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# Internationalization and Higher Education Policy in Canada: Three Challenges.

**Glen A. Jones**

## Introduction

Internationalization has become an important theme in national higher education policy in many jurisdictions.[1] The objectives of facilitating student mobility and providing new international opportunities for students underscore many of the major reforms currently taking place in Europe. Other European public policy initiatives have directly encouraged the internationalization of the curriculum through the support of joint degrees, and provided major support for new international research initiatives. American mechanisms for supporting research continue to provide the infrastructure associated with attracting and funding a significant number of international graduate students, and the Simon Study Abroad Act

arrangements and initiatives emerging within individual universities that include everything from major curriculum reform projects, funding development initiatives, encouraging international research partnerships, and marketing international programs.[5]

On the other hand, it is difficult to argue that internationalization has been anything like the driving force or major theme within Canadian higher education policy that it has within many other jurisdictions. My objective in this paper is to explain why internationalization has received so little attention within higher education policy in this country.[6] I will argue that the discussion of internationalization and higher education policy in Canada has faced three basic challenges during the last three decades: the challenge associated with the Canadianization movement of the 1970s; the challenge associated with Canada's federal structures and our decentralized approach to higher education policy; and the fear that international activities and initiatives will displace national activities and initiatives. I will conclude by offering a number of modest suggestions for change.

**The Challenge of Canadianization:**

The first step towards understanding the strange intersection between internationalization and higher education policy in Canada is to recall that forty years ago the great debate was on the "Canadianization" of Canadian universities. The centennial celebrations and Expo 67 in Montreal had awakened a new sense of nationalism within Canadian society, but a series of reports and polemics raised serious questions about whether the Canadian educational system was teaching Canadians about Canada. A 1968 report of the National History Project, based on observations at over 900 schools, revealed that there was surprisingly little Canadian content in our elementary and secondary schools. [7] In their 1969

book,

With the recession of the 1970s the academic labour market shifted dramatically; the expansion of graduate programs and enrolment in the 1960s was now producing more doctoral graduates than the higher education system could absorb. There was little public sympathy for employing the best of the world's academic talent in Canada if it meant that the best Canadian talent would be under or unemployed. There was nothing wrong with introducing Canadian students to concepts and ideas from other nations and cultures, as long as it was Canadian citizens who were studying and teaching these concepts and ideas.

This is not to suggest that the Government of Canada had become isolationist and introverted. With its new emphasis on serving domestic interests, Canadian foreign policy under Trudeau was striking out in quite new directions. Canada strengthened its membership in francophone international organizations, developed new ties with Southeast Asia, and was one of the first western countries to open relations with communist China. New international relationships frequently involved higher education sector components, such as bilateral scholarship agreements or development initiatives. As Trilokekar notes, the biggest international academic relations initiative to emerge during this period was the( t)8(hi)-2(s)9( no5 0 o-u( n[(s)9(w

by conditional transfer grants to the provinces, which, in response to continuing provincial concerns, were eventually replaced by unconditional transfer grants to the provinces.

In addition to providing core support for higher education through transfer programs, the federal government is also involved in wide range of policy areas that are directly related to higher education, including student financial assistance, research and development, cultural and language policy initiatives, and human resource development. Since there is no ministry with explicit responsibility for higher education, federal involvement in the sector can be defined as the sum of the policy initiatives associated with a range of federal government departments.

The current Canadian reality of federalism has two very important implications for the discussion of internationalization in the context of Canadian higher education policy. The first, and perhaps the most obvious, is that there is no Canadian higher education policy and there is no clear mechanism to develop Canadian higher education policy. In its recent analysis of postsecondary education in Canada, the Canadian Council on Learning (CCL) concluded:

> Canada currently has no means to establish the national PSE objectives to which it aspires. It has not even reached the first step – the ongoing evaluation of national progress – that would indicate our seriousness about this pan-Canadian priority. If Canada is serious about improving educational outcomes for Canadians to stimulate economic growth, increase Canada's international competiveness and enhance social cohesion, it must develop and utilize appropriate tools to expedite this task.[16]

The CCL report identifies an important problem in the development of higher education policy, but it also serves to illustrate the dynamic tension between the federal government and the provinces that underscores this problem. In 1966 the Government of Canada began to develop an education support branch within the Department of the Secretary of State. As Cameron notes,

for internationalization given the realities of departmental territoriality and unit rivalries[20], but also because internationalization is an umbrella concept that captures a wider range of initiatives that transcend the operational boundaries of any single federal department.

The Canadian federal arrangements, therefore, are far from conducive to the development and emergence of something resembling a national strategy for internationalization. In reality, what one might term "Canadian" policy for internationalization is essentially the sum of

1970s was centred around a network of relatively homogeneous publicly-supported universities serving local geographic areas.[22] The vast majority of undergraduate students attended a university that was close to home, and the universities generally treated Canadian degrees as equivalent in terms of quality. There was no formal stratification of institutions, and there was limited competition between institutions since provincial governments generally treated universities as equals and the provinces controlled the two largest sources of institutional revenue: operating grants and tuition. The common threads linking provincial policies across the country in this context was to increase access to postsecondary education while tightly controlling operating grant allocations. Generally speaking, participation rates increased, government grants stabilized or increased modestly, and universities across the country complained bitterly about underfunding. One provincial civil servant, interviewed for the Stuart Smith review of university education released in 1991, noted "Our approach is just to starve the buggers to death and hope they'll react as we'd like".[23]

The issue of international student fees became intertwined with these dual policy themes of access and funding. If international students paid the same level of fees as domestic students, then it meant that international students were being subsidized by provincial taxpayers at the same level as domestic students. If universities were underfunded and unable to admit every student who applied, then provincial governments might be subsidizing an international student

internationalization seems to take place at the margins rather than at the centre. The recent review

[24] J. Knight, *Internationalization at Canadian Universities: The Changing Landscape* (Ottawa: Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, 1995); J. Knight, *Progress and Promise: The 2000 AUCC Report on Internationalization at Canadian Universities,* (Ottawa: Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, 2000).

[25] Canadian Council on Learning, *Report on Learning in Canada 2006.*

[26] B. Rae, *Ontario A Leader in Learning. Report and Recommendations* (Toronto: Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, 2005); G. Plant, *Access and Excellence: The Campus 2020 Plan for British Columbia's Post-Secondary Education System*, (Victoria: Ministry of Advanced Education, 2007).