

Number of foreign students skyrockets on Canadian campuses; International contingent at AUC above national average

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Droves of international students enrol in this country's universities.

Only two per cent of Canadian students studied abroad, in 2005.

"It doesn't really surprise me," said Rebecca Stuebing, 19, a second-year Algoma University student who this summer will research elementary schools and the local impact of Western-imported education in Ghana, in Africa.

She knows of only one other student who has done a similar exchange. While volunteering on campus with World University Services of Canada, an organization that primarily works to bring foreign students here, she found her opportunity to travel.

Canadian students are among the least mobile of any developed nation, according to the Canadian Bureau for International Education.

"I think there's a lot of interest out there, but not that little extra push," said bureau spokesperson Jennifer Humphries. That "push" includes better in-school exchange programs and more grants. The tiny percentage of Canadian full-time students studying abroad now is double what it was 10 years ago, says an Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada study. Comparatively, during the same period, diversity on domestic campuses skyrocketed.

In 1996 just more than 25,000 international students attended schools across Canada.

By 2006, the number had increased to 70,000 full-time and 13,000 part-time students.

Twelve per cent of the student population at Algoma University College is international, topping the national average of seven per cent - a big feat for a little school.

Aside from general recruiting of foreign students, Algoma hosts summer English as a second language programs, said Krista Pearson, registrar for Algoma University's overseas international recruitment and exchange program.

It is also a member of World University Services of Canada. The organization works with Canadian universities and Immigration Canada so foreign refugees can study here and become permanent residents. Algoma has three students enrolled in the program.

"Staff, faculty and students comment that they're at Algoma, the university down the road, they get there and have this international experience. We've created this multicultural mosaic you expect to have at a (bigger) university," said Pearson.

But now, Algoma University wants locals to pack their bags and head out the door and off the continent.

"It fits in with the model of international exposure. You don't only recruit (foreign) students, you make sure your Canadian students are part of it," said Pearson. "A worldliness comes with having experience with people from different cultures."

The Ontario International Education Opportunity Scholarship, a new award, helps make that happen. Last year, two Algoma students received \$1,500 each to fund overseas programs.

"Essentially, it pays for a round-trip ticket to wherever they're going and pays for passports," said Pearson.

Humphries suggested scholarships that restrict study to Canada should be reworked to encourage students to travel.

Grants and programs within domestic universities provide cheap alternatives to Canadians enrolling as international students in different countries, she said.

"It gives you the best of both worlds, retaining your Canadian students and programs, but giving them the international perspectives that allow them to bring added value on their return."

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