

# **Serving International Students on Post-Secondary Campuses**

*John Engels*

## **International Students Love Canada!**

Canada was listed as the top most favorable destination for international students according to [CIC News](#) in 2023 because, “post-study work is the main, or an influencing, factor in where they choose to study and 72% said they would apply for a work visa after graduation.” The Canadian Bureau for International Education ([CBIE](#)) says there are three main reasons students come to study in Canada. First is the quality of our educational system. Second is our reputation for being a tolerant culture. Third, Canada is known for being a safe nation.

## **Future Trends**

The Statistics Canada [website](#) reported 388,782 post-secondary students in 2019. Although the International student population on post-secondary campuses has been record breaking through the 2010’s, the Government of Canada put a temporary [two-year cap](#) on the number of education permits that will be issued. Study permits in 2024 will decrease 35% from the previous year. Factors for the decision included significant education fee increases and the housing shortage.

## **God Loves International Students, And So Should We!**

The church has a mandate to welcome international students according to scripture. Deuteronomy 10:18-19 (NIV) states that God, “Loves the foreigner residing among you, giving them food and clothing. And you are to love those who are foreigners, for you yourselves were foreigners in Egypt.”

Don’t you appreciate how honest and practical God is? He reminds us that we are no different than the international community that lives here in Canada. Israel lived as outsiders in Egypt. My family were outsiders immigrating to Canada and we were warmly welcomed. Indeed, we all were outsiders under the domain of Satan’s kingdom before salvation. As Christ followers, we are now citizens of His heavenly country worshipping now with our international friends.

God desires to provide the necessities of life to our outsider neighbours through the church so they can become insiders in the family of God. Will these amazing international students graduate with a favorable experience by associating with a Christian and a local church? The answer is crucial for their lives and those they will influence.

## **International Students Have Significant Needs**

The influx of international students in Canada presents a wonderful opportunity for our campus ministries and churches to be centres of hospitality and friendship. International students are tomorrow’s global leaders in all spheres of culture. These bright students come with high hopes of learning and finding meaningful relationships here on campuses. Yet, they can struggle with loneliness, food insecurity, English language challenges, exam anxiety, a place to rent, and employment. Our advocacy for them can bring hope and encouragement. God has made it very convenient for us to fulfill His great commission by bringing the nations here. Our “go” connection is just a few minutes away at a local post-secondary institution.

### Practical Tips

Consider providing campus transportation to your church services for students. New Life Church in Castlegar, BC has been busing international students from Selkirk College to their church for years. This avenue of service provides a great connection for students to worship and fellowship.

Another way to serve is developing a network between your church and international students for home hospitality. Kelly Johnson is the Pentecostal chaplain at the University of Calgary and co-director of The Friendship Program: [Home Away From Home](#) that matches international students with host families in Calgary. Kelly says that the organization through the years, “Has over 750 graduate students connected to over 400 families in Calgary since about 2011 and are enjoying a good relationship with the University’s Student and Enrolment Services as well as the Graduate Students Association.” Isn’t that amazing?

Churches with international students can also partner and coordinate with [International Student Ministries Canada](#) (ISMC) through their [Friends For Dinner](#) website connecting international students and local families. ISMC is active on dozens of campuses. They are always looking for churches to collaborate with. Another excellent partnership opportunity is [Alpha](#). Churches can work with a campus ministry to host Alpha on or near a campus.

Below are other online training and organizational resources to consider as you serve international students in your context. Feel free to contact us if we can help you further at [servecampus@paoc.org](mailto:servecampus@paoc.org).

#### More International Student Ministries Resources

1. Association of Christians Ministering to Internationals (ACMI)

[ACMI](#) is a Network of eleven partner International Student ministries. Their vision is to see a connected, effective, & healthy community offering the love of Jesus to international students & scholars. ACMI Resources: <http://acmi-resources.wixsite.com/acmi-ismresources>

2. Free training Videos: [Every International](#)

#### Where the PAOC Connects with International Students

PAOC churches and campus ministries are engaging International Students across Canada. For current campus locations, please view the [Serve Campus Network Locator](#).