

One Podcast to Start Your Day
Season 1, Episode 2: Internationalization in Canadian Colleges and Universities

Alex Usher:

Good morning, everybody, or good afternoon, or good evening. Whatever time of day you happen to be tuning into this podcast. Today we're talking about internationalization at Canadian universities and colleges. With me, I have three guests: Andrew Ness (Dean, International at Humber College), Nancy Johnston (Independent consultant and former Vice Provost of Students and International at Simon Fraser University) and from here in Toronto at Higher Education Strategy Associates, Michael Savage, who is our manager of International Markets and Mobility. Good morning, everyone.

Andrew Ness:

Hello

Nancy Johnston:

Hello.

Michael Savage:

Hi. Happy to be here.

Alex Usher:

Great. So I'm just going to start things off with a really simple question. Andrew, you had a member of your staff go off on around the world Ocean vacation maybe 10 years ago and they just got back. What do you tell 'em about what's changed?

Andrew Ness:

Oh, thanks Alex. That's a fantastic question. So I think the first comment I would make is "we're not in Kansas anymore, Toto" <laugh>. And what I mean by that is that we've really changed in three fundamental ways: in scale, in scope, and I would say in rigor. So, what do I mean? We've seen a massive shift in demand at Humber from primarily domestic enrollments to international students really filling what we would consider excess capacity. We haven't grown our aggregate enrollment for a number of reasons, but we've seen that proportion shift significantly. We've also seen the diversity grow at Humber, which has been interesting not only on our own campus but in terms of our outbound students where we have dozens of international students now looking for study abroad opportunities and looking for international work integrated learning, which is different than what we would've seen 10 years ago. And the rigor comment I would use is, I meant, the rigor comment that I made refers to the approach we've taken in terms of expectations for study abroad and academic partnerships. So more expectations on preparation, on risk mitigation, outcomes, and provision of academic credit. So significant change in that 10 year period.

Alex Usher:

Nancy, does that sound right to you from the West coast? Similar perspective?

Nancy Johnston:

Yeah, kind of. We've always had a strong demand, as you know from international students. It's never been an issue. Simon Fraser's been up in the 20% far before Covid, and of course we are a receiving immigration community and the rest of our students that we draw domestically, in fact 90% of the SFU students are living and already studying within a spit of the hill, which is interesting and we'll talk a bit more about that I think later, Alex with pathways. But, I would agree and I really applaud and welcome the rigor that you referenced, Andrew, because it's been something that's been a little bit lacking as we've rushed to focus entirely on recruitment in the past. I'm very happy to see that we're looking at the longer trajectory of international students when we bring them here or our own students when we send them internationally and really paying attention to the outcomes and the impacts and the learning piece which sometimes gets lost in the rush to bring people to campus or send them off campus.

Michael, any thoughts?

Michael Savage:

I would completely concur with Andrew's three points, and I think maybe this is just the consultant in me speaking, but I think the scale is probably the most noticeable. And I would put that in the context of stagnant provincial funding for example. So international students have become a big business for a lot of institutions and that seems to be the major driving force behind a lot of these changes.

Alex Usher:

<affirmative>, I have to say it, it's striking to me the extent to which the exchange rate for the rupee has become a sort of strategic issue for a lot of institutions in this country that you wouldn't have thought that making it into the discussion at board level at some places, but it is now just because that, I think particularly it's Ontario colleges, not all of them, but some of them and some other parts of the country like Cape Breton University become a real thing. But let me ask you the question about international students and how they're treated once they're at institutions because obviously this has been an issue recently we've seen the fifth estate report, which I think a lot of people saw and is maybe influencing, or starting to influence, a lot of minds around international students. What do you think, Nancy? How well do we meet international students need and where could we be better?

Nancy Johnston:

Well, <laugh>, we could always be better for all of our students, of course. And I think the answer, and I hate to say it's qualified, it depends on the pathway that brings them here. And there are many different pathways. People probably think the most common one we think of is the greedy agent pushing people over to Canada to meet the Canadian enrichment, which could be taken in many ways of the education system but I'm well familiar with the pathway program that brings them here through a college that's affiliated with the university, in our case Simon Fraser that has them here for two years taking university transfer courses taught by our own faculty that ensures when they get to our transfer to SFU, they're already going to succeed. And in fact the data of the last 15 years shows us that they're succeeding at the same or better rates than our domestic counterparts. But that wasn't always the case and Simon had to look at itself about 10 years ago, we did a massive study that compared new immigrants, with domestic students, with international students and looked at student success retention, academic success, completion, and they were lagging way behind. And so the university had to take some really intentional options to improve the experience of those students, Alex, and we did. And not just service and program actions, policy actions, we had to change the nature of the university.

Alex Usher:

Now am I right in thinking SFU you had an agreement with Navitas for quite some time if I'm not mistaken. So, is this what came out of that survey?

Nancy Johnston:

Well, no, those were kind of happening concurrently and there was a lot of discussion at the university whether these kinds of agreements were good. And so we knew we had to really pay attention to the academic rigor. Every one of those courses at our Navitas College is monitored semesterly compared with how that course is taught at the university and how they succeed, and when there's a problem, we're on it. So in a way, Navitas kind of made us better not just enriching our coffers as some people would like to point out, but I think actually enriching the student experience for everyone and some of the changes that were made at Navitas carried over to SFU. So there was some nice reciprocity there.

Alex Usher:

Interesting. Andrew, sorry, I think I cut you off there.

Andrew Ness:

No, not at all. No thanks Alex. Nancy, gosh, what you're saying resonates similar to us, and you as much as said a student is a student. So what we're seeing in terms of that question of how they're treated, the challenges that are manifesting in domestic student population, whether it's mental health challenges, or anxiety or financial pressures manifest in our international student population. I do look at our retention and graduation rates as somewhat of a marker to say how are they being treated and how are they doing? We're graduating international students at a rate, the most recent rate was 88.9%. Persistence rates, 91%. The students are successful.

Alex Usher:

Wow.

Andrew Ness:

Yeah, those are high number numbers Alex and I'm not sure they're exceptional. If we talk to colleagues, I think you'd see, so that's positive. But that also says we have the right inputs in terms of academic qualifications and in terms of admissions. We're also, Nancy intimated this as well, we're monitoring data. And what I mean by that is we look at the international health insurance usage data to adjust coverage to better serve our international student population based on what their specific needs are. We're also thinking not only the input, but we're thinking what's happening after they graduate and international graduates school at Humber that we launched two years ago is a good example where we have a facility in downtown Toronto, but we've integrated in community connector hub, integrated in very specific career connections and career supports, so it's more wrap around employability skills in addition to the academic outcomes.

Nancy Johnston:

I think that's a great point Andrew, but I mean it's not all rosy either. <laugh> these students use in our cases disproportionately high needs for counseling, mental health supports, financial aid. I mean the change in government to allow international to work more that's recently occurred is I think a fantastic thing for that group of students. But, fortunately the service providers that many of us use have kind of ponied up for this and we now sign onto a mental health service that's available 24/7, 7 of the languages

most spoken at SFU have counselors are available, they're language and culture relevant and sensitive, and they're accessible from anywhere in the world. And that's through our Canadian service provider of health insurance. So, I think slowly this sector is responding, but I think it's fair to say that international students still have, I think, much greater challenges. Yes, a student is a student and anything we do that helps an international student that's struggling will help a domestic student that's struggling. But they have some unique needs, not the least of which is around employability. Our BC WIL (work-integrated learning) group did a two year long research study on the ways in which employers view the Hiring of Students from International pathways is the name of the study, published in the International Journal for Work Integrated Learning and there there's a lot of conscious and unconscious bias out there still in that sector.

Andrew Ness:

<affirmative>. And actually, thanks Nancy. We subscribed to the same service, so I'm glad you referenced it in terms of the mental health support. So that's terrific. You did what you said actually made me think of the connection and the intersection and I would say more consciousness around the connection between academic and immigration policies where they've often been really cross-purposes. Sometimes our academic colleagues with all good intentions struggle to think, "well how does this impact my ability to administer the policies that we have?" and I would say there's a far greater understanding and greater appreciation and consideration without any, which is really important, without any diminution of academic standards, none. But we're thinking about the different consequences that arise while upholding the academic standards, <affirmative>, which I'm sure is this case elsewhere as well.

Alex Usher:

Yeah. Let me ask a question here about sources, because I think one of the things that's really changed us, pardon me, we were a country for a long time that looked more diversified than say Australia and New Zealand did in terms of their student body. Yes, China was a big deal, but then there was a whole bunch of countries that gave us the second tier and there's Korea and there was Hong Kong. Not sure if Hong Kong and China are still considered separate anymore, but you know what I mean. And now all of a sudden we look a lot like Australia because we are now coming up on about 85% China and India and nobody else anywhere close. What happened and why? Michael, any thoughts?

Michael Savage:

Well I think the easiest answer here is that it frankly depends on what type of institution is causing this. I mean there are national trends and it's clear that Canada is a national player. So we're in the same markets as your New Zealands, Australias, the UK. So we're competing for the same sort of students. And I think it speaks to the fact that we kind of have two kind of main pathways here. Colleges and polytechnics are especially well-primed to get students who are interested in immigration, for example: future work opportunities, this is why will has already come up in the context of these types of institutions. So that's going to get you a very kind of immigration focused market, which is going to be your places like India. In other cases, prestige is what's drawing people and that's a case for other major destinations. For example, certainly the UK has prestigious institutions, the United States has prestigious institutions and the major kind of western receiving countries all have institutions with very similar characteristics. We can debate the differences between the English system, the American system, the Canadian system, the Australian system, but at their core they're very, very similar institutions that are likely to attract a similar type of student and they offer a very similar value proposition. So I think our

similarities between these countries define as far more than our differences. And I think that's reflected in the convergence of these international markets.

Alex Usher:

Interesting. Nancy?

Nancy Johnston:

Well, I think that's true, but I think there are some differences that Canada has played on in the past, safety being one of them and also because we've had some really ugly things, well everywhere, but particularly Australia went through a spade of it as did Britain certainly more than Canada, but also in the case of the west coast anyway, there are large diaspora communities here already. This is attractive in our case from Hong Kong, China, Korea, Persia which we haven't mentioned but is much smaller. But so there are safe places to land and we have certainly found at SFU that studying abroad is kind of a family decision. And if the first kid to go has a wonderful experience, you're going to get brothers and sisters and cousins and then they're going to buy a house here and then <laugh> going to do the immigration path post. And so I think there's that sort of human side of it that we can't forget when people are making decisions, they are largely influenced through previous experience.

Alex Usher:

Andrew?

Andrew Ness:

You know, I go back to the scale comment. If you think of the scale how we increase, there's really very, very few places outside of China and India that could provide us the scale in terms of the capacity we've added. Again, I have an Ontario college-centric view of things, but we've added enormous scale. But I would also say Alex, and you've referenced the UK, and UK access, there's an access issue in terms of study permit approval rates. The standing committee on immigration identified this most recently where we have enormous inbound interest from Nigeria for instance, and we can't get them into the country, but they're academically qualified, they would be superb students, yet there's a challenge there. I do think we could have perhaps a different distribution, not massively so, but appreciably so. Where we'd have a little bit more equity in terms of some of that access that comes across the rider.

Alex Usher:

Yeah, I'll come back to the policy aspect that in a second, but I do want to come to the issue, Michael, I know you've worked on this before, but there is the question of everybody wants to diversify, but where to diversify to? Where are the markets that we're not tapping? And Michael, you said we're a lot of overlap between us and I guess the old white commonwealth. Are people chasing a kymera when they say they want to diversify or is it just that so much of the world is India and China that that's where we're going to get our students?

Michael Savage:

Well, prepare for probably the least comforting answer or the least welcome answer: It depends on my kind of argument here. But there's kind of no one market for diversification just as there is no one institution. And I'm actually going to bring us back to one of Nancy's points that I find to be kind of key, which is just how much easier it is to recruit students from a specific destination when there's already a diasporic population in the community that your institution serves. There's a reason that institutions in

Brampton have such an easy, relatively easy time attracting students from India. For example, there are lots of communities in Canada with a large Filipino diaspora, they have an easier time getting Filipino students. Where it gets difficult though, is that we can't necessarily speak of "this is this country's market, it wants this", but we can definitely break things down into institution type or into specific programs for example. So if we're talking about prestige based markets, well maybe Iran is one, but maybe Iran is just a market for say business programs and medical schools for example, and not other things. So, diversification, in my mind, really speaks to a need to develop faculty and in some cases department specific strategies, for example. There's not sort of a one size fits all student for your institution. I think the more specific, the more we can drill down into specific pieces of data, specific pieces of trends, the more likely you are to be able to diversify. Though there is no kind of easy solution.

Nancy Johnston:

What I'd like to see in that diversification discussion, it's really clear why we don't want all our eggs in one financial basket. I get the financial argument but I've heard much less discourse among senior management about why do we want to diversify beyond that? Experientially academically, intellectually, as a community? And if we knew that answer to that, we would be able to choose countries by the ways in which they align with those particular kind of higher level needs. I totally get the financial argument but I think it's so overweighs and everyone just takes it as a given that diversification is good, but if it's not aligned with the core values and the core activities of your institution, I think at some point there, the tension is going to get really difficult.

Alex Usher:

Andrew?

Andrew Ness:

Diversification I think is a matter of degree. The scales that some of us are operating that you're really moving in single percentage points and it really depends on how you measure that. I do think that's the challenge. So setting the expectations around what that diversity looks like and how it will manifest in terms of your aggregate goals. And that's again with added capacity. I think that's a challenge. Michael really hit on something that I find really compelling and that is faculty specific goals. So how fine grained are the enrollment goals? Is it one bucket and whoever comes across the trends at first are admitted? Or are we really being much more deliberate to say we're using a stratified approach where there's X coming from this region and Y coming from this region. To my mind that's where we need to move. It's really putting action against this goal of diversity in order to really maintain some degree of differentiation because the cycles are so heterogeneous, they're coming into the funnels at different points, they are different and for very good reason. And so how is it that we can actually use our systems to ensure that we meet the diversity goal, and I'm talking about pre-application, really looking at this in a much more systematic way and re-engineer the process to allow for that.

Alex Usher:

That's something that strikes me. It's a lot easier for big institutions to do than small institutions in the sense that it requires a certain amount of specialization and sophistication both at the faculty level, and at the level of the recruitment office, the international office, to make that work. So if you are a small institution what do you do?

Alex Usher:

Let me turn the conversation a little bit to something that's been under the microscope in a few communities across the country and that is how international students are affecting housing. To me this is a really big one because I mean obviously universities and colleges didn't cause the long term slowdown in construction of new houses but in some communities they have been very active in bringing in a lot of short-term people requiring short-term housing and people say, well what is just another extra thousand students? I'm like, well actually you think about the number of students at SFU for instance, who live with their parents actually a thousand requiring short-term housing. That's a really big number for Burnaby, right? Or whatever part of Toronto, or Vancouver, they're scattered over. What that's doing, it's not just that it's causing a heartache to students or international students specifically. Although clearly that's finding them housing is a problem. It's raising prices not just for students but for local populations and particularly local low-income populations. It's like a tax that institutions are imposing on their communities and it's not doing the system any favors, let's put it that way. And I think we're losing allies as a sector because of some of this. So what can institutions do about this kind of thing? How bad could this get? How bad could the loss of prestige or allies get and what can we do about it?

Nancy Johnston:

Well, one of the things that we've done is really bumped up our residents and housing. We've committed to a place for every single FIC student, not even SFU student, but FIC student in their first and second years.

Alex Usher:

And FIC is your transfer?

Nancy Johnston:

That is the Fraser International College. That's our navitas partner. For a couple of reasons. One, it's a very tight residential housing, problems exist here anyway. But secondly for that transition and that sort of experience of gaining community, I mean our multi-faith center, residence and housing, and international services for students are three main student service sectors that provide such a landing place for most of our international students. Unlike Canadian students, in fact, I'm almost gonna argue that the faith-based programs and services are more important to the international students we bring in. It's the first place they will go whereas the Canadian students will head over to counseling and health because they understand that's their safe place. But anyway, residents in housing being first and foremost. And then there's sort of an interesting little offshoot to what you say, Alex, while it does make us maybe unhappy partners in the accessibility for non-students, there's a huge business in people renting out their suites, in bringing in international students, particularly the kids on the high school pathway. And so a lot of people are helping pay their own mortgages by hosting these students and bringing them into their families. So there's always two sides standard.

Alex Usher:

I know it's the Airbnb argument, right? Yeah, yeah, it's very similar. Andrew?

Andrew Ness:

Do you know where this, we are always looking for housing numbers for our students and we understand that housing costs is just going up and up. Availability, of course, is a challenge and that's really related to what's happening in the price. And where this question led me to is thinking how

transparent and how deliberate are we saying to students "this is the amount it's going to cost you to live here" and I come back at this a number of times, a number of conversations in Ontario over the past year to say we are going to be really forthright to say "this is what it's going to cost and frankly do not come unless you are prepared to bear the cost. It's not healthy for you." Not that we don't want willing students, but it's expensive and we appreciate that it's expensive and we want to be upfront with you to say this is what it will cost. To come in expecting that you'll be able to make your tuition money in working off-campus is just not a reasonable approach. So to my mind, that is, that's an important component to this.

Alex Usher

Michael, I just wanted your thoughts on the housing issue before we step away completely.

Michael Savage:

Certainly. Well I think there's no one silver bullet here. I think universities and colleges do have a responsibility to perhaps provide a little more on campus housing than they currently do. They should prioritize the expansion of that though that's not likely to bring returns for a good long while. I think one of the things that we face is that this is an issue that's much larger than just the sector. So the sector can be an important voice in lobbying for more affordable housing. It should be a champion of more opportunities, more housing opportunities for everyone in this country here. But it alone is not going to be able to solve the problem. But if it's seen as a helpful ally, I think that will go a long way.

Alex Usher:

And again, so that notion of allies and who you're allying with in the community and therefore who's willing to be allies with you is really important. One example of that that I think is really interesting is that Cape Breton University, the famous Cape Breton University, with all its international students, they have just put up a big proposal for a lot of, not just student housing but low income housing. So I think it's about 700 units that they're putting. Now admittedly on an old environmental site, if I'm not mistaken, it's near, it's... sorry, it's not on the flats, it's near the flats. But that they sounds to me like they're getting close to permission to get going on that. And while it's not enough to capture the whole big increase in the last few years. There is some stuff that's especially set aside for the community, which I think is pretty interesting.

Alex Usher:

Okay, well then let me focus do before we wrap up, I want one piece of insight baseball because I think this is a question that a lot of people have in the international student business and it's how do you right size your international services? How do you fund your international services? I mean one of the things about student services, or the bookstore, or whatever is you've had years to figure out how to fund those things. International, you got money floating in many cases very quickly and you have to upsize what you're doing to match and we have no practice doing that really, right? Because it's just the idea that there are specialized services that need to come in, that's difficult. And I hear often people in international offices feeling under appreciating saying we have to bring in all the money, but we're not getting any of the money in order to actually do what we're supposed to do. So how do you size an international student operation? And Michael, I know you, you've done some work on this with an Ontario University, so what's the answer to that, at least at larger institutions?

Michael Savage:

Well, you have to get creative with things. I would say that there's not a lot of creativity currently. So if we are looking at how these are currently staffed and resourced, they're almost exclusively budgeted for according to kind of past precedent. "This is what we gave them last year, we might give them a modest increase, maybe not." That's sort of how they look at it regardless of other things. Now some institutions,

Alex Usher:

Regardless of how many students they get?

Michael Savage:

Often now some institutions get to play around with some revenue generating activities. There's a lot of really, really great summer programs and things like that are used as revenue generators that can then be channeled back to services. I know University of British Columbia runs a really interesting summer school, for example, that's highly profitable and can be used to support other things. It's exceptionally rare though for an increase in international students to automatically equal an increase in the resources provided to international student offices. A while back, I think about two years ago, I did a benchmarking of most U15 offices and I think it was just the University of Calgary that had it had a funding formula whereby if international students increased by X amount the funding for the unit would go up by Y amount. So it really is largely based on past precedent. Although I will say institutions that have been stumbling blindly in this area have still come to similar concerns. They've all sort of realized that there's a clear need for kind of frontline service personnel, frontline immigration advising and the like, and you can sort just chart it based on the amount of staff per student. And it seems like everywhere decides that about 1500 international students equals a need for one immigration advisor. Now, nobody comes out and says this, nobody has said, "here's our actual number" but the pressures seem to be oriented right around this number. So everybody sort of falls in line in the 1500 to 2000 and if you go over that the offices are just increasingly pressed, then they're worried about actually kind of upholding the appropriate level of service.

Alex Usher:

Andrew, we're going to go to you partially because Humber teaches that course on how to advise students on or if where all the university advisors for immigration

Andrew Ness:

Yes, that's right. We did but it's no longer, it's moved now, but no, I think Michael's hit on some... Look, I can only speak for Humber in terms of our budget model and we don't hitch our wagon to revenue. What we try to do is embody the academic values, including internationalization. Alex, you and I have talked about this. If we have a need at a budget point, immigration advisor, Michael, I don't know how you figured out that 1500 number, but that's pretty darn accurate. We have a need and the institution's responded and that's happened multiple times. We identify the need and it's funded, but it's part of our normal budget process. So we don't say, "look, the revenue came from us", that's just not correct to do. So we just wouldn't do that. But part of this here, the conversation is how are we supporting the Strat plan, the academic plan, the digital campus plan, which I know many institutions talk about this, but really here it's a crucial part of what our future direction is and we really need to be either amplifying or exemplifying what the outcomes of those plans are and then we we're supported accordingly and we're

very careful to ensure that we're aligned with where the institution's going that way and we're supported as a result.

Alex Usher:

Nancy?

Nancy Johnston:

Yeah, maybe I could just add, We- Michael don't have at SFU a particular formula like that - Built into the increases in tuition, we've been doing this for a while, is increased international targeted scholarships and international targeted financial aid. So there are space there for students in need, but I'm going to challenge us to do something bigger than that. When I was there, I was keen to change the whole image of what international student services is. It's not to recreate regular student services in another complete silo and keep them all for their entire career over here with their international counterparts. They come here because they want a Canadian experience. And so we change the name of our center to International Services for Students. It welcomes domestic students, international students study abroad, field schools. It has of course the most important onboarding stuff. It's usually at the front end for students internationally in the immigration services. But after that where, what we challenged was every other student service to ask itself, how does it offer its service in a particular way that meets the needs of international students. And so we began to work way more like that. And we do the same for indigeneity, disability. There are certain obvious challenges that those groups need specialized, informed counseling and guidance on, but really you have to change the pond. If you don't want the frogs to keep getting sick, the frogs will change a little bit. But the pond has to change too. And I think our Canadian institutions have a lot of change to do, to be truly a welcoming partner to international students because we are still very, very stuck on the ways in which we offered education 5, 10, 20, 30 years ago.

Alex Usher:

Yeah. Interesting. Can I ask, because you mentioned one thing earlier, Nancy, about there was one specific set of services that you thought were important, which was the interfaith services. That seems to me that would be a really big change in the institution or a sub-unit of the institution that would have to undergo quite a bit of change. Can you describe how that happened? and was it gradual? Was it sudden?

Nancy Johnston:

No, it was very gradual to your point Alex. And obviously there's always faith-based activities on campuses and I think the SSU wanted to be hands-off and stay out of that business and let them do their thing in their own way. But it became clear that it would be better to have, somebody always would rise at chief chaplain or that wanted to coordinate activities and the students would have some amount of intermingling. And so finally, and I think this is not uncommon across Canada because when I actually put a full-time job in place for our center of interfaith, the head of the center of interfaith, I took it off of about 15 other schools. Calgary was out there; I think they were doing some stuff in Windsor. And so we have a full-time person that as part of the student services team. And so they're always there because who's looking after the desk disproportionately, Hi, I'm sorry to say for international students, the Chaplaincy. Who's looking after the people that are stressed out in international services for students delivering services? the chaplaincy. Where are the students going to, first and foremost, they land in their faith-based communities, at least with the students that we have coming to us. They're very strong faith-based people. So yeah, we now have a very good relationship with that group. They interact as

part of a student services team and they perform a lot of really important functions that are critical to, I don't want to say academic success, but human success. Which of course when those things start to degrade, academic success is out the window. So I really think they're kind of an unspoken about important foundation to setting a new community and in the pond.

Alex Usher:

Interesting. Well, let me wrap up with this one last question. Policies towards international students come at various levels, right? We've got some coming to the federal government, we've got some coming from provincial governments, sometimes accidentally. And of course what's going on at the institutional level. And I always like to sort of say, how are we doing? And the, we contains multitudes here but how is Canada doing on international students? What have we got right as a country about bringing international students here and what have we got wrong in the whole system? Michael, can I start with you?

Michael Savage:

Sure. I think one of the things that we've gotten right has been what we haven't done. We haven't embraced the politics that completely others international students. We haven't had our own kind of Brexit moment. Not that we'd have the capabilities of having a moment like that, but this absence has really served to make the Canadian brand stronger irrespective of any kind of strategy we have. I think I, I'll be curious to hear everyone else's thoughts, but there are opportunities to have a more articulated international strategy. We've just been the beneficiaries of some well-timed inaction, frankly.

Alex Usher:

Interesting. We haven't gotten our own ways basically. Yeah. Okay. Nancy?

Nancy Johnston:

Well I, I'm thinking that, I don't know if it's so much a federal government policy, although as I mentioned earlier, I think they are paying more attention to things like extending the ability to work off campus. Those are policies that have been very good I think and will be very good for international students. We've always had, this is institution dependent, but we at SFU have always had the allowed international students to work through our work-integrated learning and the federal government of policy allows for that. They get the ability to do that their entire time in top of working outside of that. So I think those have worked well, and perhaps, I don't want to get too political, but I think Canada's still seen to be a welcoming generally country for new immigrants. So what we're doing on the immigration front is perceived, I think generally by the external world as being fairly, maybe in many people's minds too welcoming, but a welcoming country. So that immigration policy kind of helps educational recruitment. I think just by virtue of creating this notion of a welcoming safe country with that's very diverse. We've always had that mosaic here that the US has never sort identified with. So I think those have helped a bit.

Alex Usher:

Andrew?

Andrew Ness:

Yeah, the immigration policy connecting credential achievement to immigration pathway was a brilliant move however many years ago. That was 15 years ago. And we continue to reap rewards based on the

policy, how it's enacting now in terms of the engineering, that is a story altogether different. And I think that is what we've done is put handcuffs on ourselves. We have a fantastic policy, but if we can't get them into the country or we're not being equitable to the way we do that then it's all for not, And Michael, I loved your comment to say it's what we didn't do and it's what, or the stumbles from these other countries. That is true, but the ships are right sizing in other places. Australia's the best example that I can think of right now and it's an enormous threat to our overall opportunity. And if we can't fix these other systems, and it's one of these things, we should have fixed the roof when it wasn't raining, when it was sunny, now it's pouring rain and we haven't fixed it. I heard a report yesterday, 155,000 study permit backlog yet so

Alex Usher:

Good Lord. 155.

Andrew Ness:

It was CBC Radio, huh. And I, it's disheartening because it's not a simple fix I appreciate, but at the same time we owe our students the ability to hear back in a timely way. So I really do hope that we'll work on that. The policy is great and enacting it? We have some work to do.

Alex Usher:

And so that's all of the time we have for our podcast today. I would just like to thank our guests: Michael Savage, Manager of International Markets and Mobility here at Higher Education Strategy Associates, Nancy Johnston, Independent Consultant and Former Vice Provost Students and International at Simon Fraser University and Andrew Ness, Dean, International at Humber College. Thanks to the three of you and thanks everyone for listening. We'll be back in a couple of weeks.