

# Overview: North-South Student Mobility in Canada's Universities

The Voice of Canada's Universities



By: Dr. Rebecca Tiessen, Associate Professor  
School of International Development and Global Studies, University of Ottawa

Dr. Kate Grantham, Postdoctoral Researcher, School of International  
Development and Global Studies, University of Ottawa

January 2017



---

## Introduction: Papers on North-South Student Mobility in Canada's Universities

International student mobility builds a generation of globally engaged, inter-connected young people. Mobility students develop the cross-cultural and problem-solving skills that are required in today's job market.

In 2012-13, only 3.1% of full-time undergraduate students in Canada chose to study abroad (Universities Canada 2014). Even fewer participate in international learning in the Global South. However, 97% of Canadian universities offer international experiences and an increasing number of these are offered in the Global South.

Increasing student mobility is a priority for Canadian universities. This collection of short papers explores the opportunities and challenges involved in meeting that goal. They focus specifically on Canadian university North-South student mobility. The accompanying infographics are intended to summarize, at a glance, the recommendations and innovative practices cited in the research papers.

Each paper focuses on a key topic in North-South mobility, and each can be read in around 10 minutes. The papers were commissioned by Universities Canada and were researched and written by consultants Dr. Rebecca Tiessen and Dr. Kate Grantham between February and August 2016. This work was made possible by a grant from the International Development Research Centre.

### Target audience, purpose and topics

These papers are meant as practical tools to help guide decision-making and administration of North-South student mobility programs. They build on existing information, and synthesize key information on six topics of interest in North-South mobility:

1. Ethical considerations for North-South mobility that should be addressed in student pre-departure training;
2. How Canadian universities are encouraging student participation and overcoming funding barriers in North-South mobility programs;
3. Challenges of measuring and evaluating university mobility programs, and strategies for improving measurement and evaluation practice;

This document is part of a series of papers that were researched and written by consultants Dr. Rebecca Tiessen and Dr. Kate Grantham from February to August 2016. 20 administrators and faculty members at 14 Canadian universities were interviewed for this project. This work was carried out with the aid of a grant from the International Development Research Centre, Ottawa, Canada. The views expressed in this paper are those of the authors.



- 
4. How Canadian universities are encouraging faculty participation in North-South mobility programs;
  5. Important considerations for North-South institutional partnerships and innovative practices used at Canadian universities.

The purpose of the papers is:

1. To highlight the key findings from interviews with 20 North-South student mobility co-ordinators and faculty at 14 universities across Canada.
2. To share innovative practices and interesting opportunities for improving or enhancing North-South student mobility options.
3. To provide direction for additional resources or materials that may be used to improve North-South student mobility programming within universities in Canada.
4. To highlight the important issues and debates on particular themes and issues.
5. To document the experiences of North-South student mobility co-ordinators.

The papers are targeted at Canadian university mobility program administrators (including International Liaison Officers, program managers and coordinators); faculty members who are involved in student mobility programs; and students at Canadian universities.

### **Definitions of “Global South” and “North-South student mobility”**

The focus the papers is North-South mobility, whereby Canadian students travel to countries in the “Global South” for educational purposes including studying, doing practicum placements (co-op, volunteer, experiential learning) or combining study and practicum work. The “Global South” is a contested term but is used here to describe the countries that have low overall Gross National Product (GNP) and are defined by the Human Development Index (HDI) as low-income nations where human development indicators are weak, reflected in high levels of inequality, poverty and insecurity.

The term “Global South” is employed to reinforce the challenge of separating countries into “haves” and “have-nots” or rich and poor, since there is also immense inequality within countries. In other words, one can find elements of the “North” (a short-hand for economic prosperity and higher levels of social equality) in the “Global South” just as one will find elements of the “South” (a short-hand for poverty, inequality, insecurity) within the Global North. Throughout this collection of papers, the term North-South mobility is used as a short-hand for Canadian students travelling to countries deemed “less developed” or “least developed” in the Human Development Index. It is an imperfect term because it does not capture the complexity of real-world diversity. However, it is a useful way of explaining an important phenomenon of learning abroad that has specific ethical, political and educational considerations.



---

## Defining student mobility

A North-South student mobility program is any opportunity for a student to study or learn in the Global South as a component of their degree program—whether undergraduate or graduate.

The term “learn abroad” encompasses studying in classrooms in other countries or in field school programs, as well as learning through practicum placements, volunteer programs and other applied or work-oriented learning experiences (such as co-op or clinical placements) which contribute to the educational portfolio of the student (whether for credit or skills development).

The host country partners referred to throughout the papers generally include universities, but local non-governmental organizations, community-based organizations or communities may also be partners.

North-South student options range from short-term intensive field placements (1-6 weeks) to year-abroad programs. Four categories of student mobility are important for understanding North-South student mobility program options offered within universities in Canada:

- **Study abroad** includes a wide range of course-related programs geared to expanding options for degree-seeking students. They include exchanges, field studies courses offering credit as well as study-abroad courses in the host university in another country. These activities can sometimes occur under the supervision of a Canadian professor or of a faculty member of a partner institution. Examples of study abroad options at Canadian universities are numerous; they include University of Guelph's India Semester and University of Alberta's Southern African Field School in African Ecology and Marine Ecology.
- **Hybrid study/work abroad programs** are a combination of classroom learning and practicum work (study abroad plus field placements, research, volunteer work, etc.). Examples of this can be found in a number of international development studies programs such as the Dalhousie semester-long program in Cuba or the Trent University programs in Ecuador and Ghana.
- **Internships, international service learning, practicum placements or volunteer/work placements** are programs that may or may not have an academic work component or university credits attached to them (these may include university-organized internships abroad and international co-op placements, among a range of work/volunteer/learn abroad programs co-ordinated through public and private volunteer-sending organizations but recognized by post-secondary institutions). Examples of international internship programs include the University of Ottawa's Faculty of Social Science international internship program or the University of Waterloo's Master of Development Practice Field Placements. For additional information of some of the diverse North-South practicum placements available to Canadian students, visit: <https://www.casid-acedi.ca/ccupids/members>. International Service Learning is a subtype of field-study program in which the pedagogical focus is a placement in an activity that serves the needs of a community. The learning arises in large part from the acquisition of practical skills through immersion in a community or organization.



- 
- **Research abroad** involves research programs carried out by students as part of the educational requirements of study. North-South mobility for research is more common among graduate students. Periods of time for research abroad vary depending on the nature of the research. Students engaged in research abroad may or may not be affiliated with a partner or locally based university in the host country.

### Methodology

The research for these papers included a comprehensive review of the materials (practical guides, reports and scholarly material). A 2015 workshop and 2016 symposium on North-South student mobility, organized by Universities Canada, provided opportunities to consult with Canadian universities about relevant priority research topics. A literature review prepared by Universities Canada in February 2016 was an important guide for researching key material in greater depth while exploring research themes in closer detail. The methods used to conduct the research included a review of current literature and resources on mobility program evaluation. Many of the resources examined are included as endnotes or additional resources in the papers. Other documents included online pre-departure training materials (in total, eight pre-departure training guides from eight different universities were examined).

Also, interviews with 20 faculty members and international program administrators from 14 universities across Canada were conducted. Student mobility co-ordinators and faculty members at Canadian universities were invited to participate in an interview for the study at Universities Canada's North-South Student Mobility Symposium held in Montreal in February 2016. After viewing a short presentation outlining the study purpose and methodology, interested individuals were asked to provide their email address in order to be contacted for a phone or Skype interview during the summer of 2016.

This study received ethics approval from the Social Sciences and Humanities REB at the University of Ottawa.

### Study limitations

This is an exploratory study with a limited budget, time frame, and number of researchers and participants. While the study results provide no basis for generalization, the papers provide an overview of broad trends with reference to specific practices as effective examples of North-South student mobility programs taking place in Canada. They also identify important research gaps that warrant further study, including the need for an in-depth qualitative study identifying under-represented groups in student mobility in Canada, and the barriers they face in studying abroad, and a study that documents the range of student mobility training available at Canadian universities.



---

## Questions to accompany your reading of these papers

The following key questions can guide your analysis of your own effective practices. Consider how your university might adopt new practices, strategies, approaches and training to improve the North-South mobility experience for students, host partners and the host institution:

- 1. What are the effective practices or successful approaches used at your institution to facilitate North-South mobility programs?**
  - a. How do you prepare students to be ethically minded?
  - b. What innovative ways do you employ to evaluate and measure impacts of your programs?
  - c. What strategies for funding North-South mobility programs have been most effective?
  - d. What ways of involving faculty members and staff have yielded positive results?
  - e. What inventive strategies have you employed to facilitate improved student experiences (e-volunteering, research project support, internship program funding, better preparation and debriefing, etc.)?
  - f. How does your institution build and maintain partnerships with host institutions and what role do those partnerships play in improving student mobility options?
  
- 2. What have you learned from the effective practices at other institutions that could be applied to your own institution?**
  - a. What are the barriers to implementing these new practices and how might they be overcome?
  - b. What resources and support do you think are needed to actualize some of these innovative practices at your institution?
  
- 3. What are the advantages of improved data collection (concerning numbers and characteristics of students going abroad and their destinations)?**
  - a. What is the nature of the data collected at your institution?
  - b. What data would you benefit from collecting?
  - c. What tools or resources would be required to improve data collection and analysis?
  - d. How might better data collection improve program offerings?
  
- 4. How is pre-departure/debriefing training offered at your institution?**
  - a. Is the pre-departure training sufficient?
  - b. What are the challenges you face with pre-departure training?
  - c. How does pre-departure training differ across the institution (different programs having different methods of pre-departure training)?



- 
- d. What important aspects of pre-departure training are students not getting and why?
  - e. Do students receive a return orientation session after their North-South mobility placement?
  - f. What are the perceived advantages of improving pre-departure training and return orientations (in terms of students, the institutions and partners)?

**5. What are the financial challenges you encounter in supporting quality student mobility programs?**

- a. How do financial barriers affect students and which students are most affected?
- b. How do financial barriers affect the nature of your partnerships?
- c. What innovative strategies has your institution used in the past to overcome financial challenges experienced by students or staff?
- d. What are the different funding models (government programs, resources, internal strategies) you can use to improve options for low-income students?
- e. How can these funding models be utilized to meet the financial challenges of students from the Global South wishing to study in Canada?

**Additional readings and sources**

Global Affairs Canada. 2016. "Studying Abroad", Accessed online on August 4, 2016 at: <https://travel.gc.ca/travelling/living-abroad/studying>

Globe and Mail. 2012. "University leaders want more Canadians to study abroad", by James Bradshaw, February, 2, 2012. Accessed online on August 4, 2016 at: <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/university-leaders-want-more-canadians-to-study-abroad/article543333/>

Universities Canada. 2016. "Why do so many Canadian students refuse to study abroad?" by Tim Johnson, May 25, 2016, Accessed online on August 4, 2016 at: <http://www.universityaffairs.ca/features/feature-article/staying-home-study-abroad/>

Universities Canada. 2014. "Universities: Facts and Stats". Accessed online on August 4, 2016 at: <http://www.univcan.ca/universities/facts-and-stats/>

Verge Magazine. 2011. "Are These the Top 10 Cities for Studying Abroad?", by Zalina Alvi, March 2, 2011. Accessed online on August 4, 2016 at <http://www.vergemagazine.com/travel-intelligence/editors-desk/556-are-these-the-top-10-cities-for-studying-abroad?.html>

Cover photo courtesy of Nayantara Malloy, participant in the *Students for Development* program in 2009.