

INTERNATIONAL

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Canadian Educators Strive to Make Their Campuses More International

BY KAREN BIRCHARD

MAKING the college experience more international, forging stronger ties with India, and selling Canadian higher education overseas were among the hot topics at the annual conference of the Canadian Bureau for International Education, which wrapped up here last week.

The conference, which attracted 500 academics from around the country, focused on study abroad, international-student recruitment, and partnerships with foreign universities. One of the most anticipated events was the announcement that the Canadian government is helping develop a national marketing strategy to recruit more students from abroad.

Canadian educators have complained for years that they are at a marketing and recruiting disadvantage because countries like Australia and Britain have successfully branded their higher-education systems when promoting them abroad. In recognition of those concerns, gov-

ernment officials have worked with universities to come up with a cohesive marketing strategy.

Preliminary details presented at the conference suggest that Canada will position itself as an alternative destination to the United States and Britain, promising that a Canadian education will help students change the world. Exactly what Canadian universities intend to play up about their system will be hashed out in the coming months.

In other news, delegates discussed a new report that says internationalization is now the norm on Canadian campuses, with the vast majority of universities and colleges including a commitment to international education in their mission statements and strategic planning.

That emphasis has meant increased numbers of foreign students, faculty members teaching overseas or visiting from other countries, study-abroad programs, and international partnerships over the past six years, along with curriculum changes. But there is still room for

improvement, said the author, Tom Tunney, a senior analyst with the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, which conducted the survey for the report. The 2006 survey updates data from an earlier survey on internationalization, taken in 2000.

"While we see an increase since the previous survey in 2000 in the number of Canadian students studying abroad, up from 1 percent to 2.2 percent," he said, "we heard Germany say at this conference that it wants to have 50 percent of its students study abroad. So clearly there's a long way for us to go."

STUDENTS FAR FROM HOME

Another session focused on the mental health of international and study-abroad students. They are at greater risk for mental-health problems because they are far from home and thus vulnerable to stress, panelists said. Universities and colleges should consider setting up "mental-health first-aid programs" that can recognize and deal with problems

before they become full-blown crises, speakers said.

"Just as taking a first-aid course doesn't make you a doctor, taking a mental-health first-aid course doesn't make you a counselor but does give you the ability to deal with an immediate crisis," said Lynne A. Mitchell, director of international programs at the University of Guelph, in Ontario. Ms. Mitchell recently completed such a course.

With forecasts of greater numbers of international students coming to campuses, and more domestic students participating in study-abroad programs, universities need to make sure they have resources for dealing with those students' problems, said the session's moderator, Wayne Myles, director of international students at Queen's University, in Kingston, Ontario. "Having high-quality support services in place is one of the ways to manage the risk," he said.

Canada's growing ties to India were highlighted at a special forum. Educators talked about ex-

panding partnerships between the two countries, including student exchanges.

The countries have much in common, said J. Colin Dodds, president of Saint Mary's University, in Nova Scotia, and outgoing chair of the governing board of the Canadian Bureau for International Education. But until now, he said, many Canadian universities and colleges have focused their international efforts on China, which sends more students to Canada than any other country except for South Korea. India is seventh on the list of sending nations.

Indian officials seemed eager to strike deals.

"We have an acute faculty shortage in the technical disciplines like engineering," said Damodar Acharya, director of the Indian Institute of Technology at Kharagpur and the past chair of the All India Council for Technical Education. He suggested joint programs to train faculty members and increase the number of Indian students earning master's degrees and Ph.D.'s.

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BY LUKE SLATTERY

