

# The Pros and Cons of Internationalization: How Domestic Students Experience the Globalizing Campus

Higher Education Strategy Associates Intelligence Brief 7

Jacqueline Lambert  
Alex Usher

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Higher Education Strategy Associates (HESA) is a Toronto-based firm specializing in research, data and strategy. Our mission is to help universities and colleges compete in the educational marketplace based on quality; to that end, we offer our clients a broad range of informational, analytical, evaluative, and advisory services.

The Intelligence Brief series is designed to provide readers with up-to-date insights from our proprietary student panel and our Policy Warehouse.

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Contact:

Higher Education Strategy Associates  
400-460 Richmond W., Toronto, ON M5V 1Y1, Canada  
phone: 416.848.0215  
fax: 416.849.0500  
info@higheredstrategy.com

[www.higheredstrategy.com](http://www.higheredstrategy.com)

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## INTRODUCTION

Internationalization in various forms is a well-established trait of the Canadian postsecondary landscape. International students have doubled as a share of total enrolment at Canadian universities from about 6% in 1992 to 12% in 2010<sup>1</sup>. Canada's professoriate is also drawn from countries far and beyond – over 40% of professors in Canada are immigrants or non-permanent residents<sup>2</sup>. Additionally, university programs provide many avenues for students to increase their global reach, such as study abroad/exchange programs, international research partnerships, and co-op programs.

While much has been written about international students and educators at Canadian universities, there has been little research conducted on how increased internationalization affects the experiences of domestic students. Universities proclaim the benefits of internationalization, but how do students actually experience the changing environment that internationalization brings, and how (if at all) does it change students' outlook on their future careers and opportunities?

In the spring of 2013, Higher Education Strategy Associates' Canadian Education Project conducted a survey to answer these questions. Domestic students – defined as students who completed secondary school in Canada, and did not require a study permit to attend post-secondary education here – were asked a variety of questions about their experiences with international students and instructors, as well as about studying and working abroad. Their answers, detailed over the following pages, paint a diverse portrait of internationalization on Canadian campuses. As it turns out, while many students report substantial benefits to internationalization, some also report drawbacks that Canadian institutions will need to address if internationalization is to be an effective and positive element of the student experience.

Section I of this report describes this paper's sample and methodology. Section II, *Internationalization at Home*, investigates how domestic students feel about internationalization as it relates to campus and classroom life. Section III, *Internationalization Abroad*, explores domestic students' experiences with studying and working abroad. Lastly, we conclude with some observations about how internationalization is seen, on balance, on Canadian campuses.

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<sup>1</sup> Authors' calculation, based on data from Statistics Canada. No date. *Table 477-0019 Public postsecondary enrolments, by registration status, Pan-Canadian Standard Classification of Education (PCSC), Classification of Instructional Programs, Primary Grouping (CIP\_PG), sex and immigration status, annual* (table). CANSIM (database). (accessed: 2013-09-26)

<sup>2</sup> Canadian Association of University Teachers. 2013. *2013-2014 CAUT Almanac of Post-secondary Education in Canada*. <http://www.caut.ca/docs/default-source/almanac/almanac-2013-2014.pdf> (accessed: 2013-09-26)

## SECTION I – SAMPLE DESCRIPTION AND METHODOLOGY

The data used in this report were collected through an online survey conducted by Higher Education Strategy Associate’s Canadian Education Project between 26 April 2013 and 10 May 2013. HESA runs an on-going online panel with a membership of over 13 000 university students and recent graduates. Periodically throughout the year, HESA invites these panel members to complete a survey on a variety of issues pertaining to life on and off-campus, with a response rate that varies from survey-to-survey, but is usually in the range of 15-25%. The sample for this analysis was 1,398 cases, each of which met the following criteria:

- Enrolled in an undergraduate or graduate program at a Canadian degree-granting university at some point in the 2012-13 academic year
- Domestic students; that is, students who were either (a) not enrolled as international students during the past academic year, (b) completed high school in Canada, and/or (c) did not need a study permit to attend university in Canada.

It should be noted that the resulting sample for this and any other of HESA’s Canadian Education Project surveys is not a purely random one – members of the panel must have responded to at least one previous survey administered by Higher Education Strategy Associates (either directly or as a part of its Canadian Education Project). Since they are not based on random probability samples, the concept of “margin of sampling error” is not applicable to the results described in this report. This is consistent with the Market Research and Intelligence Association’s (MRIA) current code of practice.

As is the case with most opinion polling, females are slightly over-sampled, as they appear to be more likely to respond to surveys than males. Our panel is also slightly oversampled in Atlantic Canada, Saskatchewan, and Alberta, and slightly undersampled in francophone universities in Quebec. As well, our panel membership is skewed towards upper-year undergraduate students. Exact numbers in the sample change from survey to survey; up-to-date details of the survey demographics are available upon request by contacting the authors.

In this report, as in all HESA reports based on data from the CanEd panel, the data has been post-stratified based on Statistics Canada data on gender and province of enrolment<sup>3</sup>. This corrects for differences in response rates by gender and region to derive results that are more representative of the Canadian university student population.

Many of the effects we have found with respect to students’ experiences with internationalization are specific to certain groups of fields of study. To simplify the presentation of results in this paper, we have used the following field of study categorizations:

- **STEM:** includes life and physical sciences and technology, engineering, computer science, and mathematics,

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<sup>3</sup> Author’s calculations, based on Statistics Canada. 2011. Special Tabulation, based on 2010 Postsecondary Student Information System (PSIS).

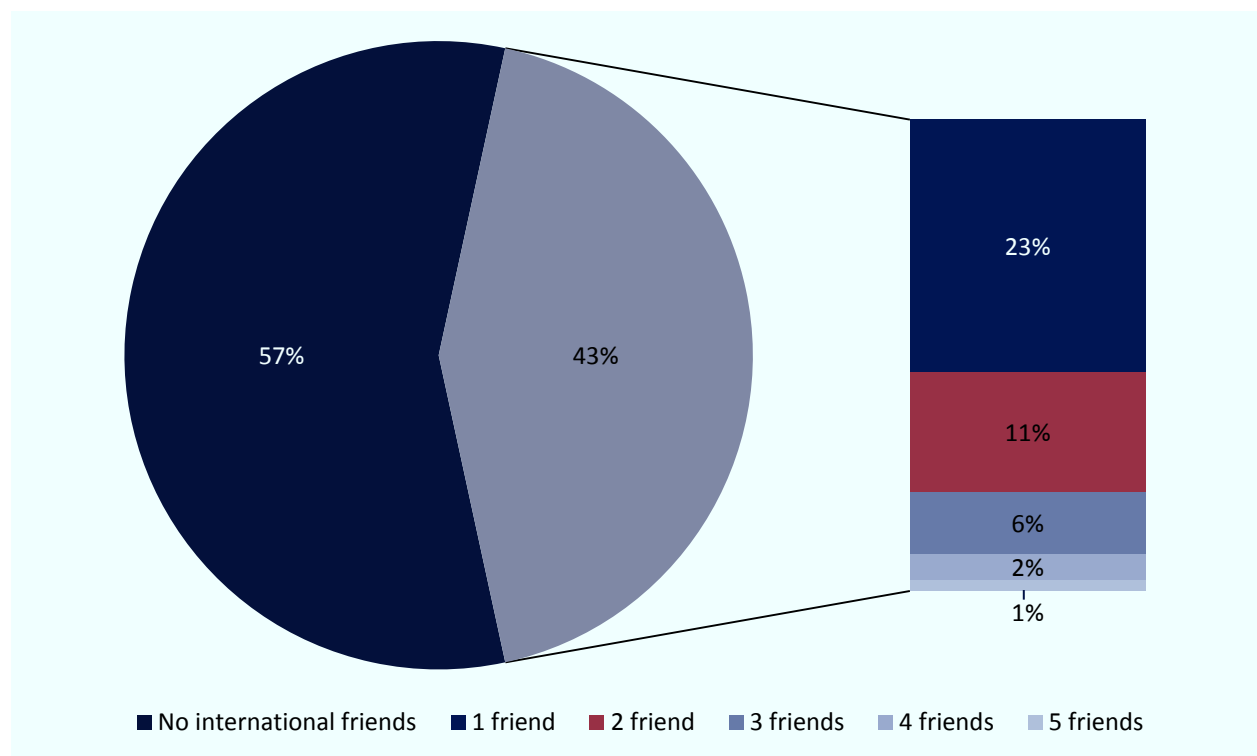
- **Health and pre-professional fields:** includes nursing, medicine, dentistry, kinesiology, physical therapy, education, and law – these are all fields that depend on local practice licensure and standards
- **Business:** includes business administration and commerce programs
- **Humanities, social sciences and visual arts**
- **Other:** fields not otherwise specified: typically includes students in interdisciplinary programs

## SECTION 2 – INTERNATIONALIZATION AT HOME

### INTERNATIONALIZATION AND STUDENT LIFE

A general claim made in favour of internationalization is that it improves the student experience by providing students with the opportunity to form friendships with peers from a diverse range of cultures. The formation of such friendships does seem to happen frequently, with roughly half of all domestic students indicating that an international student is among the five best friends they made while at university.

FIGURE 1: THINKING OF THE FIVE CLOSEST FRIENDS YOU MADE AT UNIVERSITY, HOW MANY WERE INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS?



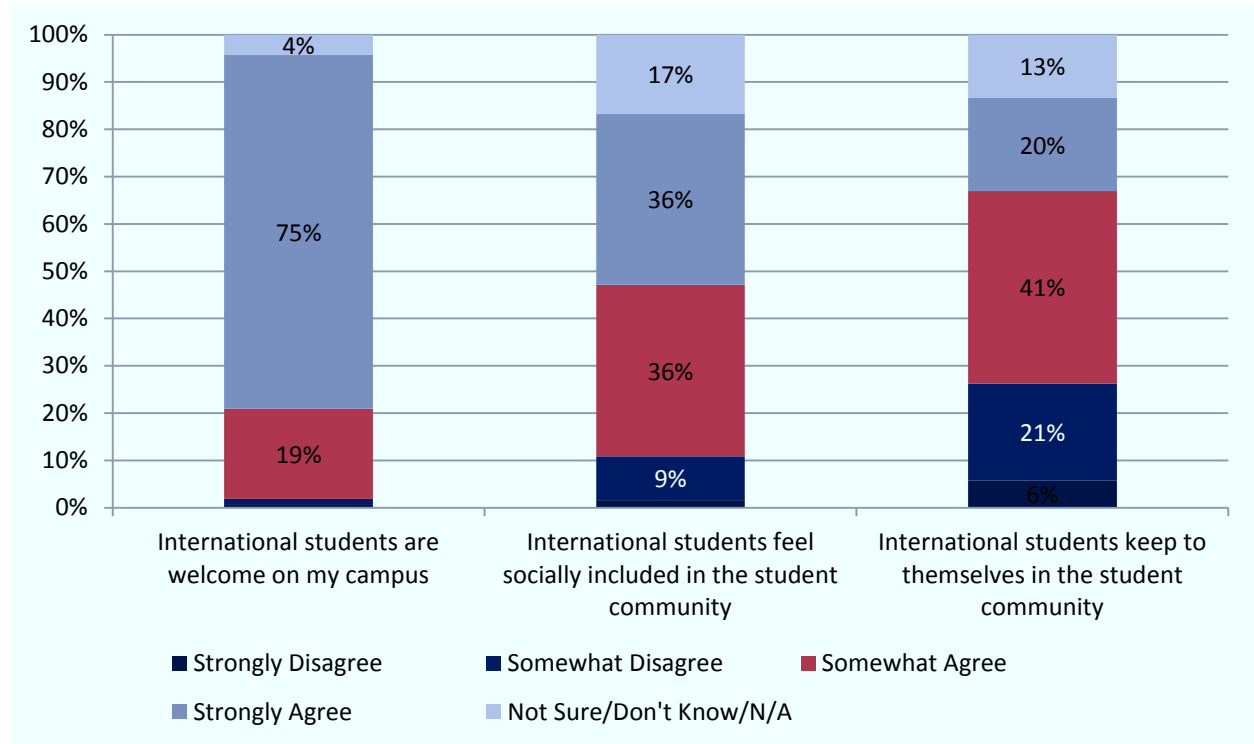
There was no significant relationship between area of study and having at least one close international friend, nor was there a relationship between gender and the presence of international students in one's social circle. However, students who live away from their parents – particularly those who live in residence – are much more likely to have an international student as a friend than those who live with their parents, as is shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1: WHO MAKES INTERNATIONAL STUDENT FRIENDS?

By living arrangement:	% with international friends
With parent(s)	37%
On-campus residence	54%
On my own with no roommates	55%
On my own with roommates	46%

We also asked students about how they thought international students integrated with the larger community. The results were intriguing. Over 90% of students thought that international students were *welcomed* on campus; however, only 72% said they thought that international students themselves felt *included* in the campus which suggests that, from a student perspective, being *welcomed* and being *included* are not quite the same thing. Just over 60% said that international students “kept to themselves” in the university community. Whether this was seen as a cause or a consequence of not being fully welcomed was unclear.

FIGURE 2: VIEWS OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN THE CAMPUS COMMUNITY





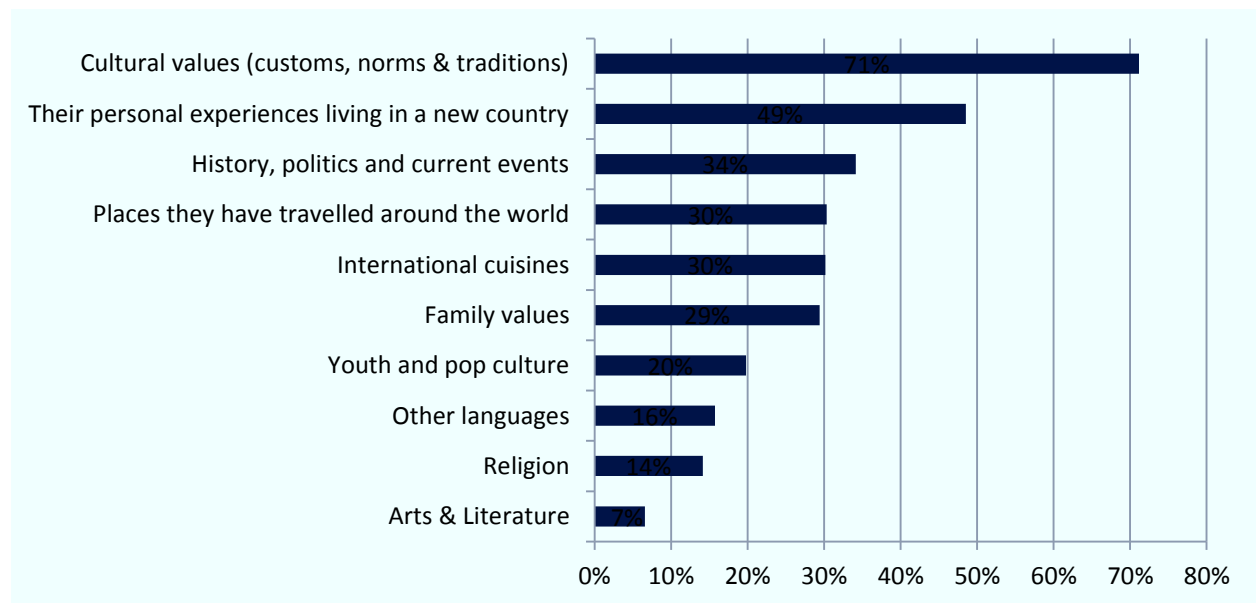
Views on whether foreign students were welcome or included on campus differed depending on whether respondents had made international friends while at university. Those with international student friends were much more likely to strongly agree with the statement that international students feel socially included in the campus community (44% vs. 31%); those without international friends were more than twice as likely to be unsure, or to have no opinion (22% vs. 10%). Furthermore, 80% of those with international friends strongly agree that international students are welcome on their campuses versus 70% of those without international student friends.

Though most campuses have a plethora of cultural clubs which offer students opportunities to immerse themselves in a different culture while on campus, few students seem to take advantage of them. Overall, about eight percent of respondents reported being involved in at least one student association that caters to students of a cultural heritage other than their own – about 11% among students with some international friends and 6% for those without.

That said, in general, most respondents (74%) felt that the increasing international student population has led to more opportunities to participate in international and multicultural-focused events. Additionally, over two-thirds of respondents said that the presence of international students at their institution has increased their curiosity to learn about other cultures.

In this vein, we asked students what it was they actually learned from conversations with their international student friends. The most common answer was cultural customs, norms, and traditions (71%), followed by friends’ personal experiences about living in a new country (49%) and then history, politics, and current events (34%).

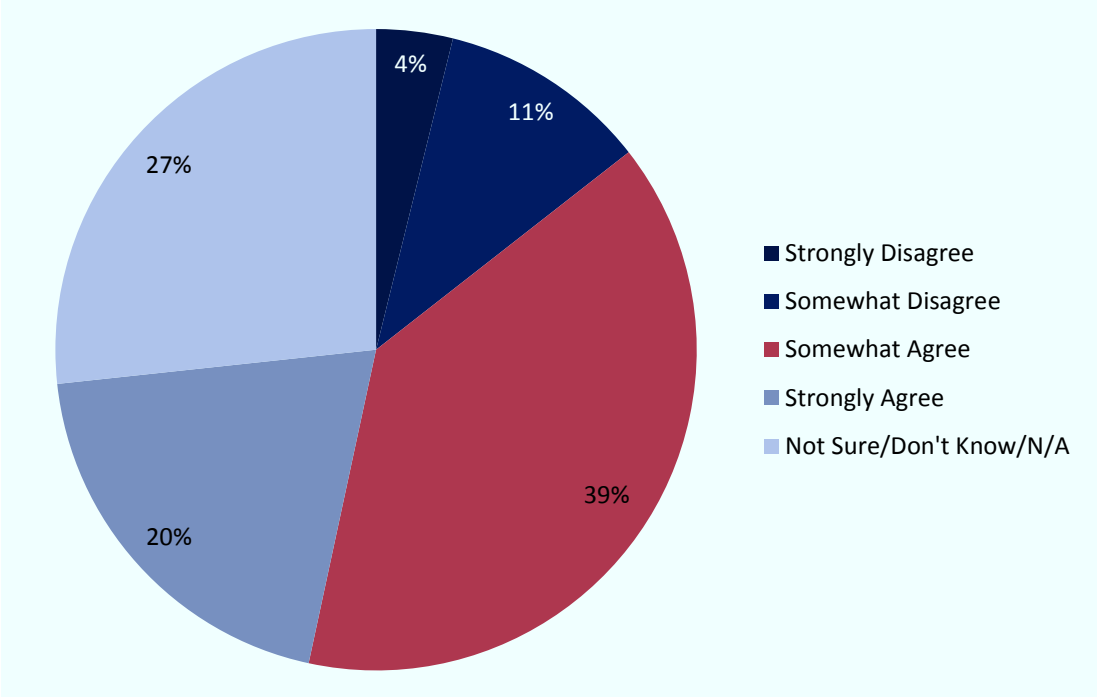
FIGURE 3: WHAT DOMESTIC STUDENTS HAVE LEARNED FROM THEIR INTERNATIONAL FRIENDS



Even though more than half of respondents did not have any international students within their top 5 friends made at university, a majority (64%) of respondents reported that their perspective about the world has been enriched since making international friends (or in many cases, acquaintances) at school. Additionally, nearly three-quarters of respondents felt that the growing international student presence has led to increased cross-cultural sensitivity and awareness among students on campus.

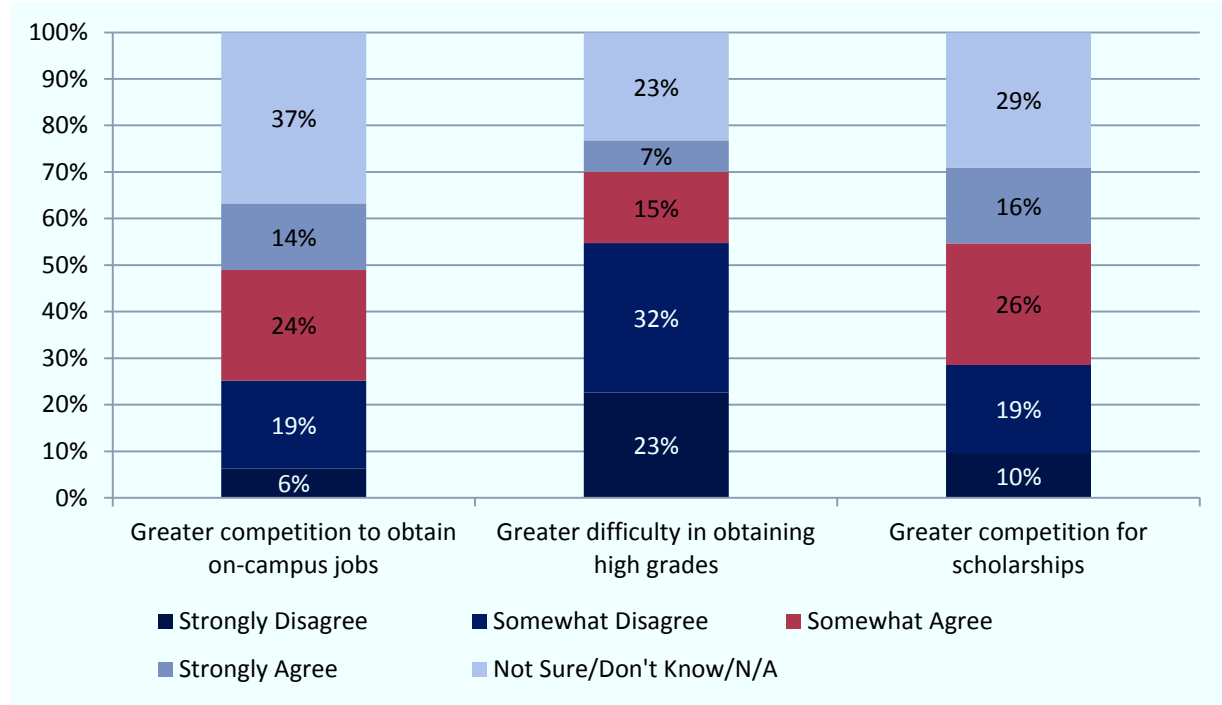
One final benefit that domestic students report is that an increase in the number of international students makes their school more desirable. Sixty percent of students believed the increasing number of international students has led to improvements in the university's reputation and image in general.

FIGURE 4: THE INCREASING NUMBER OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS ATTENDING MY INSTITUTION HAS LED TO IMPROVEMENTS IN THE UNIVERSITY'S REPUTATION AND IMAGE



All of that said, however, there was a feeling among some domestic students that the growing international student population created greater competition for higher grades. Close to 40% of students felt that the increasing number of international students on their campus has led to greater competition to obtain on-campus jobs. A similar percentage of respondents felt that growing international numbers also means greater competition for scholarships.

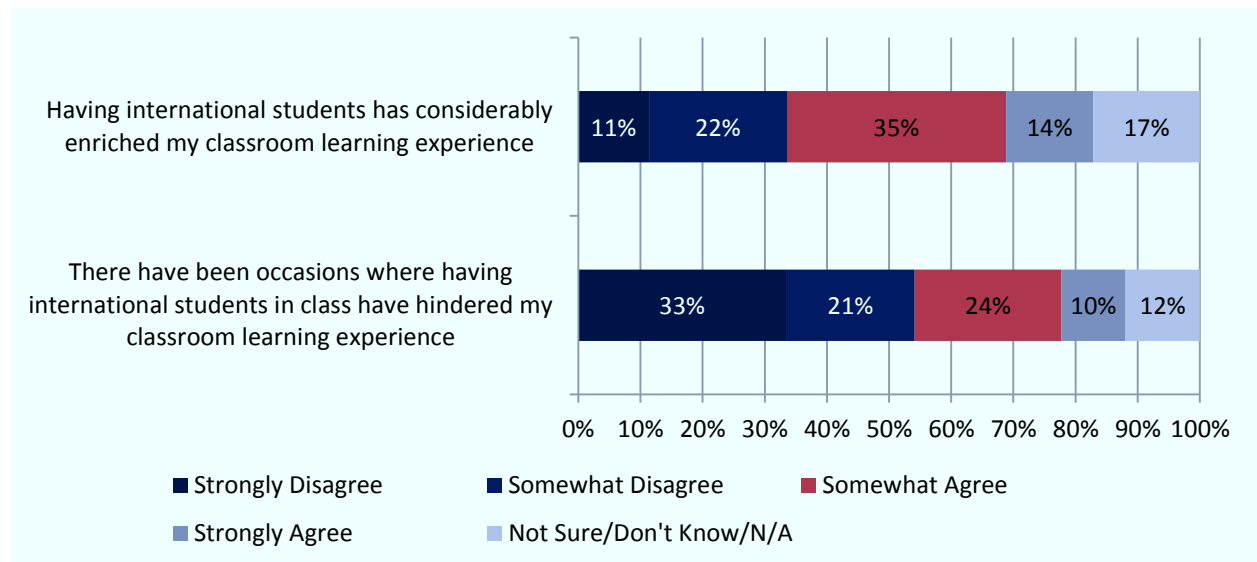
FIGURE 5: THE INCREASING NUMBER OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS ATTENDING MY INSTITUTION HAS LED TO \_\_\_\_\_



## INTERNATIONALIZATION IN THE CLASSROOM

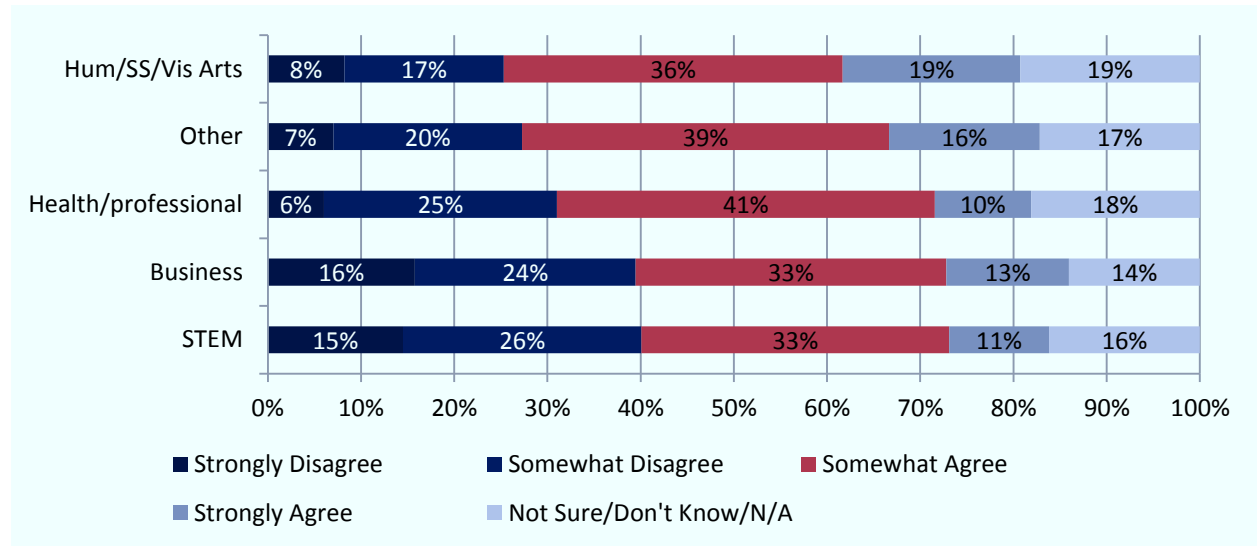
One of the oft-mentioned benefits of internationalization is the way in which it brings different perspectives to the classroom. However, domestic students seem somewhat divided on international students' contributions to their classroom experiences. Roughly half of all students agreed with the statement that having international students in the classroom has considerably enriched their learning experience, but fully one-third disagreed with it (17% were unsure). Similarly, roughly one-third of students indicated that international students have, on occasion, hindered their classroom learning experience, while just over half disagreed.

FIGURE 6: PERSPECTIVES ON INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN THE CLASSROOM



STEM students (specifically, those in the physical sciences, engineering, math, and computer science) seemed to be less enthusiastic, with approximately 11% having strongly agreed that international students enriched their classroom experiences. 19% of humanities/social sciences/visual arts students and 18% of pre-professional students strongly agreed with the same statement. These differences are illustrated in Figure 7.

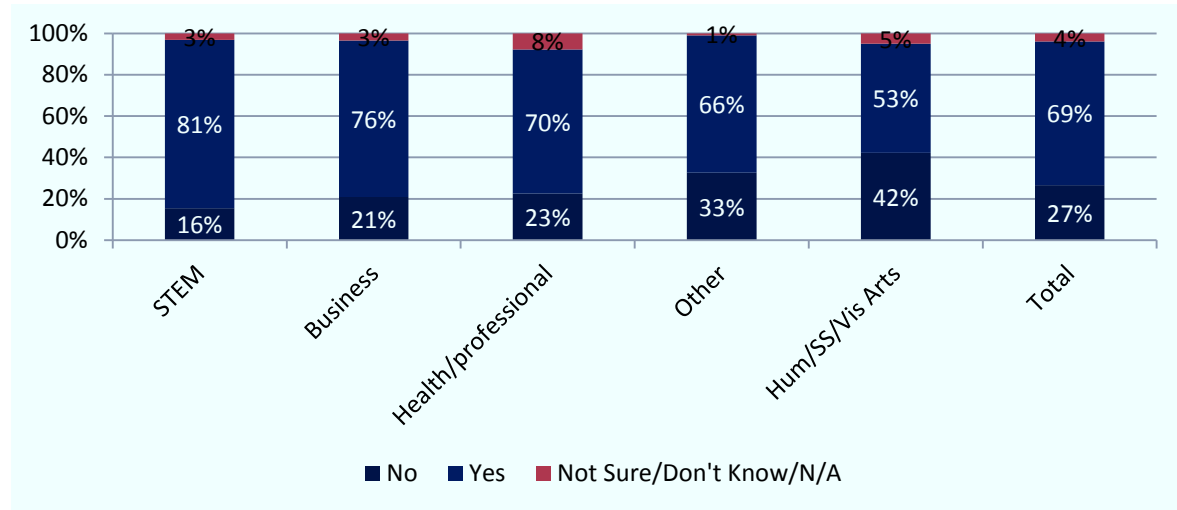
FIGURE 7: HAVING INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS HAS CONSIDERABLY ENRICHED MY CLASSROOM LEARNING EXPERIENCE, BY FIELD OF STUDY



Having international students in one’s social circle had a strong effect on how respondents felt about internationalization in the classroom. Over 62% of students with at least one international friend agreed with the idea that international students enrich their classroom presence, compared to just under 40% of those without any international friends. This effect is similar across all fields of study.

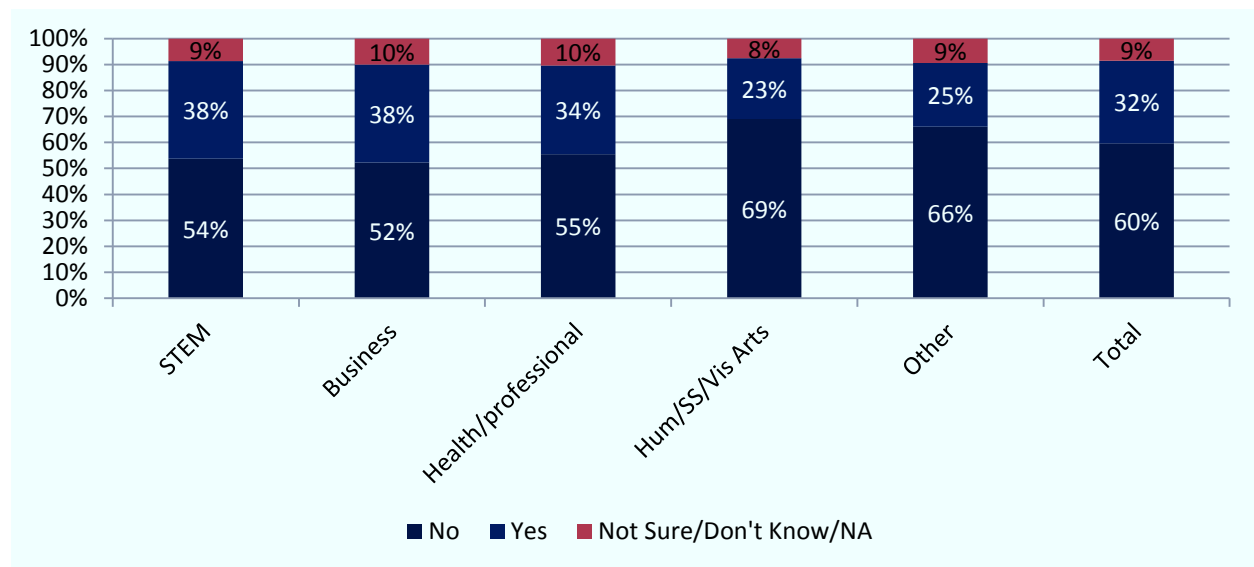
When we turn to the effects of international instructors, respondents were divided on the topic of how an international instructor impacted their progress in a course. About 32% of respondents have had an instructor whose English or French language facility significantly and negatively hindered their ability to be successful in a course. The majority of respondents (70%) reported that they have had an international instructor or TA who was difficult to comprehend due to their command of English and/or French. As with many other issues in internationalization, students’ experiences differ by field of study. 81% of STEM students and 86% of physical/agricultural science students have had an instructor whom they had trouble understanding, whereas this was only the case for 52% of social science/humanities/visual arts students. These differences are further illustrated in figure 8.

FIGURE 8: HAVE YOU EVER HAD AN INTERNATIONAL INSTRUCTOR/TA THAT WAS DIFFICULT TO COMPREHEND BECAUSE OF THEIR COMMAND OF ENGLISH OR FRENCH, BY FIELD OF STUDY



Of perhaps greater consequence, however, is that many of the respondents who indicated that they had a difficult-to-understand instructor also indicated that the instructor's language ability significantly and negatively hindered their ability to be successful in that course. Of those reporting that they had a difficult-to-comprehend instructor, 32% indicated that they had been negatively affected by their instructor's language ability, with the effect again being more pronounced in STEM subjects than elsewhere.

FIGURE 9: HAS A DIFFICULT-TO-COMPREHEND INSTRUCTOR SIGNIFICANTLY AND NEGATIVELY HINDERED YOUR ABILITY TO PERFORM OR SUCCESSFULLY COMPLETE A COURSE?



## SECTION 3 - INTERNATIONALIZATION ABROAD

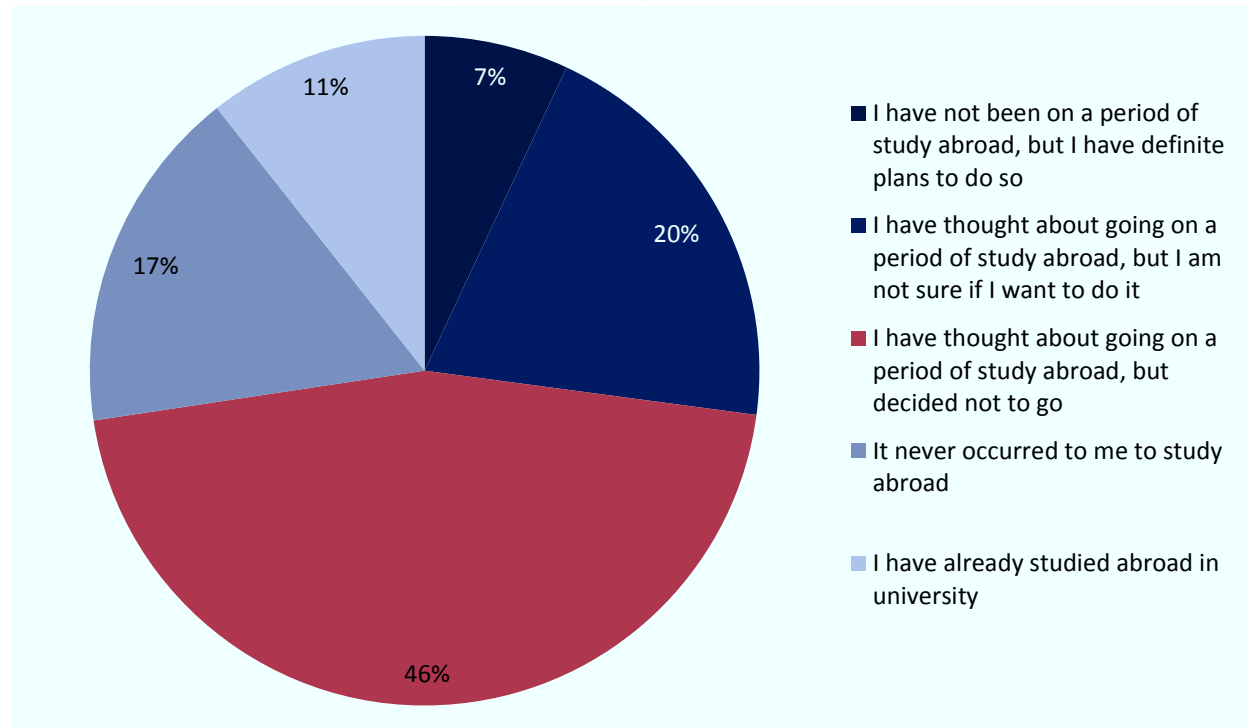
### STUDYING ABROAD

For some domestic students, experiencing internationalization involves pursuing part of their university studies in a foreign country. Just over 10% of respondents reported traveling outside Canada or the United States for a study abroad period while in university.

Field of study has a significant relationship with having gone on a term abroad: humanities/social science/visual arts and business students were the most likely to have studied abroad (16 % and 13% respectively), whereas respondents in science, engineering, computer science, or mathematics were the least likely (8%).

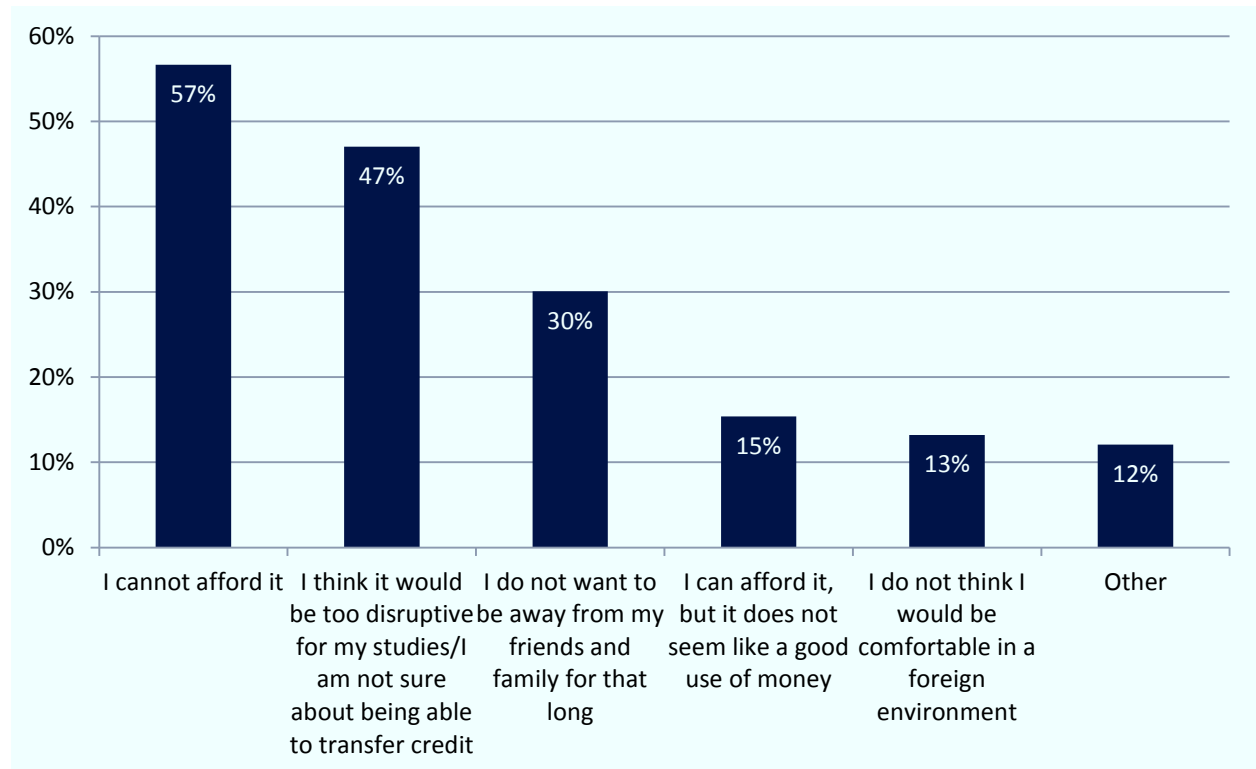
We also asked students who had not studied abroad about their intentions to do so in the future. Slightly over half had thought about going abroad, but had decided not to go. Just over one-fifth of respondents had thought about going on a period of study abroad, but were undecided about actually making it happen. A similar proportion, at 19%, reported that studying abroad had never occurred to them. Finally, 8% had concrete plans to have an educational experience abroad. The overall distribution of respondents' study abroad plans and experiences is illustrated below in Figure 10.

FIGURE 10: PLANS TO STUDY ABROAD (OVERALL SAMPLE)



Students who do not have definite plans to study abroad have a variety of reasons for choosing to stay at home, with concerns about affordability being an issue for over half of these students. Nearly half (47%) of respondents in this group felt that time spent abroad would be too disruptive to their studies or lead to trouble in transferring credits to their home institution, a concern that seems to be slightly more pronounced amongst STEM students (53%). Just under a third of respondents with no plans to study abroad simply did not want to be away from their friends and family for an extended period of time.

**FIGURE 11: REASONS RESPONDENTS WOULD NOT STUDY ABROAD**

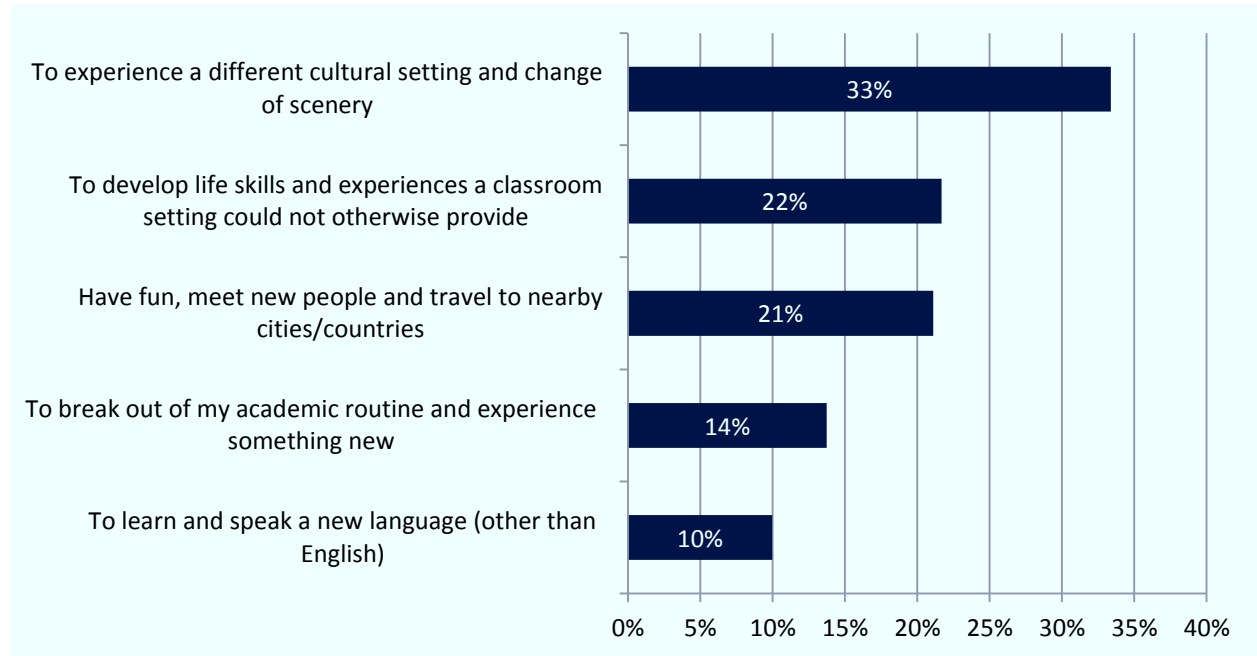


These results point to logistical issues, rather than a lack of curiosity about international education, as being the major barriers for students considering studying abroad. Field of study plays minor role in how students feel about studying abroad. Close to one-fifth of our respondents in STEM and pre-professional programs had never thought to study abroad, compared to about 14% in humanities/social sciences/law and business.

When respondents who had already gone abroad or were planning to do so were asked about their motivations for studying abroad, experiencing a new culture was the top reason chosen by nearly 33% of respondents. Having fun and meeting new people, and developing life skills in a non-classroom setting were the next two most-frequent answers, each chosen by slightly more than one-fifth of respondents.



FIGURE 12: REASONS FOR STUDYING ABROAD (AMONG THOSE ALREADY STUDIED ABROAD OR PLANNING TO DO SO)



As for students' most-desired destination, the top destinations for students who had studied abroad and those considering it were France, the UK, Australia, and Germany, comprising over 45% of responses. Conversely, countries in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East were less popular study abroad destinations; about 2% of respondents had chosen China as a study abroad location, and India was a destination for less than 1% of respondents.

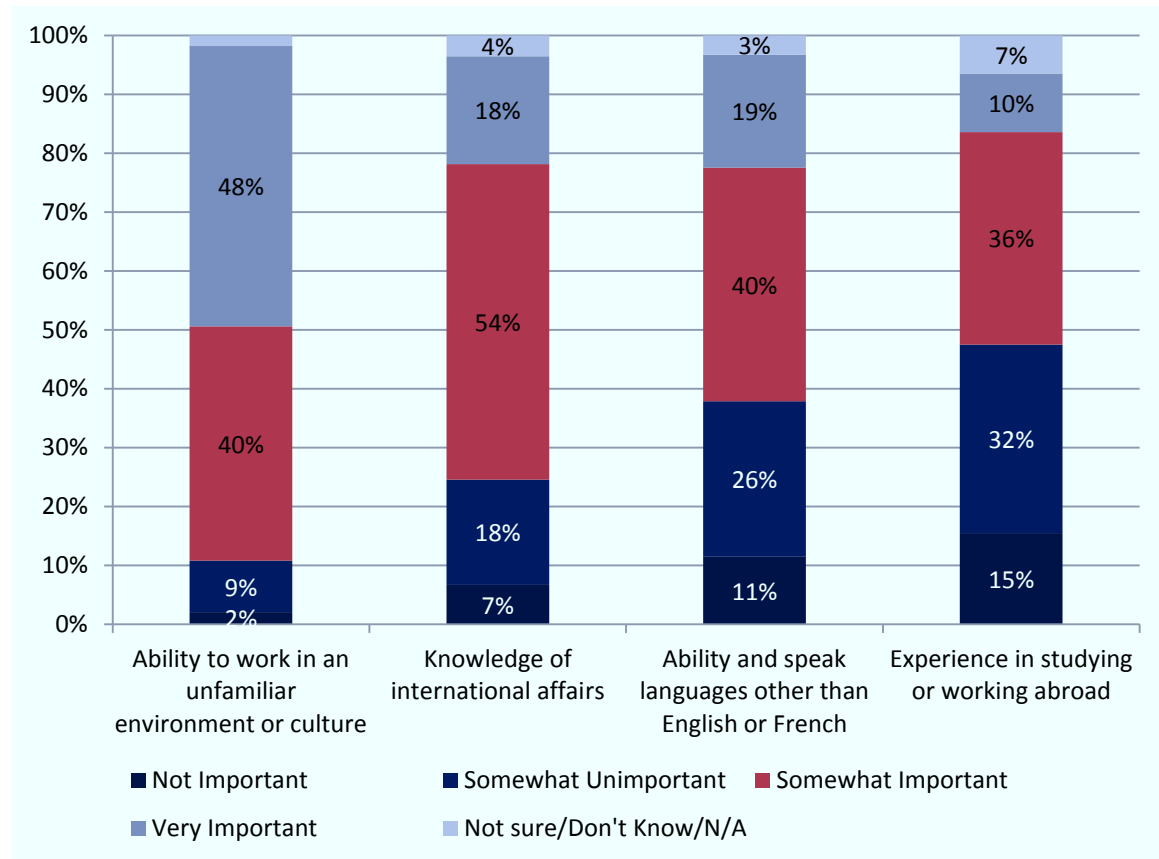
## WORKING ABROAD

Building a career abroad is another way in which domestic students may gain international experiences after they complete their studies.

In general, over half of respondents saw working abroad at some point as being an important part of building a successful career. To that end, about 7% of respondents had gotten a head start on international work experience by having already travelled outside of Canada for work or co-op. But even among students who did not see working abroad as important, there was still widespread agreement that certain internationally-related skills were important to obtaining a job. An overwhelming proportion – close to 90% – of respondents felt that being able to work in an unfamiliar environment or culture would be at least somewhat important for finding a job after university. Additionally, over 70% of respondents felt that knowledge of international affairs would be at least somewhat important to getting a job.

However, as manifestations of internationalization become more practical and concrete, students seem to become less convinced of their value. The ability to speak a language other than English or French was seen as very important by only 19% of students, and somewhat important by another 40%. Only 10% of respondents saw experience in studying or working abroad as being very important to their future careers, with another 36% having rated it as somewhat important.

FIGURE 13: HOW IMPORTANT DO YOU THINK EACH OF THE FOLLOWING ARE IN TERMS OF GETTING A JOB AFTER GRADUATION?



Field of study affected how students regard internationalization in their careers; over 26% of business students and 25% of social sciences, humanities, and law students felt that knowledge of international affairs would be very important to their post-grad job search, compared to just 8% of engineering, computer science, and math students. A similar pattern emerged when looking at respondents' attitudes about non-English/French language skills; about 11% of engineering/CS/math students saw this as being highly important, compared to 25% of social sciences/humanities/law students and 24% of business students.

## CONCLUSION

The good news in all of this is that domestic students generally welcome the greater presence of international students on their campuses, and have generally positive attitudes towards the diversity that international students can bring to their classrooms and social lives. Many have formed close friendships with students from abroad. And they are also very positive about study abroad programs and the benefits of internationalization generally.

Probe a little deeper, however, and the picture is not quite as rosy. Many students feel they cannot go on a study abroad period, while many others simply do not think it is worth the investment. A third of students reportedly disagree with the notion that international students have enriched their education, and a similar proportion suggest that there have been occasions that have actually been hindered by the presence of international students. Perhaps more significantly, a third of students suggest that they have had an instructor whose English or French was sufficiently difficult to comprehend to the point where it affected their performance in a course.

None of this should be taken as an argument against internationalization. Rather, it suggests two things: first, that the values of internationalization are still in many ways adopted only superficially by Canadian students, and require strengthening. And second, that not enough attention is being paid to the dislocations caused by internationalization, particularly with respect to instructors' official language abilities. Mitigating those problems is likely key to sustaining students' support for internationalization over the long run; without it, the large minorities who have had less than positive experiences with campus internationalization could turn into majorities, and the resulting discontent could imperil the entire process.



400-460 Richmond Street  
Toronto, ON M5V 1Y1  
Phone: (416) 848-0215  
Fax: (416) 849-0500