BCCIE
BC COUNCIL FOR INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION

The International Student Lifecycle
Stage 3 – Transition Through

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Foundational Supports: This section outlines the core services and resources essential for addressing basic needs and facilitating smooth transitions throughout the student journey.

Advanced Supports: This section offers insights into advanced support strategies aimed at enhancing the student experience and promoting wellbeing. When applicable, foundational and advanced supports might be combined.

Support and Resource Delivery Options: Practitioners are encouraged to consider a 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-centred support.

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

Professional Development and Training Opportunities: This section highlights relevant training sessions, workshops, and certifications aimed at enhancing intercultural engagement, communication skills, and strategies to support the international student journey.

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.

Foundational and Advanced Support

- **Cultural Exchange:** Intercultural engagement provides opportunities for international students to share their own culture, traditions, and perspectives with domestic students, fostering a greater appreciation for diversity.
- **Networking and Social Integration:** Building relationships with domestic peers helps international students expand their social networks, both within and outside the academic environment, which can benefit personal and professional growth.
- **Cultural Competence:** Creating opportunities for international and domestic students to interact enhances the cultural competence of all students. Exposure to diverse perspectives promotes a better understanding of global issues and prepares students for a multicultural workplace.
- **Global Awareness:** Intercultural engagement contributes to developing global awareness and a broader worldview among domestic students. This exposure helps break down stereotypes and fosters a more inclusive and open-minded community.
- **Enhanced Learning:** Collaborative projects and discussions involving students from different cultural backgrounds can lead to richer and more comprehensive learning experiences as diverse viewpoints are considered.
- **Preparation for a Globalized World:** In an increasingly interconnected world, working effectively with people from different cultural backgrounds is a valuable skill. Intercultural engagement prepares domestic students for future professional environments that are likely to be culturally diverse.
- **Actioning Inclusivity:** Engaging with international students contributes to a more inclusive campus environment. This inclusivity benefits all students, creating a sense of community that values diversity.

Staff are uniquely positioned to generate and mobilize knowledge that addresses and transforms systems of oppression and helps shape our campus and the broader community in a positive way. However, it is critical to develop programs that foster intercultural engagement without essentializing intercultural as "international."

ACADEMIC LIFE

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.

Foundational Support

- **Teaching and Instructional Support:** International students' academic performance is mainly determined by their experiences in the classroom. Faculty and instructors' decisions about their curriculum design and course content will impact the learning experience of students (Schuerholz-Lehr, Caws, Van Gyn and Preece, 2007). Providing support for faculty to consider internationalizing their curriculum might include infusing international elements and resources into their content, and offering instructional approaches that are more inclusive of culturally diverse student populations.
- **Writing Support:** Provide assistance with writing skills, including help with essays, research papers, and other writing assignments.
- **Academic Integrity:** Provide resources to help international students learn expectations around academic integrity and how to navigate the culturally specific approaches to academic integrity in their institution.
- **Academic Advising:** Ensuring that academic advisers are knowledgeable about the international student experience and well connected to the international student service office is an important part of providing academic support. International students can benefit from early, frequent, and easily accessible academic advising to ensure that they are on the right track to meet their academic and career goals. Finding courses and academic programs that fit their aspirations and learning styles as early as possible can have a profound impact on their academic performance and overall experience:
  - » Program and course selection
  - » Prerequisites and upgrading options
  - » Graduation requirements
  - » Academic resources and on-campus support services
- **Library and Research Support:** Provide assistance with using library resources, learning effective research skills and understanding how to use databases to support coursework and learning.
- **Technology Support:** Provide assistance for students to develop digital skills, and effectively use learning technology, software, and platforms.

- **Peer Support:** International students often state that they are more comfortable talking about academic challenges with their peers. Structured peer support programs can be a more accessible way for students to access support from peers that are trained in knowing and understanding the appropriate and available resources on campus.
- **Accessible Learning Centres:** Accessible Learning Centres provide essential support for international students with disabilities, supporting their academic wellbeing by addressing individual needs and promoting inclusive learning environments. Through specialized accommodations such as assistive technology, alternate format materials, and academic coaching, these centers facilitate equal access to educational opportunities for all students, regardless of their abilities or backgrounds. By fostering a supportive and barrier-free learning environment, Accessible Learning Centres play a crucial role in promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion within the international student community.

It is important to communicate to international students that accessible learning centres are not only for those with physical disabilities but also explaining how individuals with learning disabilities or mental health challenges may also benefit.

Advanced Support

- **Individualized Learning Support (i.e., LS practitioners):** International students may benefit from specialized approaches to learning support including providing learning assistance and strategists that are knowledgeable about international students' academic experiences and can offer culturally appropriate services and support.
- **Learning Skills Programs and Courses:** Providing workshops, programs and courses focused on students developing a better understanding of themselves as learners and effective learning strategies and study habits (e.g., time management, exam preparation, note-taking and reading strategies.
- **Credit-Based EAL Courses:** Some international students require additional resources for developing English language proficiencies to support their academic coursework and responsibilities. Providing EAL courses for credit will encourage students to take these courses alongside their academic program courses to support their learning and course progression.
- **Specialized Tutors Programs:** Provide individual or group tutoring services that are accessible and culturally appropriate for international students. This may include providing resources to help students determine the appropriate tutor(s) for their learning styles and specific disciplines.
- **Communication:** Timely communication to international students regarding academic and social supports will help convey valuable information to students to positively support their experience at the institution. Each institution may have different methods and may include e-newsletters, social media posts, or bulletin boards.

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.

Foundational Support

- **Intercultural Events:** Hosting and supporting intercultural events bring together students from diverse backgrounds to share their cultures, traditions, and experiences, fostering cross-cultural understanding and appreciation.
- **Faith-Based Programs:** These programs provide opportunities for students to engage in religious or spiritual activities, connect with peers who share similar beliefs, and explore their faith in a supportive environment.
- **Peer Connection Programs:** These programs are socially-based and bring students together to facilitate friendship, support, and cultural exchange, helping newcomers navigate campus life and feel more connected. This creates opportunities for students to have fun together in casual and more comfortable settings.
- **Mentorship and Conversation Partner Programs:** Through mentorship, experienced students provide guidance and support to new students, while conversation partner programs pair students to practice language skills and learn about each other's cultures in casual settings.
- **Leadership Programs:** These programs empower students to develop leadership skills, build confidence, and make a positive impact on-campus and beyond through workshops, training sessions, volunteer, and experiential learning opportunities.
- **Online Communities and Social Media:** Online platforms allow international students to connect virtually, share experiences, seek advice, and build relationships with peers, providing support and a sense of belonging even from a distance.
- **Cultural Celebrations:** These events showcase various cultures through food, performances, and activities, allowing students to celebrate diversity, learn about different traditions, and build connections within the campus community.

Advanced Support

- **Intercultural Workshops:** Workshops and seminars that promote cross-cultural understanding, communication skills, and cultural competency among students, faculty, and staff.
- **Community Engagement Initiatives:** Opportunities for international students to engage with local and diaspora communities through volunteer work, cultural events, and community service projects.
- **Global Centers:** On-campus hubs provide resources, programming, and community spaces for students from diverse cultural backgrounds. Creating spaces on-campus that are dedicated to intercultural connections and create a welcoming space for international students, enriches a campus community.
- **Language Exchange Programs:** These programs can facilitate language learning and cultural exchange between international and domestic students.
- **International Student Advisory Groups:** Student Advisory Groups provide a platform for international students to voice their concerns, share feedback, and collaborate with university staff to enhance the international student experience and campus community. These groups serve as advocates for the needs and interests of the international student community, fostering a supportive and inclusive campus environment.

WELLBEING AND MENTAL HEALTH

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.

Foundational and Advanced Support

- **Orientation Programs:** International departments may collaborate with student experience departments responsible for orientation programs to aid international students in adjusting to the Canadian educational system, culture, and lifestyle. These orientations often include information about mental health resources, health insurance, and other health-related services.
- **Counseling and Health Clinic Services:** Collaboration with on-campus counselling and health clinic services provide tailored counselling, workshops, and support groups for international students addressing homesickness, loneliness, academic stress, and cultural adaptation.
- **Workshops and Seminars:** A series of workshops and seminars are developed that are geared towards enhancing mental health awareness, stress management, coping strategies, and cultural adaptation for international students. The primary objective of these initiatives is to foster a conducive environment that offers international students the opportunity to learn, share experiences, and connect with their peers who encounter similar challenges.
- **Peer Support Programs:** Some student support departments facilitate peer support programs where international students can connect with trained peer mentors for informal support, guidance, and companionship. Peer support programs help alleviate feelings of isolation and enhance social connections, which are crucial for mental well-being.
- **Resource Referrals:** ISSS staff are typically well-informed about mental health resources available both on and off-campus, including counselling services, support groups, helplines, and community organizations. They can provide information and referrals to assist international students in accessing appropriate support.

- **Cultural Competency Training:** To provide culturally sensitive support and improve the experiences of international students, it is recommended that international departments engage in collaborative efforts with community organizations or equity departments to provide staff training in cultural competency. By doing so, staff can gain a deeper understanding of the unique challenges faced by international students and acquire the necessary skills to provide effective support. This training enables staff to address mental health concerns effectively while respecting cultural differences and individual preferences.
- **Online Resources:** Student service portfolios provide a wealth of online resources related to mental health and general wellness, including articles, self-help tools, and information on accessing support services. These resources are accessible to international students anytime and can complement in-person support.

CAREER DEVELOPMENT

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.

Foundational Support

- **Access to Career Advising Services:** Offers guidance on career exploration, goal setting, and action planning, to help students identify their skills, interests, and career paths suitable for their academic background. Provides support in creating personalized career plans and setting achievable goals.
- **Resources and Workshops for Job Preparation:** Provides resources on resume writing, cover letter crafting, and job searching strategies specific to the Canadian job market. Offers workshops and seminars on interview techniques, networking skills, and employer expectations to assist students in developing effective job application strategies tailored to their career goals.
- **Specialized Job Boards and Online Platforms:** Offers dedicated job boards or online platforms exclusively for international students to help connect students with employment opportunities that cater to their specific needs and requirements. This facilitates access to internships, co-op placements, part-time jobs, and full-time positions.
- **Guidance on Work Permit Regulations:** Assists students with understanding work permit regulations and eligibility criteria and provides information on transitioning from study permits to work permits for prospective employment in Canada after graduation. Offers guidance on work permit application processes and required documentation.
- **Collaboration with Support Services:** Collaborates with other support services, such as immigration advising and settlement assistance to address broader needs related to employment and settlement while considering the unique challenges faced by international students. A coordinated effort to provide comprehensive support, ensuring successful integration into the workforce and Canadian society.
- **Volunteer Opportunities On-Campus or in the Community:** Allows student to gain experience in the Canadian workplace and gather references for future employment. If the volunteering position is not in their field of study, it can speak to their soft skills that can be used to share their adaptability and employability on their resume.

Advanced Support

- **Work-Integrated Learning Opportunities:** Co-op programs or internships enable international students to gain valuable Canadian work experience and provides opportunities to apply classroom knowledge to real-world scenarios and develop industry-specific skills. Enhances students' resumes and increases their competitiveness in the job market and is one of the best ways for international students to gain Canadian work experience in a safe and welcoming environment is through on-campus employment.
- **Sector-Specific Career Workshops and Events:** Industry-focused workshops, speaker series, or employer panels offer insights into current industry trends and practices. Facilitating networking opportunities with professionals connects students to potential mentors, allowing students to gain industry-specific knowledge and build relevant connections in their desired fields of study.
- **Mentorship Programs:** Connects international students with professionals and alumni in their desired fields of study. Provides guidance, advice, and industry-specific insights to help students navigate their career paths and builds valuable connections and expands students' professional networks.
- **Industry-Specific Job Fairs and Recruitment Events:** Organizes events where international students can interact with local employers and explore job opportunities and offers a platform for students to showcase their skills, learn about industry requirements, and connect with potential employers. This facilitates direct interaction between students and employers in a focused and industry-specific environment.
- **Entrepreneurship Programs and Resources:** Provides access to programs and resources for international students interested in entrepreneurship or starting their own businesses. Offers guidance on the process of establishing a business in British Columbia or globally. Supports the development of entrepreneurial skills, business planning, and access to relevant networks and funding opportunities.

SUPPORTS AND RESOURCE DELIVERY OPTIONS

- **Academic Advising and Support Services:** International students can utilize tutoring, study skills workshops, and academic advising to improve their academic performance and adjust to the Canadian educational system.
- **Career Development Services:** These services assist international students in exploring career options, writing resumes tailored to the Canadian job market, and preparing for interviews. Career counsellors can provide guidance on work permits, internships, and co-op opportunities, helping international students gain valuable work experience while studying.
- **Counseling and Mental Health Services:** International students facing cultural adjustment challenges, homesickness, mental health, and general concerns can access confidential counselling sessions and support groups. Mental health professionals can provide culturally sensitive support and resources to help international students cope with stress and maintain their well-being.
- **Disability Support Services:** International students with disabilities can benefit from accommodations and support services to ensure equal access to education and campus facilities. Disability support offices can assist international students in navigating the accommodation process and connecting with relevant resources to support their academic success.
- **Financial Aid and Scholarships:** International students can seek guidance on financial aid options, budgeting, and managing tuition fees. Additionally, assistance with scholarship applications and accessing bursaries – when available – can help alleviate financial burdens and support international students in their academic pursuits.
- **Indigenous Student Services:** International Indigenous students can access culturally sensitive support, programming, and resources to connect with Indigenous communities on campus. Indigenous student centres offer opportunities for cultural exchange, support for academic success, and connection to Indigenous traditions and resources.
- **LGBTQ+ and Equity Support Services:** International LGBTQ+ students can find support, advocacy, and resources in LGBTQ+ student centres. These services provide a safe and inclusive space for international LGBTQ+ students to connect with peers, access counselling support, and participate in educational workshops and events.
  - » It may also be that international students have no frame of reference or understanding regarding LGBTQ+ or gender diverse students. Providing this information in a safe and welcoming environment may be considered.

- **Health and Wellness Services:** International students can access medical care, wellness programming, and health education to maintain their physical and mental wellbeing while studying abroad. By collaborating with international departments, health centers offer culturally sensitive care and resources to support international students in navigating the British Columbia healthcare system.
- **Multifaith Services:** Multifaith services offer an environment for international students to explore and practice their religious beliefs while away from home. These services provide a platform for students of diverse faith backgrounds to come together, share their traditions, and support one another in their spiritual journeys. Whether seeking guidance, community, or simply a place to connect with others who share similar beliefs, multifaith services can support diverse needs of international students.
- **Housing and Residence Services:** International students can receive assistance with housing options, roommate matching, and support for issues related to on-campus living. Residence life programming provides opportunities for international students to connect with peers, engage in cultural exchange, and participate in community-building activities.
- **Dietary Options and Food Security:** In today's fiscal climate, food security is a challenge for many, for international students they have the additional challenge of finding culturally appropriate food. Institutions can work with their food services and local food providers to ensure diverse food choices are available.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- **Accessibility:** Make supports readily accessible to all international students, considering language barriers and varying levels of familiarity with Canadian systems. This includes physical accessibility, language accessibility, and cultural accessibility. Consider using various approaches to offering programs and activities, allowing for students to engage that are more comfortable and aligned with what works for them.
- **Accountability:** Provide clarity about institutional responsibilities to support academic success.
- **Advocacy:** Advocate for the rights, interests, and needs of international students within the university or college community and beyond. Advocate for policies, practices, and resources that promote equity, diversity, and inclusion for international students.
- **Collaboration:** Foster collaboration between institutional stakeholders, student organizations, and external partners to maximize support effectiveness.
- **Community Building:** Foster a sense of community and belonging among international students by providing opportunities for connection, cultural exchange, and mutual support. Create spaces where international students can build meaningful relationships, share experiences, and engage in collaborative learning and growth.
- **Confidentiality and Privacy:** Ensure the confidentiality and privacy of international students seeking support services, counselling, or guidance. Respect international students' right to privacy and maintain confidentiality in accordance with professional standards and legal requirements.
- **Continuous Improvement:** Regularly assess and evaluate the effectiveness of support services and programs for international students. Seek feedback from international students to identify areas for improvement and continuously strive to enhance the quality, accessibility, and relevance of services.
- **Cultural Sensitivity:** Approach support provision with cultural sensitivity and awareness of the unique challenges faced by international students.
- **Empowerment:** Empower international students to actively participate in their social integration process and provide opportunities for leadership and engagement.
- **Ethical and Proactive Approach:** Focus supports on the needs of the students, what will help the student reach their academic goal vs. what is best for the institution.

- **Holistic Support:** Take a holistic approach to supporting international students, addressing their academic, social, emotional, and cultural needs. Offer a range of services, resources, and programs that promote holistic well-being and academic success among international students.
- **Inclusivity and Diversity:** Ensure that supports are inclusive of diverse cultural backgrounds and promote intercultural understanding. Engage with groups that are participating in events and programs, but also pay close attention to groups that are not connecting. Elicit feedback from students and local communities to better understand who is attracted to institutional offerings and who is not feeling reflected or included. Using research, feedback and experience, find ways to build programs help students feel connected and a place of belonging.

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- **Canadian Association of College and University Student Services (CACUSS):** CACUSS focuses on supporting student services professionals in post-secondary institutions.
- **Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC):** CMEC works collaboratively with provinces and territories to enhance the quality of education in Canada.
- **Cultural Centers and Community Organizations:** Cultural centers, ethnic associations, and community organizations that provide cultural programming, language classes, and networking opportunities for international students.
- **ISempower:** They provide resources and services to support the professional development and integration of international students, including career coaching, mentorship programs, and networking opportunities.
- **Learning Specialists Association of Canada (LSAC), (learningspecialists.ca):** The Learning Specialists Association of Canada (LSAC) is a professional organization dedicated to supporting the development and advancement of learning specialists across Canada.
- **Non-Profit Organizations:** Non-profit organizations specializing in immigrant and newcomer support services, offering resources, workshops, and community events tailored to international students.
- **Online Learning Platforms:** Online learning platforms such as Coursera, Khan Academy, or edX that offer free or low-cost courses, tutorials, and resources in various subjects to supplement international students' academic learning and provide additional support in areas of interest or need.
- **WorkBC:** provincial government resource that assists job seekers in British Columbia.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

- **Cultural Competency Training:** Training sessions and workshops for faculty, staff, and student leaders focused on cultural competency, diversity awareness, and supporting international students.
- **Peer Mentor Training:** Training programs for peer mentors, equipping them with the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively support incoming international students.
- **Conference Workshops and Seminars:** Various conferences, such as the Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE) Conference and the Canadian Association of College and University Student Services (CACUSS) Conference, and British Columbia Council for International Education(BCCIE) offer workshops and seminars focused on international student support, cross-cultural communication, and diversity inclusion.
- **Online Courses and Webinars:** Institutions like the Centre for Intercultural Learning offer online courses and webinars on topics such as intercultural competency, cross-cultural communication, and working effectively with international students.
- **Community Engagement and Partnerships:** Collaborating with local community organizations, immigrant support centers, or cultural associations can provide practitioners with valuable insights and training opportunities to better serve international students from diverse backgrounds.
- **Intercultural Experiences:** Participating in intercultural immersion programs, language exchanges, or international study tours can deepen practitioners' understanding of different cultures and enhance their ability to support international students effectively.
- **Mental Health First Aid Training:** Provides staff members with the skills and knowledge to recognize signs of mental health concerns and provide initial support to international students experiencing mental health challenges.
- **Cross-Cultural Counseling Techniques Training:** Focuses on equipping staff members with culturally responsive counselling techniques and interventions to support the mental health and well-being of international students effectively.
- **International Student Advising Best Practices Workshop:** The training focuses on sharing best practices and strategies for providing comprehensive advising and support services to international students throughout their academic journey. This can also be an informative webinar or panel.
- **British Columbia Career Development Association (BCCDA):** Workshops and conferences addressing best practices in career development for diverse populations.