BCCIE
BC COUNCIL FOR INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION

The International Student Lifecycle
Stage 2 – Transition In

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE?

Foundational and Advanced Supports: This section outlines the core services and resources essential for addressing basic needs and facilitating smooth transitions throughout the student journey, with additional support strategies aimed at enhancing the student experience and promoting well-being.

Support and Resource Delivery Options: Practitioners are encouraged to consider a wide range of delivery options, including in-person, virtual, and asynchronous formats, to ensure accessibility and flexibility tailored to the preferences and needs of students.

Guiding Principles: Drawing from established principles in international education, the guiding principles section articulates core values and approaches that underpin effective support for international students. Practitioners are encouraged to apply these principles as guiding frameworks across all stages of the international student lifecycle to ensure consistent and student-centered support.

External Resources: This section highlights external resources, such as community organizations and government agencies, to supplement and enhance institutional support efforts.

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.

Foundational and Advanced Immigration Support

- **Study Permit Advising and Support:** Offer detailed information on the requirements, eligibility criteria, and necessary documentation for obtaining a study permit.
- **Documentation Guidance:** Help students prepare and organize documentation for study permit applications and extensions, co-op work permits, and post-graduation work permits, ensuring that all students are aware of the required documentation as per IRCC regulations.
- **Immigration Compliance:** Educate students about maintaining legal status in Canada, study permit conditions, visa extensions, and other immigration matters, ensuring compliance with Canadian laws.
- **General Visa Support:** Assist with temporary resident visas (TRVs), electronic travel authorizations (eTAs), and other relevant travel documents, simplifying international travel for students.
- **Post-Graduation Work Permit (PGWP) Advising, Including Escalated Support to Alumni:** Provide information on PGWP eligibility criteria and application processes, enabling eligible graduates to seamlessly transition to the workforce in Canada after completing their studies.
- **Immigration Workshops and Advising Sessions:** Organize workshops and information sessions on IRCC regulations and updates and other relevant topics, such as:
  - **Permanent Residency Programs:** Host representatives from the provincial and federal government to provide immigration updates. Representatives from the BC PNP and IRCC outline changes to their programs, offering updates of interest to students looking to remain in Canada.
  - **Get a Social Insurance Number (SIN):** Arrange for Service Canada agents to visit campus early in the term to provide SINs for eligible new students, allowing them to obtain their SINs on campus without travelling to a Service Canada office or applying online.
  - **Tax Filing for International Students:** Host Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) representatives to explain the tax filing system in Canada. Students can ask questions and learn about tax credits, tax agreements, and the tax process.
  - **Co-op Work Permit:** Provide information sessions on applying for the co-op work permit, including hands-on tutorials for the application process.

- **Integration with Academic Services:** Collaborate closely with faculties and other student advising services to streamline immigration processes with academic services. This allows students to concentrate on their studies without unnecessary bureaucratic challenges.
- **Emergency Immigration Support:** Offer holistic and administrative assistance for urgent immigration matters, including stakeholder engagement with IRCC representatives and the Canadian Border Services Agency (CBSA).
- **Connection to Legal Resources:** Inform students about available legal resources for escalated immigration concerns, ensuring that students have access to professional support when needed.
- **Orientation Programs:** Integrate immigration processes into orientation programs organized collaboratively with other student services, ensuring that international students are well-informed about the Canadian immigration system from the moment they arrive.
- **Updates on Immigration Policies:** Keep students informed about any changes or updates in Canadian immigration policies that may impact them during their studies. Regular communication ensures that students are aware of the latest developments and can make informed decisions regarding their immigration status.

Foundational and Advanced Settlement Support

- **Guide Health Insurance:**
  - **Guidance on Coverage:** Offer information on the BC healthcare system and assist students in understanding and obtaining the necessary health insurance coverage, such as the BC Medical Services Plan (MSP) or private health insurance.
  - **Access to Healthcare Services:** Provide details on accessing healthcare services in BC, including local clinics, hospitals, and emergency services. Ensure students are aware of 8-1-1, 9-1-1, 9-8-8, and their purposes.
  - **Liaise with Health Care Professionals and Stakeholders:** Work with student unions and other community stakeholders to ensure health insurance and extended health support are provided.

- **Support Cultural Transition:**
  - **Cultural Orientation Programs:** Conduct programs or workshops to help international students understand Canadian culture, social norms, and customs.
  - **Language Support:** Offer resources on-campus that enhance communication skills, especially for non-native English (or French) speakers.
  - **Social Integration Events:** Plan events and activities that foster social connections, allowing international students to build friendships and networks within the local community.
  - **Cultural Events:** Host culturally-relevant events to help students develop community ties and integrate into the broader community while enriching their cultural awareness.
  - **Peer Mentorship Programs:** Pair incoming international students with experienced students who can provide guidance on cultural adaptation, academic life, and social aspects, facilitating a smoother transition and creating a supportive network.
  - **Cultural Competency Training:** Provide training for faculty and staff to enhance their understanding of the challenges faced by international students, contributing to a more inclusive and culturally aware campus environment.

- **Provide Accommodation Support:**
  - **Housing Assistance:** Collaborate with campus partners to guide students in finding accommodation, whether on-campus or off-campus, and assist with any housing-related concerns.
  - **Temporary Accommodation:** Help students secure temporary housing for the initial period upon arrival.
  - **Inform About Legal Rights:** Inform students about their legal rights and responsibilities within the Canadian and provincial legal frameworks, including tenancy laws and employment regulations.

- **Offer Financial Guidance:**
  - **Budgeting Assistance:** Advise on financial management, including budgeting for living expenses, tuition fees, and any unexpected costs.
  - **Banking Information:** Provide information on opening bank accounts, understanding Canadian currency, and managing financial transactions.
  - **Offer Cell Phone Guidance:** Provide hints and tips on what students should consider before purchasing or signing up for a cell phone plan or contract, as navigating cell phone providers and plans can be challenging.

ARRIVAL, ORIENTATION AND TRANSITION

Arrival, Orientation and Transition (AOT) programs are essential for the success and retention of international students. The first six to eight weeks after arrival are crucial for ensuring a smooth transition and fostering a sense of belonging. Institutions have an ethical responsibility to proactively support students' success through three key phases:

1. **Arrival programs:** First contact leading to the orientation programs.
2. **Orientation programs:** Between the arrival programs and the start of classes.
3. **Transition programs:** Continue up to the first eight weeks of students' arrival and beyond.

Foundational and Advanced Arrival Supports

Engage with students as soon as possible after they arrive to reduce anxiety and send a reassuring message of support and care. Arrival programs can include:

- ❏ **Airport Greetings and/or Transportation**
- ❏ **Programs and activities to help students navigate a new location and environment:** Organize activities that help students familiarize themselves with the local area, including public transportation, shopping, dining, and cultural sites. Institutions can organize bus trips, social gatherings, on-campus residence activities, and shopping trips.

Foundational and Advanced Orientation Supports

After arrival, help students orient themselves to the institution, campus life, and classroom experiences. Attending orientation sessions helps students familiarize themselves with campus culture and resources, academic expectations, support services, and connects them with peers and other students. Orientation programs should cover the following topics:

- ❏ **Understanding of Immigration Rules and Student Responsibilities:** Provide detailed information different visa types, visa requirements, study permit conditions, and renewal procedures, ensuring students keep track of expiration dates. Clarify on- and off-campus work privileges and the importance of complying with immigration laws and the consequences of non-compliance.

- **Academic Expectations and Integrity:**
  - **Academic Programs and Course Selection:** Help students understand how their program choices align with career goals, navigate the registration system, course pre-requisites and manage course loads. Explain expectations regarding academic integrity and ethical conduct.
  - **Academic Resources:** Inform students about available resources to support their academic work, including citation standards and avoiding plagiarism. Encourage the use of libraries, research facilities, learning centres, academic workshops and academic advising services.
- **Campus Support Services and Facilities:** Ensure that students are familiar with academic advising, libraries, tutoring centres, counselling services, student centres, health services, dining options, and recreational facilities.
- **Social and Cultural Engagement:** Educate students about Canada's social and cultural norms to enhance intercultural communication skills, help them understand and manage culture shock and organize events to foster interaction between international and domestic students, creating a sense of community.
- **Financial Management Skills:** Teach students how to create and stick to a realistic budget, plan for unforeseen expenses and emergencies, manage tuition payments, find and apply for scholarships and financial aid, and navigate banking in Canada.
- **Health and Wellness Awareness:** Provide information on navigating the healthcare system, including health insurance policies and mental health services. Offer strategies for maintaining health, including physical activities and managing stress.
- **Housing Knowledge and Tenant Rights:** Educate students on various housing options, considerations for choosing accommodation, their rights and responsibilities as tenants, and how to address housing issues responsibly.
- **Personal Safety and Security:** Familiarize students with campus security personnel and services, safety apps, emergency procedures, personal safety tips for late hours on- and off-campus, securing personal property, and available support and counselling services.

- **Communication and Language Proficiency:** Provide information about language support services and programs to enhance proficiency in the language of instruction. Highlight the importance of effective communication in academic settings.
- **Professional and Career Development:** Introduce students to career services and the importance of gaining professional experience through internships, volunteer work, and on-campus employment. Encourage exploration of skill development opportunities that will benefit their future career paths.
- **Campus Involvement and Leadership:** Inform students about extracurricular activities, student organizations, leadership opportunities, and the benefits of active participation in campus life, contributing to personal growth and community engagement.
- **Spiritual Opportunities:** Provide information about faith or spiritual opportunities available at the institution or in the community.

How to plan a successful orientation?

The essential steps for designing an effective orientation program:

1. **Setting Objectives:** Set clear goals for onboarding and community integration. Define learning outcomes, like understanding the academic system and where to find support services.
2. **Forming a Planning Committee:** Form a diverse team with staff, faculty, and students. Ensure representation from key service areas and hold regular meetings.
3. **Conducting a Needs Assessment:** Collect data on academic readiness, language skills, and cultural concerns. Use surveys, interviews, and feedback to identify student needs. Debrief with current students or students who have just completed their orientation to garner further insight.
4. **Developing a comprehensive schedule:** Balance informative sessions with interactive and social activities. Address needs from assessments and include social and rest breaks.
5. **Additional Considerations:** Plan for language barriers, jet lag, and culture shock. Plan for multiple events in one week to build opportunities for students to make connections and offer campus tours. Ensure that all programming is inclusive and respectful of the diverse cultural and religious backgrounds of the students.

Foundational and Advanced Transition Supports

After the initial orientation program, students need time to transition into a new environment, navigate cultural shifts and changes, make friends, and understand the local lifestyle. Institutions have opportunities in the first 6-8 weeks of student experiences to create climates that foster connections and sense of belonging. These connections can typically be facilitated through mentorship programs, conversation partners programs and networking opportunities with campus ambassadors.

- **Peer Mentorship:** Connect incoming international students with current student ambassadors or peer mentors who can share their experiences and provide ongoing support throughout the transition period and beyond.
- **Conversation Partners:** Implement conversation partner programs where students can practice language skills and learn about culture through regular interactions with native speakers.
- **Networking Opportunities:** Create events and activities that encourage interaction between new and current students, promoting a sense of community and belonging from the outset.

How to run a mentorship program?

The key elements for establishing an effective peer mentorship program:

1. **Objective:** Facilitating international students' integration into their new academic and cultural environment through guidance and support.
2. **Selecting Mentors:** Choose ambassadors with leadership skills, communication abilities and relevant commonalities with incoming students (such as language or country of origin). Provide mentors with training on campus resources, cultural sensitivities and mentoring techniques.
3. **Defining Mentor Responsibilities:** Mentors should share their own experiences to set realistic expectations, offer insights into academic life (including study tips, course selection, and time management), introduce mentees to social aspects of campus life (such as clubs, activities, and events), assist with practical matters (like opening a bank account, navigating public transportation and shopping for essentials), serve as a touchstone for understanding cultural nuances, and provide emotional support to reduce feelings of homesickness and isolation.
4. **Organizing Orientation and Initial Activities:** Peer mentors should meet mentees during orientation, offering tours and attending welcome events together. Initial meetings might include ice-breaking activities to foster a welcoming atmosphere, and mentors can help explain administrative processes, such as registration, visa status clarification, and health services enrolment.
5. **Providing Ongoing Support:** Establish regular check-in meetings to address ongoing concerns and questions, create a safe space for mentees to voice challenges without judgment, and encourage mentees to engage with the campus and local community to broaden their support network.
6. **Evaluating Outcomes and Feedback:** Peer mentorship aims to increase retention rates, improve academic success, and promote positive cultural exchange. Collect regular feedback from mentees to evaluate the effectiveness of mentors and the program, and use success stories and testimonials to promote the program and encourage participation.
7. **Recognizing Long-Term Benefits:** Mentorship provides a foundation for strong, cross-cultural relationship that benefit both mentors and mentees in their personal and professional development. International students often experience smoother integration into the host country and gain a deeper understanding of the local culture and customs, while mentors develop valuable skills such as leadership, empathy, and cross-cultural communication.

SUPPORT AND RESOURCE DELIVERY OPTIONS

- **Online Programs:**
  - **Virtual Orientation:** To supplement in-person orientation events and programs, institutions might provide online orientation sessions covering essential information such as immigration procedures, settlement and housing options, academic expectations, and cultural norms, accessible to international students before their arrival.
  - **Online Language Courses:** Providing virtual language courses and language exchange platforms to help international students improve their English proficiency remotely.
  - **Virtual Peer Mentoring:** Facilitating virtual peer mentoring programs where incoming international students are paired with current students or alumni for guidance and support, fostering connections and easing the transition process.
- **Social Media Campaigns:**
  - **Social Media Orientation Guides:** Launching social media campaigns featuring orientation guides, Q&A sessions, and virtual campus tours to engage international students and provide them with valuable information and resources.
  - **Cultural Awareness Campaigns:** Running social media campaigns promoting cultural awareness and inclusivity, highlighting cultural events, traditions, and resources available to support international students' cultural adaptation.
- **In-Person Sessions:**
  - **In-Person Arrival Assistance:** Providing in-person assistance and support services upon international students' arrival, including airport pickups, welcome receptions, and orientation sessions tailored to their specific needs and concerns.
  - **In-Person Workshops and Events:** Organizing in-person workshops, seminars, and social events throughout the academic year to facilitate face-to-face interactions, networking opportunities, and cultural exchange among international students and the broader campus community.
- **Faculty-Led Programs:**
  - **Faculty-Led Academic Support:** Engaging faculty members to lead academic support programs such as tutoring sessions, study groups, and academic advising tailored to the unique challenges and academic goals of international students.
  - **Faculty-Led Orientations:** Collaborating with faculty to design academic discipline specific orientation events. These are opportunities for international students to get to know their peers, instructors and faculty administration.

- **Additional Supports:**
  - **Peer Support Networks:** Establishing peer support networks and international student associations to provide ongoing support, social connections, and advocacy for international students within the campus community.
  - **Health and Wellness Workshops:** Offering health and wellness workshops, counselling services, and support groups specifically designed to address the mental health and well-being needs of international students, promoting holistic wellness and resilience.
  - **Intercultural Acumen Training for Faculty and Staff:** Providing intercultural training programs for faculty and staff members to enhance their cultural competency, awareness and humility and support international students effectively in academic and non-academic settings.
  - **Indigenous Acumen Training for Students:** In collaboration with Indigenous colleagues and communities, create opportunities for international students to learn more about Indigenous cultures, traditions and knowledge while learning more about Canada's history of colonization.

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GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Accountability and Collaboration: Welcoming, orienting and helping students transition into their new environments are cross-institutional responsibilities. Effective programs require clear leadership and organization, with the entire campus community playing a role. Foster partnerships across campus departments, units, services, and programs to enhance support services.

- **Advocacy and Legal Compliance:** Support policies and practices that enhance the welfare and experiences of international students, addressing issues such as immigration policies, work opportunities, and social integration. Ensure all support services adhere to legal requirements and advocate for students' rights within the broader legal framework.
- **Continuous Improvement and Responsiveness:** Regularly assess and refine support programs based on feedback and emerging needs. Be flexible and responsive to changing immigration policies and emerging challenges.
- **Crisis Management and Support:** Provide support and guidance in times of crisis, whether related to global events, public health emergencies, or other challenges. Collaborate with organizations and authorities to ensure the well-being of students.
- **Cultural Sensitivity and Inclusivity:** Recognize and respect cultural differences, provide culturally appropriate support and promote inclusivity. Tailor arrival, orientation, and transition supports to meet the diverse needs of international students.
- **Ethical and Proactive Approach:** Understanding the barriers that students face in trying to engage and succeed at institutions helps to create a proactive approach to effective AOT programs and supportive learning environments. Institutions have an ethical responsibility to play an active role in students' success.
- **Equity and Holistic Support:** Ensure equal access to resources and opportunities. Support students' academic, cultural, social, physical, and mental health well-being.
- **Fostering a Sense of Belonging:** Building a sense of belonging from the initial contact with students is crucial to their success. Arrival and orientation programs play a vital role in this.
- **Global Citizenship:** Emphasize the development of global citizenship among students, providing opportunities for them to engage with their peers.
- **Student-Centric Approaches:** Prioritizing the needs and well-being of international students, recognizing their unique challenges and aspirations in a new cultural and academic setting.

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- **Community Settlement Agencies:** Connect with community settlement agencies specializing in assisting newcomers, providing services such as housing assistance, language classes, job placement support, and cultural orientation programs to help international students integrate into the local and diaspora communities and navigate life in their new environment.
- **Cultural and Region-Specific Community Partners:** Collaborate with cultural and region-specific community partners who offer cultural events, language exchange programs, and support networks tailored to the needs and interests of international students from specific countries or regions, fostering a sense of belonging and providing opportunities for cultural connection and enrichment.

- **Law Enforcement Liaisons:** Access resources and support from law enforcement liaisons who work closely with international students to address safety concerns, provide information on local laws and regulations, offer crime prevention tips, and facilitate communication between law enforcement agencies and the international student population. Care needs to be taken to ensure that the liaisons understand and are sensitive to the varying ways that international students might perceive law enforcement. For some cultures and countries, engaging with law enforcement can be perceived as intimidating or frightening for international students due to differences in law enforcement practices or previous negative experiences
- **Local Goods and Service Providers:** Explore a directory of local goods and service providers, including food outlets, grocery stores, community recreation centres, and other essential amenities, to help international students access basic necessities, explore leisure activities, and become familiar with the local community resources available to them.