



A Horse of a Different Color? Reexamining International Students at Community Colleges in the USA and Canada

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Abstract

International students have become a growth area in community colleges in the USA and Canada. Broadly, this has been viewed as a microcosm of changes seen at all levels of higher education related to globalization. However, there are reasons to suggest that this phenomenon deserves greater attention. Community colleges occupy a distinct role in higher education systems, and their international students can also be viewed this way, as somewhat of a “horse of a different color” from their counterparts in universities. To be sure, international student mobility shares commonalities across tertiary providers, but the aim of this chapter is to highlight ways that the community college context generates unique conditions for international students worthy of further research. This is undertaken in this chapter by focusing on three lines of inquiry, pertaining to international students’ backgrounds, their academic and social experiences, and their pathways through and beyond these institutions. Throughout, examples are drawn from existing research in both the Canadian and American contexts, with

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some reference to informational interviews conducted with college personnel working in the two countries. Although further research might focus on articulating cross-national differences between these contexts in greater depth, the aim of this chapter is to draw attention to the transnational dimensions of this phenomenon. Paying more attention to international students in community colleges may not just improve these students' experiences, but also shed more light on the course of internationalization as it has advanced in different tiers of higher education.

Keywords

International students · Internationalization · Differentiation · Academic and social integration · Equity

Introduction

There is a major shift underway in community colleges in the USA and Canada. Since the turn of the century, these institutions have become hosts to ever greater numbers of international students. In Canada, recent growth has been more rapid, with the number of international students attending their colleges and institutes growing from 12,000 in 2009 to over 29,000 in 2013 (Canadian Bureau for International Education 2014). Steady growth though has also been seen in the USA with the sector expanding from 81,000 international students a decade ago to over 91,000 in 2014–2015 (Institute of International Education 2015). Debates persist in some quarters concerning the compatibility of the community college model with international students (Budd et al. 2016), but there has been increasing acceptance that educating international students is something community colleges “do.” There are multiple reasons for this development. Globalization has been a key facilitator, as communication and travel across borders have been eased to make international student recruitment possible. There have also been changes related to the business models employed by community colleges (Levin 2005) – not dissimilar from changes in the management of universities – which have, in many cases, made the enrollment of greater numbers of tuition-paying international students financially lucrative. At the same time, community colleges have not been immune to the rise of a new global imperative in higher education, whereby international students are rationalized as a mechanism for making domestic students more globally aware (Manns 2014). Economic changes in other countries, such as the growth of a global middle class (Brandt and Büge 2014), have also produced new “markets” in which North American community college credentials can be viably “sold.”

As the practice of enrolling international students has grown rapidly in community colleges, some have expressed reason for concern. As Anayah and Kuk (2015) explain: “the rapid increase in the presence of international students at U.S. community colleges has caught many institutions off guard” (p. 1099). In Canada, Skinkle and Embleton (2014) likewise report that actions by colleges to introduce support services for these students have been uneven, and often have “not kept pace

with recruitment” (p. 47). These challenges are by no means specific to community colleges, as they are related to the growth of international student mobility in higher education worldwide, an unprecedented phenomenon which has gained widespread scholarly interest (Streitwieser 2014). But community colleges have received little attention in most discussions of internationalization in higher education, where the bulk of research has been on institutions offering traditional academic degrees, rather than on institutions more focused on vocation and practical skills. This myopia is common, as in both national, and global discussions of higher education, more selective and prestigious institutions receive “the lion’s share of academic and media attention” (Stevens 2015, p. 2) – even when other forms of tertiary institution serve greater numbers of students (see also Deil-Amen 2015). Efforts to analyze international students in community colleges have drawn heavily on writing about these populations in universities, admittedly because of a lack of sector-specific research (Hagedorn and Zhang 2013).

This chapter constitutes an effort to approach the rise of international students in community colleges in terms of its unique properties, by synthesizing existing research and suggesting future lines of inquiry. It is well-known that these institutions occupy a distinct role in their higher education systems; but how might the growth of international students among them be seen as similarly distinctive, somewhat of a “horse of a different color” from their growth within universities? To generate preliminary answers to this question, this chapter first articulates conventional differences between community colleges and other higher education institutions in the USA and Canada. Then, it focuses on three dimensions of the trajectory of international students through community college, aiming to highlight what may be distinctive to this sector concerning *student backgrounds*, *student experiences*, and *student pathways*. Each of these is presented broadly, meant to encompass multiple dimensions of variation deserving greater attention. The chapter closes by considering the expansion of international student mobility in the community college sector worldwide, focusing on how this development might have different implications beyond those which have been previously associated with the internationalization of universities.

Throughout, the chapter draws from existing theory and research in the study of both universities and community colleges. Insights developed primarily through a literature review are also buttressed by reference to two interviews conducted with personnel at community colleges who interface with international student populations, one in each of the USA and Canada. These informational interviews were conducted in 2016 as part of preliminary research for a broader study. Each employed a semi-structured interview method (Galletta 2013), consisting of open-ended questions concerning the origins, experiences, and pathways of international students at these institutions. Pseudonyms are used to maintain confidentiality of these research participants, and all information and quotations are utilized with their consent. Although by no means generalizable to the entire community college sector in either country, these anecdotal voices from the field are used to verify observations developed from other academic sources. Further, there is minimal focus herein on differences between the college contexts of the USA and Canada, as they are

discussed together to make sense of this trend as a transnational process. Future research could build on this framework however to articulate dimensions of cross-national variation.

Differentiation and Tertiary Sectors in the USA and Canada

Given the historic development of higher education systems within nation-states, there remain key differences between countries in terms of the structure of tertiary education and its mass provision. Nonetheless, it is possible to observe general similarities between systems worldwide, most notably the differentiation of groups of providers which either offer their students theoretically-oriented academic degrees or vocationally-oriented certification in trades. So common is this distinction that it has been adopted by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) as a means of organizing statistics concerning tertiary enrolment across different national systems (OECD 2008). In Canada, this distinction broadly corresponds to a national distinction between a sector of universities, on the one hand, and a sector of colleges and institutes, on the other. In the USA, there is a more varied set of tertiary providers, as the higher education market is much larger, but there is a similar distinction made between 4-year institutions which offer bachelor's, master's, or doctorate degrees, and 2-year community colleges which offer associate's degrees. For simplicity, the American term *community college* has been adopted to refer to this sector, as well as to the college sector in Canada, as both are included in what the OECD refers to as tertiary provision type B: "programmes. . . that are more occupationally oriented and lead to direct labour market access" (OECD 2008, p. 57). This will be contrasted with the *university sector* in both countries, which corresponds to the OECD category of tertiary provision type A: "programmes [that] are largely theory based and designed to provide qualifications for entry into advanced research programmes and highly skilled professions" (OECD 2008, p. 57). Although this is not a perfect means of dividing between these sectors in each of these countries, it allows for some general comparisons to be made between them.

For example, beyond their focus on skills for direct application to the labor market, there are a bundle of other factors generally unique to community colleges in both the USA and Canada. Their programs tend to be both shorter than those offered in universities, as well as less expensive. They are also less likely to have a residential offering for their students, or to occupy large, secluded campus spaces. Because community colleges were historically designed as educational institutions serving their local or regional areas, many offer part-time options for students who work full-time, and they often enroll students with different demographics than those found among universities – broadly referred to as "non-traditional" students. Finally, community colleges occupy a common status, as in both countries their credentials are often viewed as less valued than academic degrees from universities. This may be more polarizing in the USA, where the institutional hierarchy of tertiary providers is much steeper (Davies and Hammack 2005), and where there is a legacy of academic

critique of community colleges as an institutionalized means of social stratification, reproducing disadvantage for lower social classes (Schudde and Goldrick-Rab 2015; Brint and Karabel 1989). However, in Canada community colleges have also historically been oriented to offering terminal vocational diplomas rather than offering tracks for students to transfer into the university sector – the latter being more common in the USA – so there is a similar construction of this educational pathway as a distinct and lower-status post-secondary track.

Broadly then, the rise of international students in community colleges in these two countries has meant the channeling of individuals from other national contexts into a particular form of tertiary education with unique properties, which are somewhat unlike those associated with “traditional” universities. This suggests that there may be other aspects of this form of international student mobility that are distinct and deserving of greater investigation. This chapter suggests that these can be usefully analyzed in terms of distinctions in three areas: student backgrounds, student experiences, and student pathways.

Student Backgrounds

One of the ambiguities when talking about international students is specifying just who such a term includes. As part of their profile of “non-traditional” students, community colleges often enroll individuals pursuing educational credentials with varying visa statuses, including recently immigrated adults seeking improved linguistic skills and employability potential. Adam, who worked in the international office of a community college in a metropolitan American city, confirmed a degree of ambiguity in this regard at his institution, relating that students were themselves often confused about whether they should come to his office. He explained that nonetheless they were only counted as “international” if they required a specific visa to study there (typically an F-1 or J-1). Lisa, who worked in student services at a community college in a large Canadian city, noted similar confusion, explaining that she dealt with many students from international backgrounds without knowing their specific status, and that only some fit the official designation. For the purposes of this chapter, international students are defined in terms of this official categorization, although it is worth noting that in the community college sector this can be perhaps a fuzzier concept than it has been in more traditional universities, which do not usually have the same association with the education of immigrant populations.

Using this definition, it is possible to surmise multiple ways in which the backgrounds of international students at community colleges are different from those at universities. It is not a given, for example, that trends in the national origins of students in the two sectors will be identical. As an illustration, Table 1 lists the top ten countries of origin for international students for these tertiary sectors in Canada in 2012, as recorded by the OECD (from <http://stats.oecd.org>). In many instances, countries are leaders in sending their students to both sectors, with the number of students coming into the community college sector at about 10% of the total coming into universities. This is a hardly a universal comparison however, as in various

Table 1 Number of international students in Canada from leading countries of origin, 2012

Leading countries of origin in community colleges ^a		Leading countries of origin in universities ^b	
India	3,939	China	21,384
China	3,681	France	6,690
South Korea	1,026	United States	6,162
France	700	India	3,759
Japan	300	South Korea	3,015
Pakistan	240	Saudi Arabia	2,799
Saudi Arabia	213	Nigeria	1,806
Hong Kong	183	Pakistan	1,599
Morocco	180	Trinidad and Tobago	1,392
United States	177	Hong Kong	1,338

^aSource: OECD statistics for tertiary type B programs in Canada, 2012

^bSource: OECD statistics for tertiary type A programs in Canada, 2012

instances countries register as leaders in one sector, but not the other. For example, while China was by far the most prominent country of origin in the university sector in 2012, it ranked second behind India in the community college sector. In contrast, that year more students from India attended Canadian community colleges (3,939 students) than universities (3,759 students). Whereas the USA ranked prominently as country of origin for university students, this was much less so among community colleges. Conversely, Japan was a relatively prevalent country of origin at community colleges, but much less so at universities. Clearly the community college share of international students is much lower when compared to universities overall, but these totals also suggest that students from particular countries are not necessarily attracted to these two tertiary sectors equally.

There is no single source which reports on these data across Canada and the USA longitudinally, so the most reliable data, which comes from the Institute of International Education for the USA, is used alongside that from the OECD for Canada for the means of general illustration. Additionally, in the USA, data for doctorate granting institutions is used because they represent the largest segment of the US university sector attended by international students.

As shown in Table 2, Saudi Arabia, Canada, Taiwan, Turkey, and Iran all registered as top sending countries to American universities in 2012, but not to American community colleges. Instead, Vietnam, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Nepal, and Venezuela all ranked in the top 10 in the community college sector. Vietnam, in particular, sent more students to US community colleges in this academic year than to US universities (7,600 vs. 5,300 students) – a surprising fact, perhaps, given the much higher number of international students in the university sector generally. As in Canada, some countries of origin were present as top senders in both sectors, like China, India, and South Korea. But it is also clear that there was not the same interest from India in attending US community colleges in this academic year as there was in attending US universities. While overall the growth in both sectors has been dominated by international students from countries in East Asia, there are complex

Table 2 Number of international students in the USA from leading countries of origin, 2012

Leading countries of origin in community colleges ^a		Leading countries of origin in universities ^b	
South Korea	11,700	China	144,600
China	11,400	India	71,500
Vietnam	7,600	South Korea	44,700
Japan	5,000	Saudi Arabia	19,400
Mexico	3,500	Canada	16,000
Hong Kong	3,100	Taiwan	15,500
Indonesia	2,300	Japan	8,700
Nepal	2,200	Turkey	8,200
Venezuela	2,000	Mexico	7,300
India	1,900	Iran	5,800

^aSource: IIE data for associate's institutions, 2011–2012

^bSource: IIE data for doctorate granting institutions, 2011–2012. From Farrugia et al. (2012), p. 54. Numbers in this table have been rounded

dynamics at work which can lead to differentiation in the backgrounds of students arriving at institutions in these two sectors.

These trends were not discussed by either Adam or Lisa in their interviews, as they are more evident at the national-level than within any one institution. However, they are significant. Longitudinally, these two sectors can experience opposite trends, with students from one sending country decreasing in their community colleges and increasing in their universities, or vice versa. There are likely very good reasons why this is, as students from countries with less widespread English fluency may need to pursue community college enrollment before they can attend North American universities. In other contexts, universities may have an appeal that community colleges do not. For example, while Americans and Canadians do cross their border to attend each other's universities, this is unsurprisingly less so for their community colleges, likely because local or in-country options in both contexts are considered sufficient and more attractive. Overall, while this kind of geographic variation by sector has been virtually unconsidered in studies of international student mobility, it means that the mix of students from different national backgrounds in community colleges and universities can be somewhat variable, and fluctuate over time.

Additionally, less well documented but equally consequential may be differences in the financial resources and motives of students who come to the USA and Canada for community college compared to those who come to attend universities. Generally, there are two interpretations of the growth in international student mobility to Western countries with regard to students' ability to pay rising tuition. One is the view that, particularly in elite universities with high global standing, there has been a convergence among affluent families, who see these institutions as pathways into the global elite class (Freeland 2012). The second view is that middle class families in emerging economies have saved money to send their students to Western higher education institutions, in part as a reaction to increased academic competition within their home countries, and the perception that international academic mobility will provide an alternative path to prosperity for their children (Hu and Hagedorn 2013;

Waters 2006). It remains an open question however, whether these trends are equally at work in community colleges as they have been in universities, where factors like the lower cost of tuition, the lessened prestige of the credentials, the generally smaller class sizes, and the shorter time to completion, all may mean that they attract a different segment of the international population. In fact, Adam shared his familiarity with a menu of motives among international students who attended his institution, including: students who saw it as a cheaper option than attending universities; students who wanted to pursue English training or improve their SAT scores; students who wanted to gain credits in order to transfer to universities; students who were advanced academically and had been admitted to top-tier US universities, but could not afford them; and students who had been put on academic probation at universities, or even had completed bachelor's degrees already, who used the community college as a "placeholder," since they did not want to return to their home countries and needed time to "figure out what they want to do with their lives." Adam stressed that most international students who came to his institution in any fashion were predominantly interested in remaining in the USA long-term, seeing it as pathway to immigration. He described how these students' families often made "sacrifices" to send their children to the USA, and that in return, these students sought to "maximize" their opportunities to remain there permanently. These factors are likely also at work in residential universities – especially as community college students often pursue transfer routes into bachelor's programs – but Adam certainly perceived his incoming international students as generally of a lower social class than many of those who first arrive in the USA to study for traditional academic degrees.

A third set of differences in student backgrounds between these sectors centers on fluency in English. With the exception of institutions in Quebec in Canada where the language of instruction can also be French, the vast majority of community colleges in the USA and Canada are English environments. But whereas among universities admission of international students is widely predicated on English proficiency, this is less universal among community colleges. Many, in fact, advertise that they require students only to have some English proficiency to gain admission, and compensate for that low proficiency by offering preparatory and intensive English programs. This means that a pathway has opened for students who are not proficient in English to be accepted to study at community colleges, which is largely closed among universities. When combined with differences in financial resources and national origins, this makes for a potentially significant difference among the international students who are enrolling in these two sectors.

Student Experiences

The notion of post-secondary education as entailing something more than academic study is well established in the American and Canadian contexts. Of course, academic degrees are widely viewed as a baseline for successful careers in a range of fields, but there is also a set of cultural connotations surrounding the experience

of going to university, centered on adolescent growth, independence, and self-discovery – among other effects (Pascarella and Terenzini 2005). Particularly in the USA, numerous studies have focused on understanding the many dimensions of the “student experience”, including students’ academic persistence, their cocurricular participation, the development of friendships, interests, and identities, and the cultivation of civic-mindedness.

In recent years, there has been growing interest in understanding the international student experience in universities along these lines. Nathan (2005), for example, highlighted how international students became outsiders in her study of one US campus, ignored by their American peers. Others have examined the challenges international students encounter in forming multicultural friendships (Williams and Johnson 2011), or the ways in which they experience racism (Lee and Rice 2007). There is also a general literature on the challenges of operating in foreign cultural environments for international students, with scholars pointing to issues related to acculturative stress and mental health (Smith and Khawaja 2011; Misra and Castillo 2004). Some have offered recommendations for how university counselors can best serve these populations (Wedding et al. 2009; Mori 2000). In Canada, recent work has drawn attention to the range of challenges international students encounter beyond the psychological and interpersonal, as they face work restrictions, challenges related to international currency fluctuation, and complications in securing reliable, affordable housing (Calder et al. 2016). International students can also face issues securing visas, transferring between them, and crossing borders, even just for a visit home, which adds to the stressors and challenges they face beyond the experiences localized to their campus environments. English proficiency, in both the USA and Canada, commonly forms another obstacle (Andrade 2009). It can prove more difficult than expected for these students to thrive in classrooms where the norms of academic learning and discussion are foreign to them, and where such cultural barriers may be underappreciated by their faculty and peers (Campbell et al. 2016; Palmer 2016).

These issues are surely not unique to international student populations at universities; however, it is possible to speculate that they may be different, and possibly exacerbated, in the context of a community college. As noted above, community colleges tend to be nonresidential institutions, and often enroll many “non-traditional” students, meaning students who study part-time while having full-time jobs, students who do not progress to tertiary education immediately following secondary-level completion, and students who are older and often have care responsibilities for family members. This is generally different from universities, and particularly so from more selective universities, where the average student is an emerging adolescent with the flexibility to participate actively in the social, residential, and cocurricular dimensions of campus life. As Deil-Amen (2011) explains, the problem with much research on how students experience and integrate into university campuses is that, “All the models were developed based on traditional students in traditional residential institutions” (p. 55). She elaborates that this means the conventional distinction made between students’ academic and social integration as two separate spheres of activity does not apply well to the community college context, where the

two are more intertwined and “indistinguishable.” Because students’ time on campus is dominated by classroom instruction, she found that they prioritized academic integration and that their social integration was “often characterized by academic utility” (p. 82). There are implications then, for how the international student experience at these institutions will be shaped, and how it should be conceptualized by scholars.

Although many community colleges are active in supporting clubs and social events for their international students, have designated social spaces for them, and offer counseling and advising to them just as their university counterparts do, it is a pertinent question whether these integrating strategies are the ones best suited to the community college context. Social outings for international students, for example, might be promoted at community colleges, but not match up with students’ more purposive focus on academic integration and success. Challenges with English proficiency meanwhile, may exacerbate intercultural difficulties in these contexts, especially when English ability has been relaxed as a requirement for entry. In these milieus, international students may be even more likely to retreat into segmented communities and friend networks composed only of students from their home countries. The challenges faced in this realm are not entirely dissimilar from those among universities, but they may attain a different significance and require different institutional responses in settings where the student population is older and primarily interested in acquiring practical credentials. This may put a relative onus on faculty in the community college to facilitate international students’ integration, as compared to university environments where there are more offices and more personnel tasked with supporting students’ social development, as well as perhaps stronger norms concerning students’ active participation in campus life.

Other research looking at the social experience of international students in a community college setting has similarly emphasized this point: that more attention should be invested in improving orientations and advisor support for students’ successful integration and acclimation (Miller 2015). Both Adam and Lisa remarked that these were areas in which they thought their institutions could improve. Adam explained that new students often showed up at his office because they were lost, unable to find university buildings and unprepared generally to navigate life in the USA independently. He contrasted this with other university settings in which he had previously worked, noting that conversations with international students at his community college were “completely different” and focused on more basic issues. Adam recounted numerous instances of confusion and “misinformation” among international students enrolled at his institution concerning the transferability of credits and the value of an associate’s degree, as well as pertaining to students’ abilities to travel and work legally. He thought this information needed to be better disseminated to students, and worried that his senior administration had been too focused on recruiting international students rather than retaining them. In Canada, Lisa similarly related how difficult it was for many new students to even register for classes if they had poor English proficiency, because there was no one assigned to serve as a translator. For students arriving to Canadian winter from warmer climates, he also described a common form of shock, “both cultural and meteorological,” as

they were inadequately prepared with sufficient winter clothing to weather the low temperatures.

Along these lines, it is also worth considering the way that international students may be viewed by the domestic students they meet who attend universities and community colleges. Robertson (2015) found, for example, that the majority of students she surveyed at an American community college were uninterested in global topics and international education, as they found them “boring or uninteresting,” (p. 482). She concluded that professors and others must do more to stimulate students’ interest and help them to “understand the connection between their lives and the world at large” (p. 482). Of course, it is hard to generalize from this sample to North American higher education as a whole, but there is reason to suspect that facilitating such peer interactions, when they require extra-curricular time and space, may be more easily adopted into the residential environments of universities. Again, these challenges may not be unique to community colleges, but there is certainly a longer precedent of international students attending US and Canadian universities in large numbers, so they may be more widely expected, accepted, and embraced in those institutional contexts. Conversely, it may be that community colleges are more welcoming and friendly for international students than larger universities, and facilitate their integration more smoothly.

There are additional dimensions of this growing international population in community colleges worthy of further analysis, as particularly when they are located in settings with limited diversity, international students may be helping to reshape the experience of their domestic counterparts in positive ways. Urban and rural differences may prove consequential in such an analysis, considering that some domestic populations are thought to be more removed from cultural diversity and global affairs than others. As has often been claimed, there may indeed be greater global awareness being generated in higher education through the increasing enrollment of international students at Canadian and American post-secondary institutions, but more attention ought to be paid to the ways these interpersonal and cross-cultural dimensions of campus life are unfolding specifically in community college contexts.

Student Pathways

A final set of comparisons center on international students’ pathways, referring to the ways that these populations move through community colleges as part of their life trajectories. One issue in this area is students’ persistence to degree or diploma completion. On this point, while Canadian colleges have one of the best records in completion among OECD countries generally, the USA fares much worse (The Conference Board of Canada 2016). This problem is well-known among US scholars looking at community colleges, where there are often low rates of completion of terminal programs, and low rates of success in transferring to academic tracks in universities. One analysis from Schudde and Goldrick-Rab (2015) explains: “Despite serving students with diverse backgrounds and needs, who are often less academically prepared for college, community colleges offer little institutional

structure and guidance to support students in navigating bureaucratic hurdles and dealing with conflicting demands” (p. 34). They note that one effect is that some students in the USA “swirl” around in the community college sector, moving laterally between multiple institutions rather than directly through one, following “long, meandering educational pathways” (p. 34; see also Goldrick-Rab 2006). A salient question then is how these organizational conditions affect the increasing number of international students who have been moving through them. Mirroring the immense body of scholarship on college persistence, some research has emerged specific to international students in community colleges, with Mamiseishvili (2012) emphasizing that the development of relationships with faculty, advisors, and peers was paramount to student success. Future studies using large-scale data could reveal what proportions of international students “meander” or “swirl,” as well as how their educational trajectories involve criss-crossing national borders. Meanwhile, the stronger record of Canada’s community colleges may mean that they provide better pathways to completion for international students, relative to the USA. It should be noted that both Adam and Lisa gestured toward some proportion of international students at their institutions who seemed to follow meandering trajectories, not only because of academic challenges, but sometimes from the desire not to return to their home countries.

Relatedly, many international students aspire to transfer from the college sectors in both countries into their universities, but little is known about these desires or their rates of success. It is interesting to note from OECD data, for example, that while Morocco declined in sending students to Canadian community colleges from 2008 to 2012, the total number of students from the country attending Canadian universities was on the rise (gathered from <http://stats.oecd.org>). This may represent a successful wave of students who moved up through the Canadian system, beginning in its colleges and then moving into its universities. There is some tracking in Canada of this sort, concerning the number of university students that have previously attended colleges there (Canadian Bureau for International Education 2014). However, it is not detailed enough to draw definitive conclusions about this trend. Nonetheless this points to a unique role that community colleges have come to play in helping to expand the pool of international students who are even eligible to apply to universities in both countries. Their institutional niche, in this sense, is uniquely significant to the revenues which universities have been able to generate from international markets, although their role as a stepping stone to universities has largely gone unremarked. For the students, meanwhile, it seems that those who begin at community colleges can be embarking on a long-term immigration pathway, but little is known about the contours of their trajectories. Both Adam and Lisa also noted that they had known international students at their institutions who had decided to “reverse transfer” – as in, move down from universities to community colleges – either because they were more affordable or were perceived as less academically rigorous. Little is known about these patterns for international students at a national-level in either country.

The same gap holds true concerning these students’ success at immigrating to the USA or Canada, and how their attendance at a community college intersects with

that aim. There is only emerging consideration of how these processes are complexly interconnected (e.g., Anayah and Kuk 2015), and none that seeks to compare the pathways of students through these two tertiary sectors relatively. In Canada in particular, there has been a recent push by provincial and federal governments to pursue international students as part of a strategy to recruit skilled immigrants (Redden 2014). But this policy aim is rarely considered in academic scholarship in terms of its different effects on community colleges as compared to universities. Cross-national comparisons among students pursuing these trajectories between the USA and Canada could be fruitful for understanding how students find success in the two contexts, as well as how this might be different between these two sectors.

Beyond the need to better track international students' pathways, it is also worth noting that the choice to travel abroad for post-secondary study presents distinct risks to international students, which are likely less acute among universities. The pathways of students at community colleges may be more tenuous and uncertain than among students who arrive more fluent in English, primed to pursue the more traditional academic track. For students who return to their native countries upon graduation, it also remains an open question how their credentials are received, because the model of the community college and its diplomas and degrees may not be well understood in international contexts. Conversely, it may actually be well understood by employers that community colleges are of lesser status in the North American context than universities, thus lowering the value of these credentials in spite of students' expectations. Adam related as much, detailing how many international students he knew had discovered that their associate's degrees were not as prestigious as they expected, and then developed new strategies to remain in the USA longer to pursue more educational credentials before returning home. These challenges are likely different for international students acquiring bachelor's degrees or above, where the scaffolding of academic credentials is more universally recognizable. Interestingly, while it is well-documented how recruiting international students can contribute to community colleges' financial stability, to the Canadian or American economy, or to making domestic students more globally aware, the value of these credentials to these students, and how these choices impact their broader life trajectories are questions that have garnered much less serious or concerted attention. This represents the tendency in the sector generally to think about international students primarily in terms of how they benefit their host countries, and only secondarily in terms of the benefits to the students themselves.

Conclusion and Future Directions

This chapter has put forth three lines of inquiry for examining the growth of international students in Canadian and American community colleges. While there undoubtedly are similarities with the university sectors in these countries, there are various reasons why community college contexts may form a differentiated environment for international students, with unique challenges and opportunities. For example, international students arriving to these institutions may, as a group, possess

different characteristics from their university counterparts, which include geographic origins, financial resources, and English proficiency. However, they also arrive to educational institutions which have historically served niche, local populations, and which have developed somewhat differently from universities, to serve “non-traditional” students, usually in non-residential environments. While there are some discussions which explore the motives of international students in pursuing community college credentials, and the motives of these institutions in seeking to recruit them (Anayah and Kuk 2015; Hagedorn and Zhang 2013), there remains little empirical or theoretical work considering this phenomena in its own right. Some scholars have begun to examine questions pertaining to the student experience of community colleges (Deil-Amen 2011), and concerning their international students specifically (Mamiseishvili 2012); but there are multiple contours of this phenomenon which deserve greater attention, especially pertaining to students’ pathways into, through, and out of these institutions. As noted above, it is also in this sector where some of the challenges of hosting international students may be particularly exacerbated. Conversely, it may be that some of the challenges facing international students in universities are actually lessened in these institutional environments, where the norms of peer interactions and academic orientation are different.

Future research should consider these different possibilities, and probe this “horse of a different color” within the field of international student mobility in higher education in greater depth. Practical strategies for community colleges that are specific to their organizational evolution and the populations they serve will surely be of great value to their leaders, faculty, and staff. Meanwhile, absent a concerted effort to focus on their particular needs, the rise of international students on these tertiary pathways will remain overshadowed by their rise in universities, and largely assumed to be undifferentiated from them. For, just as these institutions have historically occupied a unique place within their higher education systems nationally, so too should the rise of international student mobility in these environments be considered in terms of its distinct properties. While scholars have noted that paying attention to international students’ origins matters to the development of institutional responses and other services (Hagedorn and Zhang 2013), it is also significant that the group of sending countries in the community college sector can actually differ from that found in universities.

From the perspective of theory building in the field of global higher education, the growth of international student mobility within this tertiary sector may also represent something different about globalization and shifting international academic relations than that which has previously been considered regarding universities (Streitwieser 2014). For example, while much has been written about international student mobility as an elite phenomenon (Igarashi and Saito 2014), and the growth of diverse campus populations as something unique to world-leading universities (Baker 2014), there has been little consideration of how these trends are different among community colleges, as they have pursued internationalization strategies, too. Though there has been much written about the rise of the global university, the rise of the global community college may be an equally significant development, considering the local histories of these institutions and their niche educational

design. This may in fact be different between the American and Canadian contexts, as further cross-national research could reveal, but as a transnational phenomenon these changes are also worthy of further investigation. These changes speak to something important about the globalization of the middle class, and they do not just represent the massification of higher education attainment. They can also be seen as entailing the massification of international relations and global awareness among a greater population of post-secondary students worldwide than ever before – a point that may be much better understood through the analysis of these changes in community colleges than in more traditional residential universities.

Finally, while there has been a growing discussion of the ethics of internationalization (Stein and Andreotti 2016; Garson 2012), this work has, like other scholarship in higher education, largely focused on the university sector. Successful in drawing attention to the history of unequal economic and cultural relations between the West and other countries and regions, there is a need for consideration of these legacies as they apply specifically to the community college sector. Certainly, the goal of making international education more accessible to a greater proportion of the American and Canadian populations is admirable, but it is important that community colleges not do so at the expense of their international students, who in some cases have become their highest-paying “customers” – but not necessarily their most important priorities.

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