

Comprehensive International Student Supports

Comprehensive support for international students is crucial for their success and well-being, covering all aspects from pre-arrival to post-graduating. In examining academic satisfaction and the intention to continue studying among international students, researchers have emphasized the importance of considering various factors, such as individual, social, academic, cultural, and institutional support systems (Gopalan et al., 2019). Overall, the research emphasizes the importance of taking a holistic approach to supporting international students. This includes addressing pre-arrival, academic, social, and post-graduation aspects to ensure their educational success and smooth transitions. We recognize that student support is dynamic and not linear. The adaptation of Alf Lizzio's Student Life Cycle offers a structured framework for organizing the stages and engagements of the international student journey.

A well-designed support system is more than just a tool; it serves as a roadmap for academic institutions to consistently deliver tailored and comprehensive support to their students. It outlines the essential steps necessary to welcome, integrate, and



develop international students. The goal is to equip them with the necessary resources to succeed academically, socially, and professionally throughout their educational journey and beyond. Workshop participants can utilize this document as a worksheet to assess the support systems within their own institutions. It provides guiding questions to determine areas that are working well, identify potential gaps, and foster the creation of resources and effective practices to promote ongoing dialogue and advance resource development within institutions.

This document focuses on general international student populations, recognizing that international students are not a homogeneous group and institutions need to exercise caution if they provide resources and supports from a one-size-fits-all approach (*El Masri & Khan, 2022*). International students have diverse needs, multiple perspectives, and come from a variety of backgrounds and lived experiences, therefore they need tailored approaches to help them thrive in post-secondary environments.

Stages and Engagements of the International Student Journey

TRANSITION TOWARDS

- » Pre-decision and recruitment
- » Admission and enrolment
- » Pre-arrival



TRANSITION IN

- » Immigration and settlement
- » Arrival
- » Orientation



TRANSITION BEYOND

- » Completion & Graduation
- » Post-study: Career & Alumni Engagement



TRANSITION THROUGH

- » Intercultural engagement
- » Academic support
- » Social life and community
- » Wellbeing and mental health
- » Career support

TRANSITION TOWARDS

Pre-decision

The pre-decision stage is a critical opportunity for international students to engage with the institution and sets the stage for the future relationship between the student and the institution. During this stage international students and their families will develop their impressions of the institution and an understanding of what to expect.

QUESTIONS

1. How does the pre-decision stage for international students factor into the strategic enrolment planning of the institution?
2. How do pre-decision and recruitment practices account for the cultural and regional diversity of international students?
3. What is the assessment practice of website and social media content and how does this relate to ongoing feedback from students and their families? How does the institution ensure that the content is clear, accessible, and up to date?
4. How does the institution provide timely and accurate information for students and families?
5. Are the initial processes that new students must engage in easy to find and described with clarity (e.g., admission processes, housing applications, etc.)

Admission and Enrolment

Providing effective admission and enrolment management support is crucial for attracting, engaging, and retaining international students in post-secondary institutions. Pre-arrival resources and supports can play a crucial role in helping students and their families feel less anxious, more prepared, and more connected to the institution as they start their post-secondary journey. One of the primary objectives of this stage is to help students understand the essential tasks and procedures they need to complete before coming to Canada to begin their studies.

QUESTIONS

1. Which support services are offered to assist international students during the admission and enrolment process?
2. Is there personalized guidance and assistance to address the individual needs of international students?
3. Are our staff and faculty equipped with culturally appropriate skills to engage effectively with international students?
4. Is there regular evaluation and improvement of admission and enrolment support services for international students?

Pre-arrival

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QUESTIONS

1. Is there collaboration between the international student recruitment and the international student support teams to ensure consistent information and smooth transitions?
2. Is information available in multiple languages?
3. Are families considered when developing content and programming?



TRANSITION IN

Immigration and Settlement Support

Immigration and settlement supports are designed to assist students with the various challenges associated with relocating to a foreign country, such as navigating immigration procedures and regulations. This also includes finding suitable housing, accessing health insurance, acquiring a cell phone, cultural orientation, and the preliminary steps of socio-cultural engagement.



QUESTIONS

1. What are the principal stages involved in the immigration process for international students and how is the institution providing support for each stage?
2. Are information sessions conducted to inform international students about Canadian immigration policies, rules, and updates? How frequently are these sessions held, and what are the participation requirements for students?
3. How is information about immigration processes integrated into orientation programs for new international students?
4. Are there any resources or materials provided to assist students in navigating IRCC regulations and other settlement matters upon arrival?
5. How does the department keep students informed about changes or updates in Canadian immigration policies that may impact them during their studies? Are there regular communication channels or newsletters dedicated to immigration-related updates?

Arrival, Orientation, and Transitions (AOT) Stage

Orientation programs play a pivotal role in the success and institutional retention of international students, providing the foundation for their success and long-term retention. The first six to eight weeks after a student arrives are crucial to help the student have a smooth transition and begin to thrive in their new country and school. Institutions have an ethical responsibility in playing a proactive and active role in students' success. Arrival, orientation, and transition programs play a crucial role in building a sense of belonging.

QUESTIONS

1. What resources and strategies are in place to support international students' transition into the institution? How is information scaffolded to ensure effective timing and less stress?
2. Is there a collaborative approach to facilitating AOT with partners across campus?
3. What settlement supports and resources are in place?
4. How does the institution help students connect with communities and resources on and off campus?
5. How does the institution incorporate opportunities for peer-to-peer connections within the AOT programs and events?



TRANSITION THROUGH

Intercultural Engagement

Developing and fostering intercultural engagement is often seen as a way to build bridges between communities, enhance cooperation, and create a more inclusive society. It enriches the educational experience and prepares students for a globalized and interconnected world.



QUESTIONS

1. How can intersectionality be built into programs to recognize and address the ways in which racism intersects with other forms of oppression, such as sexism, homophobia, ableism, and classism?
2. How can staff members become more aware of their own cultural biases and assumptions that may impact their interactions with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds?
3. What steps can staff members take to create an inclusive environment where international students feel valued and respected for their cultural identities and contributions?
4. In what ways can staff members support international students in adapting to the Canadian academic and social environment while preserving their cultural identity?
5. How can staff members incorporate empathy into their support services and interactions with international students to build trust and rapport?



Academic Support

The academic success of international students is paramount to their post-secondary experience. Their academic performance can impact their mental health, social engagement, community and career opportunities, and life achievements post degree.

QUESTIONS

1. Which departments/units provide academic support at the institution?
2. What resources are in place to help international students understand and comply with academic integrity?
3. What resources are in place to support faculty and instructors in developing courses, building curriculum, and creating classroom environments conducive to international student learning and academic success?

Social Life and Community Engagement

Forming connections with peers and communities is integral to the experiences of international students in post-secondary institutions. It is crucial for both international and domestic students to engage in cross-cultural exchange, share perspectives, learn from each other, and establish meaningful networks, enriching their educational journey. It is imperative that international students are not only welcomed but also recognized as valuable contributors within these spaces.

QUESTIONS

1. How is the institution engaging domestic students and elevating a sense of responsibility for contributing to a campus environment that is welcoming and inclusive of international students?
2. How does the institution incorporate student voices and feedback into student support programming? What mechanisms are in place to ensure the accessibility and inclusivity of support services for international students? How does the institution create a variety of offerings to appeal to a broad group of students who may not otherwise engage?
3. How does the institution foster a sense of belonging and community among international students?
4. How does the institution collaborate with off campus community organizations to enhance social support resources for international students?
5. How does the institution promote cultural diversity and inclusivity within the campus community?



Wellbeing and Mental Health Supports

Studying in a new country can present numerous challenges for international students, encompassing cultural adjustments, language barriers, academic pressures, social integration, and unfamiliar healthcare systems. Mental health and wellness resources can aid international offices in recognizing these challenges and offering tailored support options to address them effectively.



QUESTIONS

1. How can we ensure that our services are accessible to international students (consider physical and neurodiverse accessibility, diverse language backgrounds, cultural difference, gender identity, and sexual orientation)?
2. How can we ensure that international students feel comfortable seeking support and accessing resources that are sensitive to their cultural backgrounds?
3. How can we support international students in advocating for their own needs and preferences within the university community?
4. In what ways can we expand our support services to address the holistic needs of international students, including academic, social, emotional, and cultural needs?
5. What initiatives can we implement to foster a sense of community and belonging among international students on campus and how can we create spaces and opportunities for international students to connect with each other, share experiences, and build relationships?

Career Supports for International Students

International students require career supports that are tailored to their diverse needs and recognize their different cultural backgrounds. Career supports for international students in British Columbia aim to provide comprehensive assistance to students in their career development and employment endeavours, both for those who choose to stay in Canada after their studies and for those who return to their home countries.

QUESTIONS

1. What are the specific goals, aspirations, and expectations of our international student population regarding their careers?
2. How can career supports be tailored to address the unique challenges and opportunities faced by international students in British Columbia?
3. What are the cultural and contextual factors that may impact how international students perceive and approach career development?
4. What are the prevailing labour market trends and future employment prospects for international students, both in Canada and globally?
5. How can we ensure that international students are equipped with the necessary skills, knowledge, and networks to navigate both local and international job markets?

TRANSITION BEYOND

Completion and Graduation Supports for International Students

Providing comprehensive support for international students during graduation and post-graduation enhances the reputation of the institution, fosters positive relationships with international students, prepares them to become successful alumni, and equips them with the skills and resources to excel in their chosen pathways, whether that be staying in Canada and BC or returning to their home countries.

QUESTIONS

1. How can we assist international students in understanding and navigating the immigration processes?
2. What resources can be provided to help international students meet program requirements and progress towards graduation?
3. How can institutions support international students in developing essential skills for academic success?
4. What strategies can be implemented to foster cultural integration and create a sense of belonging?
5. How can we align career development initiatives to meet the unique needs of international students, including those related to immigration?



Post-Study: Career and Alumni Engagement

Supporting international students during the post-study phase is crucial for their successful transition into the workforce (whether in Canada or abroad) as well as maintaining strong alumni connections. This phase includes career advancement, alumni engagement, and ongoing support to ensure that international students can make meaningful contributions to their chosen fields.



QUESTIONS

1. How can institutions effectively support international students in their post-study career advancement and job search processes?
2. What strategies and resources can be provided to help international students establish and maintain connections with alumni networks?
3. How can institutions collaborate with employers to create employment opportunities and secure relevant work experiences for international students?
4. What supports can be offered to international students to enhance their cross-cultural communication skills and adaptability in the workplace?
5. How can institutions encourage international students to embrace lifelong learning and continuous professional development in their chosen fields?