

*Today's News*

# Canada Starts a 'Branding' Campaign to Help Universities Recruit More Foreign Students

By KAREN BIRCHARD

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Canada will soon have something the country's internationally-focused educators have long sought: a national marketing strategy to help them recruit more students from abroad.

The new "education brand" was the focus of one of the final sessions of the annual conference of the Canadian Bureau of International Education, which concluded here on Wednesday.

While the strategy is still being created and won't be formally unveiled until May at the annual conference of Nafsa: Association of International Educators, in Washington, academics and administrators heard preliminary details of the plan here at a session led by officials of Canada's Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade.

One idea for the campaign, the federal officials said, is for Canada to position itself as an alternative destination to the United States and Britain for international education. Such a strategy would emphasize differences that make Canada attractive to foreign students, including the promise that a Canadian education will help them "change the world."

That suggestion, the federal officials said, was among the ideas advanced by Bang Marketing, the Montreal-based company that is creating the campaign. Exactly what Canadian universities intend to play up about their system will be hashed out in the coming months.

Wednesday's session also included discussions of what other countries are doing to attract students and why Canada has slipped as a destination for international students ([The Chronicle](#), November 14, 2006). The biggest problem, many educators say, is that Canadian higher education does not speak with one voice.

The reason for that lies in the country's Constitution, which makes higher education a provincial matter. Canada does not have a federal office for education, yet the federal government is responsible for helping market education and sets immigration policy.

For years, Canadian educators have said they felt that they were at a marketing and recruiting disadvantage because countries like Australia and Britain have successfully branded their higher-

education systems when promoting them abroad. In response to those concerns, Canadian federal officials and the provincial ministers of higher education have held meetings to work on the issue, with the branding campaign as the result.

The federal officials who described the campaign on Wednesday said use of the Canada brand would be tightly controlled to weed out fly-by-night operations and to provide an assurance of educational quality to students in other countries.

Canada's identity problem has been a hot topic throughout the conference, both at the microphones and in private hallway chats.

"The situation now is a very fragmented approach; even some provinces don't have a strategy," Vianne Timmons, vice president for academic development at the University of Prince Edward Island, said earlier this week at a session for senior administrators.

"We feel that it's broader than just getting students here, that it should include research and collaboration," she said of the efforts to develop a national strategy. "We're so far behind that we can only get ahead."

To some, it seemed ironic that Canada's education brand would be unveiled in Washington rather than at the gathering here of educators who want their universities to have the brand.

Jean-Philippe Tachdjian, one of the federal officials who discussed the plan on Wednesday, saw nothing unusual about the venue for announcing the brand. "It's not going to be used domestically," he said in an interview. "It's going to be used in foreign countries."

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