 2011), and other European countries (Belkhodja, 2011). Very few studies of international students depart from such depictions of these migrants as transient and highly mobile. Ong (1999), Olwig (2007), Ley (2010) and Fong (2011) present some evidence that the pursuit of degrees outside one's country of origin can be part of larger, long-term migration goals, which include strategic family plans. However, while both Ong (1999) and Ley (2010) recount the experiences of upper and upper-middle class students, the children of affluent business families of Hong Kong, Olwig (2007) and Fong (2011) challenge the image of the privileged international student. Their ethnographies capture the financial vulnerability of international students. These studies informed our interview themes.

Drawing on this literature, we begin by describing national and regional demographic and policy trends concerning international students. Following that, we describe and analyze our sample of fifty interviews, thirty-five of them with international students and recent graduates of Atlantic universities and the remaining fifteen with regional stakeholders. We focus on emerging trends and their implications for students, policy makers and communities in Atlantic Canada.

As of 2012, there are over 16,000 international students studying in the Atlantic provinces, this number representing an increase of 47% since 2008 and 6% of the total number of international students currently in Canada. Figure 1 illustrates the current distributions of international students at major urban centers in Atlantic Canada based on the most recent data reported by Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC Facts and Figures, 2011).

We selected our study locations to include the centers that currently welcome most international students in the Atlantic region and therefore conducted interviews in Halifax, Nova Scotia (hosts 6,852 students), Fredericton, New Brunswick (1,114 students), Saint John's, Newfoundland and Labrador (817 students) and Charlottetown, Price Edward Island (733 students) (CIC Facts and Figures, 2011). This paper reports on qualitative data collected between March 2012 and January 2013.

This research poses questions regarding students' and graduates' decisions to study, work and settle in the selected urban centers, and investigates the national and local status quo that shapes such decisions. More specifically, we ask **1) How do students and their families select study locations? 2) What factors become prominent in shaping their decisions to come to Atlantic Canada, as well as shape their decisions to attempt settlement in the Atlantic provinces, move to other parts of Canada or return to their countries of origin? 3) What services or supports might better facilitate attraction and retention of students and graduates to Atlantic urban centers?** The study thus highlights the social and economic priorities and needs that shape the success of provincial efforts to attract graduates to local communities (Chira, 2011).

Figure 1: The current distribution of international students in Atlantic Canada
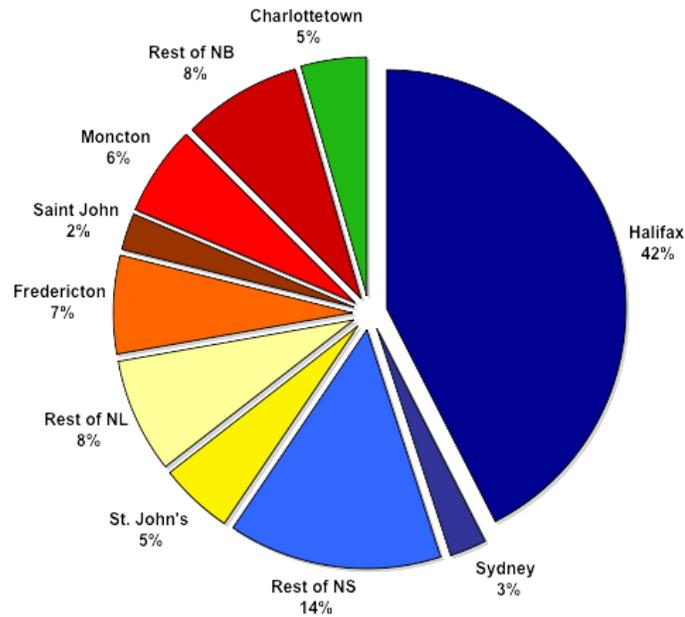
Sources: CIC Facts and Figures, 2011

The Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission (MPHEC). Report 2012

Policy framework:

In the past decade, international students have been described as 'designer migrants' for Canada (Simmons, 1999) their local ties and Canadian credentials suggesting seamless social integration, and their skill-sets promising to boost Canada's expanding knowledge economy. Receptive to this view, federal and provincial immigration policies have gradually encouraged the temporary and permanent integration of international students and graduates into the Canadian labour market. Currently, international graduates can become permanent residents mainly through the Canadian Experience Class (CEC) or the Federal Skilled Worker Class (FSWC). Thus, while most graduates require at least one year of Canadian work experience in a competitive field and apply through the CEC (CICa, 2013), international PhD students can apply after their second year of PhD through the FSWC, with no work experience requirements (CICb, 2013). In addition, many provinces have added a category for international graduates to their Provincial Nominee Programs (PNPs). In the Atlantic provinces, only two such PNPs remain open to date, those in New Brunswick and Newfoundland and Labrador. In Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island those streams have recently closed. Prince Edward Island closed the program on December 31, 2012 describing it as redundant to the federal pathways (Government of PEI, 2012). Nova Scotia closed its PNP International Graduate stream on March 28, 2013 (Nova Scotia Office of Immigration, 2013).

In Canada, international students are allowed to work on and off-campus during their studies. Work off-campus is capped at 20 hours a week during the school year and requires a valid work permit

that is dependent on satisfactory academic performance as monitored by the students' university (CICc, 2013). Accompanying spouses are entitled to full-time work permits. Post-graduation, international graduates are eligible for a three-year open work permit (CICd, 2013).

Despite the open immigration pathways post-immigration, visa-granting bodies abroad routinely ask applicants to declare that they will not attempt permanent settlement post-graduation. Moreover, in most jurisdictions in Atlantic Canada, settlement agencies are not mandated to offer any support to students, some being allowed to provide limited support to recent graduates who hold work-permits. Given these incongruences, this research aims to captures students' and graduates' understanding, challenges and successes in accessing the available supports and permanent residence avenues.

Methodological Approach:

We utilized qualitative research methods to investigate the outlined research priorities. Interview narrative analysis was utilized in the data analysis process. This methodological approach was chosen as the preferred investigative method of emerging migration trends (Ley, 2010; Olwig, 2007; Mahler, 1995).

In total, fifty participants contributed to the research. Of those, thirty-five self-identified as international students. The remaining fifteen participants either self-identified or were identified by their organizations as policy strategists and program deliverers for international students at different locations across the Atlantic region. This group included provincial policy strategists and immigration officers (six participants in the sample), university strategists and international student advisors (six in the sample) and settlement experts (three participants). At each location, we interviewed three to five stakeholders and eight to ten students. We invited the three groups of stakeholders -government, post-secondary education providers and settlement agencies- to participate at each location. In Halifax, ten students and three stakeholders participated. In Fredericton, we interviewed nine students and five stakeholders. In Charlottetown, we talked to eight students and three stakeholders, while in St. John's we interviewed eight students and four stakeholders.

We recruited participants by circulating research invitations as widely as possible. For inviting stakeholders, we contacted government offices, university departments and settlement agencies and invited recipients to participate if they consider they have expertise in the area of our study. In addition, participants could recommend co-workers or others in their community as active in this field, and we would then contact those recommended. When recruiting students, we contacted international student offices, student societies and posted invitations in public spaces. We invited participants to self-identify as international students and this opened our sample to recent graduates, recent applicants to various permanent residence streams and to students who had transitioned to permanent residence and citizenship status. This diversity allowed us to document students' challenges at different stages in the immigration process.

Data Collection:

Data collection started in the spring of 2012 and was completed in January 2013. Research invitations were sent out through the winter of 2011, with repeated recruitment invitations being sent throughout the year. Most interviews were then set for the fall of 2012. International Advising Offices at post-secondary institutions with the highest numbers of international students were asked to forward the study invitation to students. Recruitment proved to be more challenging than expected, as some potential student participants demanded financial reimbursements for their time, which we could not provide. In addition, while some institutions were more than supportive of the research, some universities preferred not to forward our research invitations at all. In those cases, we posted research invitations through other public channels and in public places.

Students' Sample Description: Demographic Trends

Gender

Of the 35 students interviewed, 12 participants were male (or 34 %) and 23 were female (or 76 %). A more gender-balanced sample could not be achieved despite as many as four separate cycles of recruitment in some locations. In this respect, our sample is skewed, as more international students tend to be men. In 2011, McMullen and Ellias found that women accounted for less than half of international students in Canada, while in 2012, the Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission (MPHEC) found that only 42% of international students in Maritime universities were female (MPHEC Report, 2012).

Age

In terms of age, three participants (or 9% of the sample) were younger than 20 years old (the youngest was 18), twenty-two were between the ages of 20 and 24 (63%), eight were between 25 and 29 (22%) and two were older than 30 (6%). The oldest participant was 36. This matches national age trends amongst international students (McMullen and Ellias, 2011). Notably, a longitudinal study of international students in Canada found that the population of international students in Canada is getting younger. Thus, while in 1992, almost 27% of international students were older than 30, and 48% were younger than 24, by 2008, 66% of students were younger than 24 and only 13% were older than 30 (McMullen and Ellias, 2011). These demographic changes have implications for the type of support needed for settlement that will be discussed in further sections.

Countries of origin

Overall, 32% of our participants were from China (n= 11), 17% from the USA (n= 6), 17% from the Middle East (n= 6), 11% from South America (n= 4), 11% from South Asia (n = 4), 2 participants came from the Caribbean (or 6%), one from an African country (3%), and one from a European country (3%). Because our participants were sometimes the only representatives of their nations in their province if not the region, we are protecting their identity by only providing their region of origin, rather than the specific country. With respect to areas of origin, our sample replicates national and regional trends. Thus, students from China account for almost half of all international enrollments both nationally and

regionally (MPHEC Report, 2012; McMullen and Ellias, 2011). In the Maritimes, students from the USA and the Middle East make up the other two largest national groups (MPHEC Report, 2012), and although NL is not included in this reporting, the trend is sustained in the other provinces and in our sample. In addition, university recruiters and strategists interviewed noted that the numbers of students from South America and South Asia are on the rise as governments in those regions are investing in programs that cover tuition fees abroad. Most notably, in 2011, Brazil announced it would fund 75,000 science students to study abroad by 2014 (Downie, 2011), an announcement mentioned by university strategists at all study locations as an opportunity for Atlantic Canada in terms of international student enrollments. However, in our sample no students were funded by their governments to be in Canada. This is in line with our goal to investigate settlement efforts, as generally students who are government-sponsored are contractually bound to return and work in their home countries post-graduation.

Levels and areas of study

25 participants (or 72%) were pursuing undergraduate degrees at the time of their interviews, six were pursuing Masters and PhD degrees (17%) and four had graduated in the past 12 months (11%). In this respect, our sample reflects the national and regional trends, as undergraduate students are a faster growing segment than international graduate students. Thus, while the MPHEC (2012) found that regionally, 81% of international students were undergraduates in 2010, CIC reports about 66% of national enrollments were in undergraduate programs (McMullen and Ellias, 2011).

Because of our interest in settlement and immigration experiences, most of our participating undergraduates were enrolled in their third year or higher (68%). Of those, nine students were in their fifth year or higher. This was the case either because they were enrolled in programs that required more than four years to complete (engineering, honors programs) or because their grades or need for ESL training caused them to have to extend their study time (five students were in the latter situation).

Of the undergraduate students, 44% were in Humanities, Social Science and Psychology programs (n= 11), 24% were pursuing Business, Accounting or Economics degrees (n= 6), 24% were Math and Science majors (n= 6) and 8% were Engineering students (n= 2). In this respect, our sample has an over-representation of students in social science disciplines, yet captures the cumulation of students in Business, Accounting and Economics programs and Engineering degrees, which represent around 20% of national enrollments each (McMullen and Ellias, 2011). We assume the over-representation of social scientists in our undergraduate sample is a result of professional curiosity, as many students shared their interest in how an interview for an academic study works. At the graduate level, two were in Masters of Arts programs and three were in Masters of Science programs. Of the students who had recently graduated, one held a BA in Arts, one a BA in Business, one a PhD in Engineering and one a PhD in Business.

Immigration status

Because our recruitment tools relied on self-identification of students as part of the 'international student' category, the immigration status of our participants varied. This allowed us to capture diverse challenges that come at different stages of the immigration process for the students.

Thus, our sample included 27 students on student visas, three participants who were engaged in the process of becoming permanent residents (all three had graduated with Bachelor degrees, one in Halifax, one in Fredericton and one in Charlottetown), three participants who were already permanent residents and two participants who were Canadian citizens. However, we are not implying that our participants neatly transition through all those stages. For example, of the two participants who hold Canadian citizenship, one had come on a student visa, applied for residence through channels available to students and later had become citizen (the process taking 6 years). Meanwhile, the other Canadian citizen in our sample had come to Canada to live for the first time as a student, and yet was born to a Canadian citizen abroad, so holds citizenship in that way. This diversity allows us to record how these differences affect settlement efforts in the region.

Family and dependents

In total, seven students had either joined family at the location of their study, or were accompanied by family in Atlantic Canada. Of these, three students joined parents or extended family (aunts and uncles) in Atlantic Canada. One participant in Saint John's joined extended family who had been established in the region for decades, while two participants, one in Charlottetown and one in Fredericton followed highly skilled parents to Atlantic Canada. All these students were undergraduates.

In addition, four students in our sample had brought along spouses and common-law partners (two in Halifax, one in Charlottetown and one in Saint John's). All four were graduate students. Of these four, two main applicants were women and two were men. In families where main applicants were men, the families also brought along children, and in both cases the spouses were highly skilled (Masters degree or above). In the two families where the main applicants were women, there were no children, and one accompanying husband was highly skilled, while the other had a trade.

Years in Canada

Most students in our sample (21 or 60%) had been in Canada for more than two years. Amongst the undergraduates, 15 of our participants had been in Canada for two or more years, while 11 were in the country for just over 12 months. At the graduate level, three came to Canada less than one year before the interview, while the others had been in Atlantic Canada for more than two years. All students who had already graduated had been in Atlantic Canada for more than five years. Of the 25 undergraduate students who participated, 17 were in year 3 or higher of their program, and only one was in 1st year. Therefore our sample is made up mostly of students who are relatively close to their graduation, making our questions about future plans particularly appropriate. Table 1 summarizes our student sample.

Table 1: International Students' Sample Description

Participants in our international student sample	N = 35

Men			**12**
Women			**23**
Age			
18 - 19			**3**
20 - 24			**22**
25 - 29			**8**
30 - 36			**2**
Region of origin			
China			**11**
USA			**6**
Middle East			**6**
South America			**4**
South Asia			**4**
Caribbean			**2**
Africa			**1**
Europe			**1**
Level of study			
Undergraduate degree	1st year	1	25
	2nd year	7	
	3rd year	8	
	4+ years	9	
Graduate degree	Masters	5	**6**
	PhD	1	
Already graduated	Bachelor	2	**4**
	PhD	2	

Area of study			
Social Science, Humanities and Psychology	Undergraduate	11	14
	Graduate	2	
	Recently graduated:	1 (Bachelor)	
Math, Science, Health	Undergraduate:	6	10
	Graduate	4	
Business, Accounting or Economics degrees	Undergraduate:	6	8
	Recently graduated	2 (1 PhD, 1 Bachelor)	
Engineering	Undergraduate	2	3
	Recently graduated	1 (PhD)	
Immigration Status			
International student			27
International student in the process towards permanent residence			3
Permanent resident			3
Citizen			2
Years at location of study in Canada			
Less than 1 year			4
1 to 2 years			10
2 to 3 years			8
3 to 4 years			7
More than 4 years			6

Relevant Trends:

This section is organized along common narrative lines that emerged from our interviews with students and stakeholders. We found that the two groups often mentioned complementary aspects of similar ideas, and therefore we aim to provide a holistic analysis of our data. We frame the section to focus on what we found to be important points of reference in the migration process, yet we do not imply that all our participants make their decisions in this particular order. We illustrate our points with quotes from our interviews that we find best capture individual thought and decision-making processes. All participants were given pseudonyms, and we use those pseudonyms to refer to them at times in this paper.

Selecting Universities: Why Atlantic Canadian Institutions?

The main drivers for our participants to choose universities in the Atlantic region are summarized in Table 2. This table reflects what we established to be some of the more popular reasons why an Atlantic university was chosen, but of course most often the reasons given were not singular. In effect, for most participants coming to Atlantic Canada was based on a lengthy decision making processes, often involving family and extended social networks. We chose to split our sample based on popular reasons in an attempt to establish some of the more important factors, rather than isolate factors in the migration decisions.

Table 2: Popular Reason for Choosing Atlantic Canadian Institutions

Popular Reason for Choosing Atlantic Canadian Institution	Number of participants who mentioned that as main reason (N=35)	Distribution of participants by province (N=35)
Low tuition and costs of living for North American education	9	3 NB
		2 NL
		2 PEI
		2 NS
Established university exchange program or agreement	8	2 NL
		2 PEI
		4 NS

Family or close friend attended university or live in Atlantic Canada	7	3 NB
		2 NL
		1 PEI
		1 NS
Only place to accept them	4	2 NB
		1 NL
		1 NS
Immigration policies	3	1 NB
		1 NL
		1 PEI
Other reasons	4	2 NS
		2 PEI

Low Tuition and Cost of Living

Most of our participants mentioned relatively low tuition and living costs as an important factor in their decisions to choose Atlantic Canada. Participants tended to consider the two costs (of tuition and living in the region) as one budget, describing it as relatively low when compared to bigger Canadian centers. Nonetheless, these costs vary significantly across the region and depending on the program of study. Nova Scotia and New Brunswick hold the higher tuition rates for international students regionally, comparable with rates encountered at universities in the bigger centers of Ontario, Quebec and British Columbia. However, the province of Newfoundland and Labrador has the lowest provincial tuition rates in our region, and amongst the lowest in the country (Atlantic Association of Universities (AAU) Tuition and Residence Fees, 2012).

Students noted these regional differences, often weighing different factors when choosing Nova Scotia or New Brunswick over Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland. A participant from South Asia who chose New Brunswick describes her process:

I spent a lot of time in 12th grade researching about the schools on Google, and found Canada was a more affordable option…like I would just Google, use university finders, where you just type in your budget and how many people you want in your schools and what programs you want to look at and then they [Google] sort the results.

What parameters would you put in?

Like if it's like $ 25,000 [USD] a year with tuition and living costs it would be ok for me, so I'd put that in. So I applied to the university here [in New Brunswick], to Memorial and to Brandon University. And then Memorial and here [New Brunswick] gave me a scholarship, but Memorial was too isolated I though, when I saw the map of Canada, I was like 'I don't want to live on an island as much, maybe mainland would be better'…so here I am.

Many participants in our sample were working with relatively low budgets, and so chose an Atlantic Canadian institution based on those budgetary constraints. Faced with the reality of rising tuition costs and amidst a financial crisis that has challenged many middle class families, many students in our sample were acutely aware of their education budget and saw Atlantic Canadian institutions as a wise financial choice.

Established University Program or Partnership

In our sample, four students, all from China, were part of Two Plus Two Programs. Those programs have students study two years in a Chinese university and their final two years in a Canadian university. University strategists who were part of our sample noted that those programs are increasing in popularity, because institutions can be more involved in the foundation process for students. Therefore, the hope is that students will arrive in Canada better prepared. Nonetheless, different institutions have different requirements for accepting participants, and some of the students interviewed noted they in fact had little choice as to what university in Canada they would study at. Gia, a student from China studying in Newfoundland explains how she came to Saint John's:

I came to St. John's since winter [some years ago]... Many friends come with me, like me in the 'Two Plus Two' program, from my university…I guess I am here because of coincidence…for international students we need to take the TOEFL [Test of English as a Foreign Language] before coming here and then based on that score different Canadian universities accept you… based on my score only Saint John's accepted me as a full-time student. I could have gone to other universities, like Dalhousie University or like Saskatoon University, but I needed to take English program first. I really don't want English programs. I think it's a waste of my time. I think Saint John's is not big but I can be here to study.

Students seem to prefer Two Plus Two Programs also because they offer a cheaper alternative to a full four-year degree, a trend previously documented by Fong (2011). All our Two Plus Two participants indicated that their families could not have afforded a full four-year degree in Canada, so the partnership made it possible for them to come.

Another trend we observed amongst our participants is that of checking with government issued university lists deemed acceptable for local employers in the home country. Four of our participants,

mainly from Iran and South Asia, said they only applied to the sanctioned institutions, in case they would want or need to go back and find further study or work opportunities.

Friends or family attended university or live in Atlantic Canada

Significant ethnographic evidence points to the importance of family ties and social networks in education migration decisions. Fong (2011), Ley (2010) and Ong (1999) all provide evidence that international education migration is often catalyzed through family and social connections to countries, regions or even institutions. This holds true for our sample. Twenty-five of our participants (72%) noted that they knew of family or friends who had lived or studied in Canada. Nine students in our sample had family living in Canada, 16 more had friends attending university across the country and seven cited social connections to a university or city in Atlantic Canada as the primary reason for choosing to study here.

Social connections were generally depicted as a preferred way to gain insights into life as a student in Canada. Most participants mentioned that they contacted family, friends or acquaintances who had experienced studying abroad before departing their countries. For five students in our sample, friends' success at an institution in Atlantic Canada brought with it enough confidence to motivate choosing that institution. Lara, a participant from South America studying in New Brunswick explains her choice in these terms:

> I had a friend going here [in New Brunswick]. She was already here [in New Brunswick] and she kept telling me she loves it, so that's why I decided to come here.
>
> *What are some of the things she mentions that you find appealing?*
>
> Well first of all she tells me how cheap it is here, the school, the city… my country right now is in a very heavy depression, you don't know… She told me their town is really nice, the people are really open… so I said, ok, I can come here.

Manuel, a male participant from South America who also studies in New Brunswick shares a similar story:

> I chose [this school in New Brunswick] because not only did it have a good program and was affordable, but I already had a friend going here and she had given me a really really good review about it. She is actually my best friend and she had a lot of influence in my decision to come here.

While decisions to follow friends were generally described as incentives to choose particular universities or programs, the decision to join family seemed to be more conflicted for our participants. This was the case as some participants regarded joining family as somewhat of a loss of independence. This is

consistent with family migration literature findings (Mahler, 1995; Raj, 2003; Olwig, 2007). Hanzi, a male participant from China explains:

> Canada was on top of the list, especially for my parents, because [a member of my family] lives here... So they tried really hard to get me to go [close to where family lives on the West Coast], but as a teenager I did not want to live with my [family member] after I moved out from my parents' house... it was just one of these teenager things. I felt I finally was getting out of my parents' control, there was no way I was getting into my [family member]'s control right after. I just wanted to experience things by myself...So I came to [Atlantic Canada].

While this participant managed to avoid living with family through his college years, Raja, a female participant from South Asia shares a story of how she lives with family in Atlantic Canada:

> Basically, my main reason to come here was because my [extended] family was living here and they did not want me going anywhere else...my mom was more comfortable with having [family] look after me, and of course I was more comfortable having [family] with me here. I live with [family] still...it's easier for me that way because I've been very close to my family all throughout my life and I think it would have been very hard for me if I was not living with them. My [family member in Atlantic Canada] is like a second set of parents to me....But now for my Masters I know I do not want to stay here...like I love my [family] and all that, but since I lived with my [family] I found it's really hard to make a lot of friends because you don't meet people much...it's hard to make friends like that.

In these brief stories, family appears both as a supporter and as a suppressor of independence for our participants. The resulting actions are based on complex negotiations of agency on the students' part, where gender and cultural norms play important roles.

Only place to accept them

For some of our participants, universities in Atlantic Canada were the only ones extending acceptance letters. According to some of our participants, ESL standards were a bit more flexible at institutions in the Atlantic region. Moreover, as Fong (2011) documents, competition is fierce for entrance at universities that are more recognizable to foreign parents. Mei, a participant from China who only got admission at a university in Nova Scotia explains where else she applied and why:

> First I looked at the schools I already knew, because in China some universities are popular. Like Victoria, Toronto, Manitoba...I think Toronto is most poplar because many people go there and people in China think it has reasons to be so popular, that their education is very good.

> *So is [university in Halifax] popular in China as well?*

> No, [university in Halifax] may be good in Canada but in China, when you tell people you study here, most people have never heard about it. But I looked at the list and applied to Victoria and Manitoba, but actually my teacher suggested me this city so I go check, and I applied it because I think it's good.

As Mei suggests, a university's popularity abroad will make its application pool much more competitive. As institutions in the Atlantic region have yet to become as recognizable abroad, they continue to offer study opportunities to more of their applicants.

Immigration policies

Most of our participants made mention of Canada's international-student-friendly immigration policies as contributing to their decision to study here. Work permits, in all forms, were mentioned as particularly important. Students and parents appreciated off-campus work permits during studies as well as post-graduation work permits, while all students with accompanying spouses mentioned the importance of spousal work permits as vital to their family's decision to choose Canada as a study destination. For three participants, immigration policies were the decisive factor in their decision to apply. Franca, a student from Europe studying in Newfoundland says:

> The biggest difference when I decided not to study in Australia was that you don't get a visa after you study in Australia. So you spend a fortune and then there is the possibility, you have to get back to where ever you come from. But Canada is different, because you can apply for a work visa after your Masters and if you get enough experience you can apply for permanent residence, so unless things change, I will do that.

Similarly, Mei, a Chinese participant studying in Nova Scotia told us:

> My mother wants me to take a job here, so Canada is the only country which gives you three years work permission, so that is why I came here.

Particularly for participants from China, getting work experience in Canada, regardless of future immigration plans, was highly valued. Although for many in our sample, getting a job was a necessary part of funding their education in Canada, as we will illustrated in the next section of this paper, for many participants, getting Canadian work experience even in unskilled sectors, was a matter of rounding off their Canadian education. Gia, a Chinese participant studying Business in Newfoundland explains why:

I have two jobs…I have a job on campus and another at [fast-food chain such as McDonalds, Burger King, Arby's]. I work in an office and then I work at [fast-food chain]…I work about 20 or more hours a week…

Why did you get these jobs?

Because I need to learn some things…even if things may seem easy, I still may learn something from the Canadians. I need to learn their Canadian culture, the way they talk, the way the live, I need to devote myself in Canadian environment, to improve my understanding of different cultures and cultural differences…

So it was not about the money?

No. My mom and dad said 'if you feel so tired, you don't need to work two jobs, mama and daddy will offer you anything you like' but I think I need this job to help me to improve my English, the way I talk to Canadians, step by step, details by details…

Many participants explained that learning 'the Canadian work culture' was a priority for them and their family. Moreover, participants noted that employers in their home countries value this cultural awareness. With many developing countries' rapid economic expansion on world markets, interaction with English-speaking clients and collaborators is at an all time high and the ability to communicate cross-culturally is highly valued. This trend has also been previously documented by Ong (1999).

While Studying: Areas of Concern

Although all participants declared themselves generally satisfied with their decision to study in Atlantic Canada, many of our participants experienced significant challenges upon arrival. We established three main areas of concern that seemed to be most widespread in our sample. These are financial worries, social isolation and academic and language challenges. Notably, for most participants, these concerns were unexpected and a significant cause for distress.

Managing Finances

As we noted before, no less than nine of our participants chose institutions in Atlantic Canada specifically because of low tuition and costs of living. Many more mentioned budgetary constraints as an important factor in their decision, and almost all participants, regardless of age, were aware of their education budget and the strain it puts on family back home. Table 3 summarizes the ways students in our sample paid for tuition and living costs in Canada.

Table 3: How students in our sample pay for tuition and living costs

How students cover costs	Number of participants (N= 35)	Distribution of participants by province (N= 35)
Family savings and job	13	5 NB
		4 PEI
		3 NL
		1 NS
Family savings	9	3 NS
		2 PEI
		2 NL
		2 NB
Scholarship	4	2 NL
		1 PEI
		1 NS
Scholarship and job	3	1 NL
		1 PEI
		1 NS
Job in Canada during studies	3	2 NS
		1 NB
Loan from home country and job	2	2 NS
Loan from home country	1	1 NB

These trends point to the reality that although most students in our sample had a somewhat privileged upbringing in their countries of origin, they are a group who are financially conscious and very often financially challenged. This is not news to university recruiters. A recruiter we interviewed noted:

> We have to recognize that we are in the lower end of the tuition scale in Canada, and Canada itself is a lot of lower than the UK, Australia, the US, so we know that Canada generally attracts students whose families aren't in the socio-economic status where they should be sending their kids abroad, but they look at Canada as a destination that is close to the US but not as expensive. And then within Canada, we are on the lower end of that again so we know that we attract students who are on the bubble[1] often.

In fact, 21 of our participants told us they were working to supplement tuition and living costs in Canada (about 60%). Participants in our sample held up to four part-time jobs, at employers ranging from campus cafes and services (custodial services, campus tours, library, tutoring) to grocery stores, Walmart, fast-food chains and other local restaurants.

In three cases, students were attempting to pay their entire tuition and living costs through summer, part-time or co-op jobs. In some cases, the financial constraints were unexpected. In one case, a student whose family had relied on business ventures to support them, had lost all support after the financial crisis. The participant explains:

> Now everything is a struggle. This past year my dad has been going through bankruptcy, which has been very interesting because we were so well off…I am still adapting to it. I did not realize its impact till last summer, which is the reason why I came to Canada early this year, got a job…I am working a job [as a waitress] right now and I work at school part-time too… I work there [downtown] most evenings, I get tips which are my groceries, and everything that I get, which is around $ 800, I pay everything else, because my parents have not been able to send me …Sometimes you go through things…Sometimes I put money on my food card at school even though I have no money for tuition yet, but you know, that's it, I am a student.

> *Before this whole thing, how much money would your parents send you each month?*

> Well, they would take care of all rent, food and tuition and then give me $500 a month for personal expenses, like phone, shopping and anything else. So quite a cut.

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[1] For readers unfamiliar with British Idioms, the expression 'on the bubble' is defined as "On the threshold; finely balanced between success and failure", barely qualifying (Martin, 2013).

This student had requested additional financial support from the university she is attending, but none was available to her.

In other cases, students and families, knowing about off-campus work opportunities, had planned for some income in Canada to supplement tuition and living expenses. However, unexpected factors such as the Iranian financial sanctions, the crisis in Libya, or economic instability leading to dramatically fluctuating exchange rates, had all exacerbated the financial pressures facing students in Atlantic Canada.

Peter, a participant from the Caribbean studying in Nova Scotia, explains how fluctuating exchange rates delayed his studies for a whole semester, as he could not afford to pay for the required number of courses:

> The first two years went great. But then I ran into a bit of financial trouble because the exchange rate went up, so I could not afford all the courses I needed to take. Because when they [the university] made the financial estimation for me, the rate was 2.4 but in a couple of months it had reached 2.7. So that difference in 20 cents ended up being a lot of money, so I had to only do some courses, not the full load that I was suppose to take…I applied for a bursary and I never got it. I was working part-time but I just didn't have enough.

Faced with such challenges, International Advising Offices at some universities have tried to access funds and provide aid to students in crisis. Such an example occurred at a Nova Scotian institution during the Libyan crisis. A university advisor explains:

> An instance where that came to a head was the Libyan crisis, where we had students being cut off financially, and from family and everything. So their spouses, most highly educated, engineers and what not, could not get work here. So CBIS [Canadian Bureau of International Education] made some funds available monthly for them, some checks, but very few came in [to our office] and took the money. This was very surprising. So we reached out [to the students to encourage them to come in and accept the help].

However, financial aid and scholarships for internationals students remain very limited. In our sample, seven students held scholarships, but four of them worked to supplement their income. A policy strategist explains why increasing financial support for international students can prove to be a difficult task:

> When we talk about enhancing scholarship opportunities for international students, one of the first things that we get from the general populous is 'why would you do that when my Johnny just missed out on a local scholarship for the local university? So why help international students when Johnny just missed out on a scholarship for domestics?" And to a certain extent it's hard

to get around that protectionist mentality with a segment of the population. But really, what we are trying to do with the scholarship is attract the best and the brightest that have the skills required in our industries.

To make matters worse, tuition and differential fees have increased significantly in the past three years, putting additional strain on students. Julia, a participant from the US, attending university in New Brunswick explains how raising tuition fees for international students put additional strain on an already strained family dynamic:

> [Before I left for school] I actually went around to all my family members and asked them for help. And they all went to try get loans, but most of them got denied cause they have bad credit…so my grandpa didn't [get denied] and so he did it [got the loan]…Last year he did [applied for a loan] it for $5,000 and then this year I actually needed $10,000 and he went and did it again. He was like 'this is it's twice as much as last year!!' and I was like 'I know, I am so sorry grandpa!'

Julia's story is not at all unique. Tuition in Atlantic Canada has been steadily going up for international students in all provinces. Jane, a participant form the US attending university in Nova Scotia, explains what happened after her tuition went up more than 15% in two years:

> I actually participated in the tuition consultation process and I felt like most of us students were mostly just blown away or confused about how it would all work in the future and if it will increase again. Some of the students there were like me in that we have to worry about getting loans from back home and how can we get them, because we had already made agreements with banks, but we kind of had to if we wanted to stay. And I think people were kind of scared of what to do if we could not afford it. Do we go back home? Do we drop out of school? It was scary.

Tuition fees have been steadily rising for international students across the country, with the notable exception of Newfoundland and Labrador, where neither domestic nor international rates went up between 2011-2012 (AAU Tuition and Residence Fees, 2012). The rise disproportionably affects the disadvantaged students who rely on loans and part-time work for financial stability in Canada.

Given these serious financial pressures, the vast majority of participants were looking for work and many had taken up minimum wage service jobs. Students often voiced dissatisfaction with the quality and number of jobs available to them. Xenia, a participant from the Middle East who holds a BA and is in a Masters program in Nova Scotia explains:

When I came here I applied for 56 jobs and still barely got any work.

How did you find these jobs?

On the Dalhousie website, on the Saint Marty's University website. I applied to everything…I remember that after the [economic] sanctions [imposed on my country] I was under a lot of pressure and I knew I had to work. So I worked at this restaurant. I was eating there one time and told them I am looking for a job so they told me they need me…I only worked at the weekends and would make about 60 bucks a weekend.

Hana, a participant from China studying in Prince Edward Island tells us how her job became hazardous to her health at times:

Do you work here [in PEI]?

No, I would like very much to work here [in PEI] because I think I am going to be a good worker, but I just don't know how to find a job. Last summer I tried very hard and I called a lot of restaurants, asking if I can clean the floor or do any work for them.

Were those restaurants Chinese?

Yes, all of my friends who have a job, work in the Chinese restaurants. I don't know why is very hard for us to get a job in the native companies. We all called the native companies a lot but nobody reply to hire us. In the end I find a job that is in Chinese restaurant. Unfortunately the job required me to carry a lot of very heavy things and I decide to quit because it is too dangerous for me.

Are you also looking for a job on campus?

Yes, but so far I did not find any.

The challenge of reaching out to local employers has been reputedly mentioned in our stakeholders' sample as an area where more work is needed. Some universities have already initiated programs to address this, as will be further discussed in the section on support from universities.

Social Exclusion
The overwhelming majority of students in our sample indicated their closest friends to be fellow international students, and many rely primarily on co-nationals for friendship and support. However, we observed that most were unhappy due to their inability to make Canadian friends. Qi, a male student from China, in his fifth year of study in Nova Scotia explains:

25

For me it's not only about getting a university degree and that's it. I also want to learn about the people here, their culture, for me that is also the important part…I want to know more and get more experience with the community, more communication with the local people.

The significance of understanding Canadian culture by socializing with Canadians was previously documented by Ong (1999), who points to the importance of cross-cultural fluency for China's expanding corporations. However, students in our sample also pointed to the importance of such cross-cultural friendships as steps towards Canadian settlement and belonging. Mei, a first year participant from China studying in Nova Scotia says:

It is easy to find Chinese friends here [at university in Nova Scotia] and they are my close friends, but I cannot find Canadian friends. I hope I can find close Canadian friends, that when I am upset I can talk to.

Why do you think that is important to you?

Because I hope that I can find a job or have a higher education here so I hope I can have friends not only Chinese, because you need to meet these kind of people [who are from here], not only Chinese, because I will be here after I graduate so I don't know how to say, but more from here, to be here…

The feeling that Canadian friends are somewhat elusive often came up in interviews, and seemed to be of concern to students from all backgrounds and cultures. Participants pointed to a variety of reasons for the disconnect. Language and cultural references were often mentioned. Hua, a Chinese recent graduate who had been in Nova Scotia for six years explains:

When your English is poor, not many Canadians will like to spend time with you. And as I understand it, there is not only the language barrier, but also a cultural barrier, so things you like will be different and that is why most of my friends are Chinese, still till this day, most of my friends are still Chinese.

Can you give me an example of cultural differences that you feel keep you apart?

Yes, for instance when you are with friends you talk about things you do in your spare time. Canadians watch hokey, but we don't even have hockey in China. We celebrate the Ring Festival but you do Christmas here, so there are less things in common between me and most Canadians compared to me and my Chinese friends, so I made more Chinese friends.

Cultural conceptualizations of friendship also have an impact. Khai, a participant from the Middle East studying in Prince Edward Island for more than three years, makes the following observation:

> I still struggle until now to make friends with Canadian students. But maybe it depends on how you define friendship. Because I know a lot of Canadian students, and I see them in class and all I can say is 'Hi, how are you?' but we'd never meet up, hang out. That may be to me an associate, but not a friend. A friend for me would be somebody you may talk to, not necessarily on a daily basis but you have that friendship bond. You ask about each other, sit, have a chat together, help each other out when you are down.

The importance of meaningful relationships and friendship to social identity and belonging for immigrants has been documented at length in ethnographic studies (Hoerder, 2005; Chow, 2007), with some potent regional examples (Tastsoglou and Dobrowolsky, 2006). Given this reality, opportunities for cross-cultural communication and friendship should become an integral part of conversations about successful campus internationalization and settlement programming.

Support at Universities

Most participants in our sample stated they were happy with their programs and academic results. Eleven participants (or 32%) mentioned they had sought support form their university on various issues. The issue of getting students to seek support had been brought up at some university centers, as advisors seek new ways to make students aware of available programming. Nonetheless, many students in our sample indicated they tend to seek support through their social networks (mostly other international students) or by using the Internet, rather than visiting campus support offices.

Of those who told us they did try to access support at their university, two had sought emergency financial aid, five had asked for counseling, mediation in legal disputes or help with finding part-time employment, while four others had sought English language help.

The two students who sought financial aid did not get it, for various reasons, some outlined in the previous section of this paper. Of the five students who had attempted to access counseling or part-time employment support from their international student office, all but one had received the necessary support. Particularly participants in Newfoundland praised a campus program that gives financial incentives to on-campus employers who hire international students. Franca, a student from Europe describes the program and her interactions with university staff and faculty:

> Fantastic! Fantastic…just such a supportive environment…I don't have to worry that much about money, which is nice because before I would spend more time trying to find a job and keep a job than study…

It is important to note that resources made available to International Student Offices, and consequently their ability to provide aid to students, varies greatly across the region. Although resources are stretched at all institutions, Memorial University and Dalhousie University have built operational teams of more than five advisors each. At Memorial, the provincial government is also involved in funding programming for international students, and, as Franca's statement shows, the supportive nature of the programming there does make a positive difference for the students.

Meanwhile, at other institutions in the region, including the University of Prince Edwards Island (500 international students), Saint Thomas University (100 international students) and the University of New Brunswick, Fredericton Campus (close to 2,000 international students) rely on only two full-time advisors for all inquiries and needs, from visa guidance to career counseling or daily issues, such as finding apartments or getting socials insurance numbers (Chira and Belkhodja, 2012).

Students are aware and understanding of those limitations and five participants in our sample had made the decision to volunteer to fill various service gaps at their universities. Khai, a male participant from the Middle East in Prince Edward Island explains:

> The international student center has been there for all of us, and some processes were very difficult for me because it was confusing, a lot of requirements, but once I learned how to do it, it got easier… I am trying to learn from it and help the people [other international students] I can. I see how they are doing, are they going to class? Are they missing their family? Can I organize events for people who cannot go back home for Christmas break? Keep more contact with people, see what they need.

Laurie, a female participant from China studying in Nova Scotia shares a similar story:

> *How come you decided to volunteer [to help other international students]?*

> I don't know, it was because when I got here people helped me a lot…my English was very bad and all the resources the school had, they helped me. Then I think if they help me, they help a lot of students, so then I thought I can volunteer so I can help them help others.

Laurie was one of the students in our sample who had sought English support after arriving in Nova Scotia. Three other students in our sample also had actively sought additional support with English. Laurie was one of two participants who described their English as 'bad', and in both cases, the students had received support. However, in the other two cases, the students had an intermediate language competency and had difficulty finding aid appropriate to their skill level. Xenia, a participant from the Middle East in a Humanities and Social Sciences program explains:

It was very hard overall, because my English was not perfect and I always had to go to the writing center…even though I was teaching ESL back home and even though I got a good score on the IELTS [International English Language Testing System].

Did you ever go to the International student center?

I did about my English. They sent me to the writing center and the writing center was not helpful…it's only half an hour of help twice a week. There was an ESL class and I went there, but it was mostly people who could not even pronounce the words…not a blame on them, but my English was much much better than them, so I left the class.

Mika, another female participant in a Science field from the Middle East has a similar story:

I understand you have the TOEFL exam as a standard, but I passed that exam and my grade was high enough. So I am not talking here about not understanding things in class, but it's a big difference between putting somebody in front of a book and putting them in front of an exam…I kind of needed more time to read and process things, especially during exams. So I was looking to find a way to maybe get a little bit more time on the exams, just so I didn't have to worry as much. So I went to the Accessibility office but they cannot help unless you have a disability. They sent me to Advising who then sent a letter to the Accessibility Office for help, but that wasn't enough because it wasn't a registered disability. So then I went to the International Students' Office and they told me 'oh, yes, that is a problem, we keep hearing about it, but sorry there is nothing we can do about it'…

We point to these student's experiences to highlight a need for differentiated language support. Language and soft skills are often cited by local employers across Atlantic Canada as a barrier to the smooth integration of international graduates in the local workforce (Chira and Belkhodja, 2012). Local settlement NGOs generally offer an array of specialized language support, and may thus be valuable resource centers to international students in the cases where educational institutions cannot provide more differentiated support. For example, Immigrant Settlement and Integration Services (ISIS) in Halifax offers English for professionals, including for professions such as Engineering, Banking and Finance and other specializations. In the current policy set-up students cannot access those services, but recent talks with universities may mean more cooperation in the future between those institutions. Our data corroborates the need for more such collaborative relationships.

Next Steps: Settlement Plans and Obstacles

Settlement Intent: Some Considerations

Recent ethnographic studies have pointed to international education as a means of fulfilling long-term immigration strategies for families in different countries (Olwig, 2007; Ley, 2010). In our

sample, 16 of the 35 students noted that they had decided to immigrate to Canada at the time they were looking for schools (46%) and eleven more said they decided to immigrate after experiencing life in Canada, bringing the total number of participants hoping to immigrate to 27 (77%). These numbers are somewhat consistent with previous national and regional survey findings pertaining to migration decisions. Nationally, in 2009 the Canadian Bureau of International Education surveyed over 6,000 international students across Canada and found that 51% intended to apply for permanent residence. Regionally, in 2005, Lebrun and Rebelo surveyed 135 students across at major Atlantic universities and found that 67% were interested in applying for permanent residence. In our study, we were able to further qualify participants' decisions to settle or migrate. Table 4 summarizes some trends related to further migration plans observed in our sample.

Table 4: Next Steps for International Students in our Sample

Decision	Impact of family[2]	Impact of length of stay in province	Number of participants (N= 35)	Distribution of participants
Stay in province of graduation	Alone 2	After < Three Years 3	8	4 NS
				2 NB
	With family 6	After > Three Years 5		2 NL
Move to big city in Canada	Alone 13	After < Three Years 12	17	5 NB
				5 PEI
	With family 4	After > Three Years 5		4 NL
				3 NS
Move back to home country	Alone 5	After < Three Years 4	6	2 NB
				2 PEI

---

[2] In this instance, we report on family that has already joined the participant in Canada, as well as the participant's expectations that family from back home or family that has already immigrated will join the participant in the province of graduation or a big city in Canada. Participants in the 'alone' category are unattached and do not expect to join or be joined by family in Canada.

	With family **1**	After > Three Years **2**		1 NL
				1 NS
Move to third country	Alone **3**	After < Three Years **3**	**4**	2 NS
				1 NL
	With family **1**	After > Three Years **1**		1 PEI

As Table 4 indicates, participants who had accompanying family or who expected family to join them in Canada, were more likely to seek long-term settlement in the province of their studies. This was especially true of students who had accompanying spouses and young children, as they generally praised Atlantic Canada as a quiet and safe place, 'great for kids'. Even when children were not present, having a spouse successfully integrated into the local labour market was a very compelling reason for settlement. Mika, a participant in Halifax explains:

> Now he's been working there [engineering company in Halifax] for three years. He has the highest level of education in that company. So now I love it here. Initially we wanted to move to BC but now we don't see that happening. I find that with men, they are more difficult to adjust, so if he is good here, he is happy here and he found something here, I'll figure it out.

Family support is only currently offered in Newfoundland and Labrador, where two participants in our study had accessed or were planning to access the support and praised its existence. In Prince Edward Island and Nova Scotia families were not included in settlement programming, while in New Brunswick such support had been offered for years but has been cut in 2012. A settlement expert explains the new system:

> We had convinced our funders that it's not only the international students, it's also their spouses. Because this is a group of people who is very isolated, many of them with wonderful skills to contribute... We also worked with them so that they can find work and employment. So our concern was who takes them over. But now the university has taken on some of these challenges, we hope…But students still come here, so it will be a while still. They come here because they have incredible networks of students who tell them where the help is. So we have to refer them back, but in some cases, where students are here but had gone to a university that is in our province but not in our city, what can we do then?

Our sample clearly indicates that family members who are not adjusted or are not expected to adjust in a smaller Canadian center are a big settlement deterrent. We observed this with participants with spouses as well as participants who were hoping to have parents join them permanently in Canada. Adi, a participant from South Asia studying in PEI speaks to both issues:

> We don't have many social gatherings, that's the one thing we are really missing. But otherwise it's small, it's nice, it's good especially when you are studying because you can focus more. My wife [who holds a Masters degree in a professional field]...she just complains. She is now working in [department store such as Walmart or Zellers]. She could only get night shift....I will go back [to my home country] and start my own business and it will be more satisfactory, not monetary wise, but for our lives.
>
> *Would they [your parents and siblings] consider moving here?*
>
> No because they would be totally isolated here. They are enjoying their lives there...
>
> *How did you describe PEI to them?*
>
> It's not that bad. I have no complaints. Just that my wife gets sad.

Interestingly, Adi uses his wife's settlement experiences as an indication of potential settlement success for extended family. He assumes his extended family will likely also be isolated, and this deters him from seeking long-term settlement in PEI.

As noted before, four participants had brought partners with them, and two had come with parents to Atlantic Canada. Six more participants hoped to bring family members to Canada once they had graduated. Five were hoping parents would join, and one was hoping to help a sibling immigrate. Four of the five who wanted to bring parents indicated they would like to move to bigger cities where parents would have better chances to socialize and find work, often through ethnic communities.

As with Adi, mistrust in settlement or employment opportunities for family was always informed by personal experiences with limited job markets and socializing opportunities. We found those previous experiences with social isolation and unfulfilling employment to act as strong deterrents from long-term settlement regionally and sometimes even nationally. It is important to highlight that we discussed with our participants intentions for long-term settlement as well as permanent residence intentions, as those were not always synonymous. Five participants noted that their permanent residence applications were a way to secure longer-term work opportunities, but that they eventually would like to (or are expected to) return to their home country, mainly because of perceived lack of social integration and expectations to care for aging parents who were perceived as unwilling or unable to join them in Canada. For three other participants, getting permanent residence was seen as a way to gain long-term access to the Canadian labour market and work to offset expenses accrued during their years of Canadian education, but that they did not expect to have a career in Canada.

In general it seemed the longer a participant studied at a location, the more incentives they would find to attempt settlement. However, as shown in Table 4, larger Canadian center such as Toronto, Vancouver and Calgary topped the list of desirable destinations, especially for students who had been in Atlantic Canada for less than 3 years. This reality was also observed by policy strategists in Newfoundland and Labrador, who have decided to attempt retention through targeting this issue in their policies and supports. A policy expert explains:

> I think most [international students] come with the idea to get their schooling [in Newfoundland] and move on [to bigger centers] but I think their decision to stay [in Newfoundland] is made during their school years. Because the main incentive at our university is going to a top rated school for very little tuition, because our university had a very comparatively low tuition rate for Canada. So the main reason to come here is to get that quality education. But if in your years here you become integrated into the community and start to see things you may enjoy here, than you may be swayed to stay here and look for a job. But not many people come to school here to live here. So that's why we have programs in place that help change their mind and show them the benefits of living in this area, slow pace, low cost of living, friendly people.

Newfoundland and Labrador has a very successful International Graduate Stream through their Provincial Nominee Program. Preliminary data to be published by the Office of Immigration in that province indicates their long-term retention rates are improving.

However, the situation in Newfoundland and Labrador is unique in the Atlantic region. In Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island, International Graduate Streams, which had been in place since 2008 and 2011 respectively, have closed down in 2013, and settlement support for international graduates remains minimal in all provinces except Newfoundland and Labrador. New Brunswick cut its settlement and job market integration program for students in 2012, after more than four years of operation. Nova Scotia settlement agencies are still operating some supports but they were funded as pilot programs and will end in March 2013. Prince Edward Island never specifically funded support for students through their settlement sector, as settlement issues are currently tackled by a limited staff at the local university. This situation clearly has an impact on graduates' willingness and ability to attempt settlement.

Settlement Success: Additional Barriers

Recent data shows that only about 5% of international students in Atlantic Canada actually gain permanent residence (van Huystee, 2011), while in 2008 only about 10,000 students transitioned to permanent residence in Canada as a whole (World Education Services, 2010). This data highlights the reality that strong intent rarely translates into reality as students encounter many obstacles on their path. Employment remains a main concern, as all permanent residence pathways require at least one year of full-time employment for application, with the exception of PhD candidates in their 3rd year of

study. The discrepancy between strong intentions and success rates makes international students at risk of transitioning to undocumented status in Canada (Goldring and Landolt, 2012).

As noted before, our sample included four students who had recently graduated from universities in Atlantic Canada (one in PEI, one in NB and two in NS). All graduates were intent on immigrating, and two, the PhDs who graduated in Nova Scotia, had already secured permanent status, one as a citizen and one as a permanent resident. The citizen had spent a year looking for jobs locally but had eventually relocated to a bigger center. The remaining PhD graduate had not yet found a job and was considering a move as well, although his priority was local settlement. Reiterating the importance of social networks in finding employment (Boyd, 1989; Reitz, 2007), a number of participants pointed to the difficulty of actually finding adequate employment without social support in the Atlantic region. Mika, a participant from the Middle East, whose husband is trained in Europe as an engineer explains:

> As an engineer he [my husband] could not find a job. Even Superstore would not hire him because they told him he was over-qualified. In Halifax it's extremely difficult to find a job if you don't know somebody who knows somebody. And we learned that the really hard way…. So he had to return to his previous job in [Europe], and then in [Europe] he met somebody who knew somebody who owned a company here. So when he came back, he went recommended to the manager through an email. And although he had submitted his resume to that company twice in the 6 months he was in Halifax before, just from reading that email the manager said 'Oh, we need that guy here!'

Mariah, a BA of Business who graduated in Prince Edward Island, also experienced some difficulties in finding a position post-graduation. After working in a call center in Prince Edward Island for a few months, she had eventually relocated elsewhere in the Atlantic region. Her difficulty with finding employment is highly problematic as she had glowing references, great grades and was fully bilingual in English and French. She was also a visible minority, originating from an African country, and noted she had experienced discrimination. She explains:

> Even when I worked at the call center, people would ask 'where are you from?'. Even when I speak in French, because it's the French from France and they can recognize it and when I say I am from Africa, they always say 'how come you speak French that way?'…I will also say that it is discrimination when you are smart and you can do things but you don't get the chance to do things because you are different. For example, my part time job I had… I can see that it took a while for them to trust me.

Mariah wasn't the only one to tie accents and language proficiency to feelings of belonging and fears of discrimination. Laurie, a female participant from China studying in Nova Scotia shares a similar story:

[At my internship in a big Canadian city such as Vancouver, Toronto or Montreal] I worked for a [new immigrant] who understood me. English is not his first language and English is not my first language and he was extremely helpful, it was like my English was enough for them, but maybe not enough for native speakers…that's why I couldn't find a job in Halifax…

So, you mean you searched for jobs locally and nobody was hiring?
They are hiring but I am not getting interviews. The job market in Halifax was bad for me, even for internships.

Participants also noted feeling confused, discouraged or experiencing difficulty with the permanent residence application process. Some connected the discomfort to the lack of access and support in navigating the immigration system. Mariah, one of our participants residing in New Brunswick, explains:

So now is your plan to immigrate to Canada?

Now it is, yes. Because I have a good job here, but if I do immigrate, my God it will be a lot of work!

So did you look into how you may immigrate?

I haven't looked at that yet. I know we can because we had talks at the university, but now that I graduated, I feel I still need somebody to help me and tell me where to go and what to do…I have been trying by myself to find information online, and I know that because I have a skilled worker position, I can apply today and I know it's time for me to apply, but I really don't know where to go. I don't know anybody here. I have been asking for immigration services here and I went online to look for phone numbers to call, but I know there is not service here where I could go. I wish I had a service here to go to. That would be very helpful.

This participant's case is particularly telling as she has no actual support to rely on. Settlement agencies in the province she moved to are not in a position to help her and nor is the local university because she graduated in another province. Her experiences, much like the experiences of her peers with job-market and settlement barriers, make a strong case for opening settlement support to international students and graduates. However, 2013 has seen consistent cuts to all settlement support services for these groups and to localized immigration support in general. While CIC offices have not been open to the public for several years now, local students and graduates could still access provincial government support for their immigration cases. This has also ended in Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island, while in New Brunswick, the Provincial Nominee Program for International Graduates is employer driven. This makes it highly challenging to access due to specific requirements which include an employment market analysis to prove a local shortage in the employment area the applicant is working in, two years work experience and proof of permanent settlement intentions illustrated by signing a form of commitment

to the province and paying a fee of $250. Given these constraints, most students would seem to have an easier path through federal programming, but then again, minimal support is provided in navigating that system.

Conclusions and Policy Recommendations

This study has found that international students in Atlantic Canada are generally attracted to universities in the region by comparatively low tuition and cost of living rates, institutional agreements such as the 'Two Plus Two' programs, as well as social networks that provide potential migrants with support and confidence, thus laying the foundations of migration chains (Fong, 2011; Massey, Durand and Malone, 2002). Students are also attracted by policies that allow them to work during and after their studies, and which provide accompanying family with work permits as well. This is particularly important as many students attracted by cheaper tuition and living costs seem to be more financially vulnerable. The situation has been exacerbated by lack of funding support for international students at the local universities and the escalating costs of tuition that took place in the Atlantic region in recent years. In our sample, 60% of participants either supplement or fully fund their tuition and stay in Canada through part-time jobs or co-op placements, and use the post-graduation work opportunities to pay back loans taken up for education. However, we found that financial vulnerability also made student more susceptible to precarious work arrangements, as most took up minimum wage, menial labour.

Our data also indicates that students encounter some obstacles in entering the Atlantic Canadian labour market post-graduation, as many find networks of employment that are not open to them, and in some cases, they report being discriminated against based on race, accents or being international. Moreover, we found that negative experiences with social isolation and limited availability and quality of jobs during their studies impact further decisions to attempt settlement locally or nationally, mostly acting as deterrents in students' settlement in the Atlantic region. Thus, in our sample only about 23% of participants hoped to settle locally, while about 49% had decide to attempt settlement in a bigger Canadian center. Notably, the financial efforts made to pay for tuition and costs of living sometimes encourage graduates to seek employment in provinces where careers are perceived to be easier to access and salaries are higher. However, students who bring family and children or who live in Atlantic Canada longer than three years are more likely to attempt settlement locally, although even in these predicaments, many still decide to leave the region due to labour market and social barriers.

Like many studies before (CBIE 2009; Lebrun and Rebelo 2005), we found that many students intend to apply for permanent residence. In our sample, this was as high as 77% of participants. However, we also found that permanent residence is not synonymous to permanent settlement regionally or nationally, as some students saw permanent residence as a way to prolong work privileges in Canada, yet did want to settle or feel confident they would be able to find adequate long-term employment in Canada. Moreover, as national statistics continue to indicate (World Education Services, 2009), most students encounter difficulties in turning their intentions to immigrate into reality. In our

sample, even participants who qualified to immigrate doubted they would be able to do so due to unstable labour markets and lack of confidence in navigating the Canadian immigration system. Recent cuts to settlement and immigration support greatly contribute to this. In Prince Edwards Island and New Brunswick, the local settlement agencies are not mandated to work with international students, while in Nova Scotia some support has been made available through pilot programs, which will come to and end in the spring of 2013. Moreover, Prince Edwards Island and Nova Scotia have recently closed their Provincial Nominee Programs to international graduates, thus ending local support and guidance in navigating the immigration system. While New Brunswick still has its Provincial Nominee Program open to international graduates, challenging requirements make that program less likely to be accessed by local graduates.

The notable exception is the province of Newfoundland and Labrador, where the provincial government has paid significant attention to settlement support and access to immigration pathways for incoming international students. Newfoundland and Labrador continues to welcome international graduates to its Provincial Nominee Program, and their requirements are designed to be complementary and to the advantage of local applicants dedicated to building a life in this province. Students in this province accessed programming and reported being more confident in their abilities to access the local labour market and eventually settle in the province. However, the size of the city deterred some from making that decision.

Given these findings, we recommend the continued support for settlement and career building for international students and graduates in the Atlantic Provinces. Given the region's ongoing investments in the recruitment and attraction of international talent (Chira, 2011), as well as the dire demographic crisis looming (Denton, Feaver and Spender, 1998; Statistics Canada, 2012), continuing on the path of cutting settlement support and programming is unlikely to serve the long-term economic and social goals of the Atlantic Provinces.

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AMC Working Papers Series - Guidelines

• What are the AMC Working Papers?

The AMC's Working Papers Series is related to the broad mandate of the Metropolis Project. The Working Papers produced by the Atlantic Metropolis Centre are designed to: (1) speed up the dissemination of research results relevant to the interests and concerns of Metropolis researchers, policy-makers, NGOs; (2) allow for an avenue where Metropolis researchers in the Atlantic region can disseminate research and information specific to immigration, migration, integration and diversity in Atlantic Canada.

• Will these be considered "official" publications?

The inclusion of a manuscript in the Working Papers Series does not preclude, nor is it a substitute for its subsequent publication in a peer reviewed journal. In fact, we would encourage authors to submit such manuscripts for publication in professional journals (or edited books) as well.

• What subject content is acceptable?

The Working Paper Series welcomes research reports and theoretical discussions relevant to the mandate of the Metropolis Project, providing insight into the policy concerns not only of immigration and integration, but also ethnocultural diversity.

Examples of areas of research include: economic, political, cultural, and educational integration of immigrants, migrants and refugees; language; transnationalism; gender and/or immigrant women; ethnic, cultural, and religious diversity; multiculturalism; social and family networks; social discourses, attitudes and values; youth; identity; citizenship; temporary migration; justice and security; settlement programs and policy; health and well-being; and human rights.

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La publication de la *Série de documents de recherche* répond en fait aux objectifs généraux du Centre Métropolis Atlantique, en ce qu'elle favorise (1) la dissémination rapide de la recherche pertinente aux intérêts et aux besoins des intervenants académiques, gouvernementaux et communautaires affiliés au Centre, (2) et la création d'un espace de diffusion où les chercheurs rattachés au projet en Atlantique peuvent faire connaître leurs travaux et tout autre information pertinente à l'immigration et à la diversité culturelle en Atlantique.

• Ces textes peuvent-ils considérés comme une publication finale et officielle?

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