

Successful Integration and Support of Postsecondary International Students in Newfoundland
and Labrador:
Identifying Challenges, Finding Solutions

Final Report

Jean Michel Montsion
Associate Professor, Global and Social Studies
Glendon College, York University

9 January 2025

Executive Summary

The successful integration of international students in Canada has become of key interest to many universities and public and community stakeholders over the years, most notably since the number of such students tripled between 2009 and 2019. Despite the current public discourse on restricting these numbers, many local stakeholders want to find ways to support these students' long-term integration, including many municipalities and community actors in Newfoundland and Labrador. The International Student Connections (ISC) Hub organized a series of public engagements to connect postsecondary student migrants to the organizations that support them. The aim of these events was to raise awareness of the services these organizations provide and initiate a sustained public dialogue on how to best support these students' integration in the province despite the various challenges (e.g., financial, language, housing, and so forth).

The ISC Hub reinforced some key insights from the literature. First, international students' lives are multifaceted and should be understood as part of the student migration process. Focusing on their status as international students is helpful as we try to grasp how they relate to institutions, but we need to understand the diversity of their realities and needs throughout their journey, beyond the parameters of this status. Second, many services and programs available to support student migrants are under-utilized or not well-known for many reasons, which makes information sharing and filling knowledge gaps an ongoing priority. Third, student migrants are active participants in their integration process, and make their own decisions on where to look for information about support services, who to trust, and if they prefer, whether to self-organize. Fourth, the demographic makeup of student migrants in specific locations can vary significantly. University, public and community stakeholders need to be aware of the profile of their local international student migrants to be able to provide targeted services. Lastly, the community sector responsible for the integration of student migrants is facing its own challenges in supporting this group while also assisting the other groups they service.

Based on the literature, some key recommendations for universities and public and community stakeholders in their support the integration of student migrants can be made:

- Research on the treatment of student migrants must be balanced against concrete initiatives that provide opportunities for stakeholders to connect both with student migrants and with each other across the sector.
- Many initiatives self-organized by student migrants can easily be scaled up by stakeholders if they seek out such initiatives.
- One-off events or the annual distribution of information about the services offered, especially through only a single medium (e.g., email distribution lists), should be replaced by sustained, explicit, and diversified outreach throughout the year.
- Stakeholders that serve student migrants might consider including these students more systematically in the design and delivery of these services.
- Stakeholders supporting the integration of student migrants need to adopt a 'proactive inclusion' attitude to counter the effects of some of the negative stereotypes about student migrants.

Table of Contents

Background	p. 4
Project Description	p. 4
Insights	p. 6
Recommendations	p. 7
Acknowledgements	p. 8
Appendix 1: Event Posters	p. 9
Appendix 2: Information Sheet on Services and Programs for International Students	p. 11
References	p. 12

Background

The presence and integration of international students in Canada have been of increasing importance in public debates, especially after the number of international students tripled from 2009 to 2019 (Kim et al. 2024). Until recently, the recruitment of these students was officially supported by the federal government, as it was considered by many stakeholders, including universities, as a way to compensate for the declining in public funding and as a means to support local economies and labour markets by welcoming highly skilled individuals (Montsion & Caneo 2024). The recent federal changes restricting the recruitment and retention of international students, along with a public discourse which tends to cast their presence in Canadian society in a negative light, have significantly impacted how universities and other stakeholders associate international students, especially skilled-based migration, with the 'public good,' hence making the issue of their integration even more pertinent (Brewis et al. 2024).

Whereas Canadian universities have adjusted their support services to accommodate this growing student population over the years, their role in supporting the various dimensions of the integration process has been limited, especially in their ability to address experiences and realities occurring off campus (Philpott et al. 2014). The main difficulties with integration include academic success, affordability, employment and social discrimination (Calder et al. 2016; Worae & Edgerton 2023). As such, the well-documented challenges of student migrant integration cut across various stakeholder jurisdictions, such as universities and others in the community sector who are mandated to support student migrants. As many public stakeholders consider a successful student migrant integration as the best path to long-term retention, the community sector faces its own challenges, due to the changeability of governments, how they frame international student contributions, and a lack of sustained connections and collaborations with universities (El Masri & Khan 2022; Garon et al. 2022).

Research in Newfoundland and Labrador has identified some particular features of international student integration. As student migrants tend to be highly educated, improving access to employment opportunities (e.g., foreign credential recognition, entrepreneurship support) and social programs (e.g., multicultural activities, affordability measures, family-friendly approaches) is key (Gien & Law 2009; Graham 2019; Pottie-Sherman & Graham 2022). Whereas challenges to student migrant integration have been well-documented (e.g., financial and language barriers, access to healthcare and childcare, housing and affordability, social discrimination), since the COVID-19 pandemic, housing needs, affordability, food insecurity and discrimination in particular have become markedly more pressing (Li & Que 2016; Pottier-Sherman et al. 2023; Saif 2021). Amid these challenges, the local community sector in the province, like elsewhere in Canada, lacks funding, coordination among organizations and social programs and optimal communication with the student migrants themselves (Li & Que 2016).

Project Description

These research insights led to the development of a public engagement project aimed at strengthening connections among stakeholders working with postsecondary student migrants in the province and creating new connections with them. It also aimed to connect individual stakeholders to a larger network, and hopefully catalyze sustained public dialogue on how to support the integration of this student group in the province.

After consultations with more than 10 university, public and community stakeholders, the project created the International Student Connections (ISC Hub). As part of the ISC Hub, we held six events in Fall 2024 for international students, university staff and community stakeholders working with international students. The events and their respective participating organizations and Memorial University units included the following:

- Postsecondary International Students in Canada: Trends and Best Practices (online)
 - Canadian Bureau for International Education
 - City of Toronto
 - EduNova
- Being Different in Atlantic Canada (in person)
 - Nexus Centre, Memorial University
 - Racialized Graduate Student Collective, Memorial University
 - Speaker: Dr. Ajay Parasram, Dalhousie University
- Brown from Away: A Conversation on Race and Living in Atlantic Canada (online, for the Grenfell campus and Marine Institute communities)
 - Nexus Centre, Memorial University
 - Racialized Graduate Student Collective, Memorial University
 - Speaker: Dr. Ajay Parasram, Dalhousie University
- Learn about Social Programs for You (in person)
 - Association of New Canadians
 - Childcare Centre, Memorial University
 - Food First NL
 - YWCA
- Know your Rights (in person)
 - End Homelessness St. John's
 - Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of Labour
 - Public Legal Information Association of NL
 - Student Support Office, Memorial University
- International Students and Career Development: Testimonies and Resources (in person)
 - International Education Newfoundland and Labrador
 - Internationalization Office, Memorial University
 - School of Graduate Studies, Memorial University

Each of these events brought together, on average, representatives from three organizations to speak on a key theme related to the student migrant experience. These representatives were able to present and speak informally with an average of 15-20 international students during these family-friendly events.

Insights

These events highlighted the importance of some key lessons, which have been documented by academic research, that could be helpful for many stakeholders in thinking about how best to support this student group.

Student Migrants versus International Students

Focusing on the status of international students is not the best way to frame the many dimensions of the student migration journey, as it only speaks to one dimension of the experience. Framing this group of students through their migration journey – that is, as student migrants – makes it the easier to see connections between the services offered by university and community stakeholders throughout these students' migration journeys, including one's evolving financial situation and needs (see Montsion et al. 2024).

Information-Sharing and Knowledge Gaps

Services and programs for student migrants are made available by many university and community stakeholders. Despite the wide dissemination of this information, student migrants often still do not know these services and programs exist, they assume they are not eligible for them, or they think what they face is unique. There are many reasons for these knowledge gaps, including whether the information reaches students at a time when they are feeling overwhelmed with their transition (see Oliveira Soares et al. 2024).

Student Migrant Agency

Student migrants are active participants in their integration process, often looking for initiatives and programs as means to support their goals or to assist with challenges. Student migrant agency involves both individual and collective searches for the 'right' information through various channels; key decision-making processes, including assessing whether a service is trustworthy; and self-organizing among student migrants who share similar experiences (see Parasram et al. 2024).

Adapting to Demographic Trends

Understanding the profile of the student migrants living in specific locations is vital in helping the community sector identify how best to adapt their current services (see Montsion et al. 2024). This makeup (e.g., the proportion of undergraduate to graduate students, family and financial situations as well as countries of origin) will differ from community to community (e.g., Memorial's St. John's campus vs Grenfell campus or Marine Institute). Racialized graduate students from abroad or French-speaking student migrants, for example, will have different integration challenges and needs, especially if they are living in Canada with their families.

A Community Sector Under Pressure

Community organizations that provide support services to student migrants also serve many other constituencies and have limited resources to do so (see El Masri & Khan 2022; Garon et al. 2022). Despite these organizations' best efforts, their support for student migrants is often

caught between publicly funded programs, namely, temporary and permanent settlement support services. Connections between university, public and community stakeholders can alleviate this complexity somewhat, while also giving student migrants a clearer picture of how to access different types of services.

Recommendations

Balancing Research with Public Engagement

Research on the treatment of student migrants has pointed to the need to connect student migrants to the resources and services available to them, and to foster connections among the organizations supporting their integration. Public engagement initiatives that connect student migrants to community organizations are needed. They are especially helpful for student migrants who think they are alone in facing specific challenges, and for organizations that are not aware of what others are providing.

Scaling Up Student Initiatives

Self-organized student migrant groups should be officially supported and scaled up by university and public stakeholders. Often, they most accurately reflect and represent students' concerns, new realities and solidarities. Supporting the expansion and growth of these groups will benefit many other student migrants, as well as the stakeholders wanting to adapt their services to students' life conditions.

Sustained, Explicit and Plural Outreach

Information on services for student migrants requires an explicit pitch for “international students” and must be distributed to them on their turf. Each event or initiative that could be of interest to student migrants should be announced to the network of formal and informal associations and groups (e.g., formal not-for-profits, online interest groups on social media) with a clear invitation to student migrants and information on how they would benefit from attending or using the service.

Invitations to Contribute

Whereas student migrant support services are mostly framed from a consumer or client-based standpoint, student migrants are often looking to connect and contribute in more significant ways. That could include program design, adjustments to way services or information are delivered, and volunteering opportunities that give student migrants a way to get involved in community-building and fostering trust.

Proactive Inclusion

At a time when student migrants are increasingly depicted negatively in the public sphere, an attitude of “proactive inclusion” is needed for all university, public and community stakeholders. For instance, stakeholders need to welcome student migrants explicitly and reassure them. This also applies to services indirectly available to student migrants, such as women's associations, racialized collectives and others.

Acknowledgements

This project was made possible by a financial contribution from the Office of Public Engagement of Memorial University (Accelerator Fund). Additional support was provided by the Nexus Centre and the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Memorial University; Glendon College, York University; and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (grant #435-2019-0823). Many researchers, organizations and Memorial University units have made this project possible. We sincerely thank them for their contribution.

Project team

- Isabelle Côté, Associate Professor, Political Science, Memorial University (*principal applicant*)
- Yiyin Liu, international graduate student, Interdisciplinary Program, Memorial University (*assistant*)
- Jean Michel Montsion, Associate Professor, Global and Social Studies, Glendon College, York University (*external applicant*)
- Mónica Murias Cato, international graduate student, Education, Memorial University (*assistant*)
- Melik Nasar, international graduate student, Public and International Affairs, Glendon College, York University (*assistant*)
- Ajay Parasram, Associate Professor, History and International Development, Dalhousie University
- Yolande Pottie-Sherman, Associate Professor, Geography, Memorial University
- Elizabeth Schwartz, Assistant Professor, Political Science, Memorial University
- Jennifer Selby, Director, Nexus Centre, Memorial University

Participating organizations

- Association of New Canadians
- Canadian Bureau for International Education
- City of St. John's (main partner)
- City of Toronto
- EduNova
- End Homelessness St. John's
- Fédération des francophones de Terre-Neuve et Labrador
- Food First NL
- International Education Newfoundland and Labrador
- Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of Labour
- Public Legal Information Association of NL
- YWCA

Participating units at Memorial University

- Childcare Centre
- Internationalization Office
- Racialized Graduate Student Collective
- School of Graduate Studies
- Student Support Office

Appendix 1: Event Posters

International Student Connections

Learn, Share, and Network



ISC Hub

Join us to learn more about the stakeholders supporting the integration of international students in the postsecondary education sector.

Everyone welcome! Contact us at mmurilascato@mun.ca

Free parking available during the event (Lot 60).
Snacks and refreshments will be provided.



BEING DIFFERENT IN ATLANTIC CANADA

Friday 25 October, 4:00pm to 5:30pm
The Whale Atrium - CSF 1301 & 1302, St. John's Campus, Memorial

A family-friendly event for international students to share their experiences and learn how to engage and navigate equity matters in Canada.



LEARN ABOUT SOCIAL PROGRAMS FOR YOU

Friday 1 November, 4:00pm to 5:30pm
The Landing - UC 3015, St. John's Campus, Memorial

A family-friendly event for international students to learn about key social programs such as childcare, language training, and family services



KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

Friday 8 November, 4:00pm to 5:30pm
The Landing - UC 3015, St. John's Campus, Memorial

A family-friendly event for international students to learn about their rights while in Canada, from housing to employment.



INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT: TESTIMONIES & RESOURCES

Friday 22 November, 4:00pm to 5:30pm
The Landing - UC 3015, St. John's Campus, Memorial


A session to learn about career development for postsecondary international students and to hear former students discussing how they chose to stay or not.

After the end of each event, you can join us to discover new tastes and connect to your community.
Multicultural Market at the St. John's Farmers' Market.
Friday, 5:30 pm - 9:30 pm. Free admission. 245 Freshwater Rd.

This series is made possible by support received from the Office of Public Engagement and the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences of Memorial, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, the Nexus Centre and Glendon College, York University.

International Student Connections


Learn, Share, and Network




ISC Hub

Join us to learn more about the stakeholders supporting the integration of international students in the postsecondary education sector.

Everyone welcome! Contact us at mmurilascato@mun.ca



POSTSECONDARY INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN CANADA: TRENDS & BEST PRACTICES

Thursday 17 October 2024 (3:30pm to 4:30pm, NL time) **Registration:** 

A **Zoom** discussion on the current trends and realities of postsecondary international students in Canada and some of the ways in which communities are supporting them.

The event will feature speakers from the Canadian Bureau for International Education, the City of Toronto, and EduNova.

This series is made possible by support received from the Office of Public Engagement and the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences of Memorial, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, the Nexus Centre and Glendon College, York University.

International Student Connections Learn, Share, and Network

ISC Hub

A special **Zoom** conversation
for Memorial's Grenfell Campus and the Marine Institute

Contact us at mmuriascato@mun.ca



BEING BROWN FROM AWAY: A CONVERSATION ON RACE AND LIVING IN ATLANTIC CANADA

Monday 28 October 2024 (11:00am-12:00pm, NL time) - **Registration:**



A conversation for racialized international students and people supporting
racialized international students with Dr. Ajay Parasram (Dalhousie University).

Come and share your experiences and hear how to navigate the social context of Atlantic Canada.

This series is made possible by support received from the Office of Public Engagement and the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences of Memorial, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, the Nexus Centre and Glendon College, York University.

Appendix 2: Information Sheet on Services and Programs for International Students

International Student Connections (ISC) Hub – Information Sheet

(last updated 10 December 2024)

Here is some information on services and programs that can be of interest to postsecondary international students to Newfoundland and Labrador. This list is based on what was shared during community consultations and the 2024 ISC Hub activities.

Information on Community Programs and Services

- [ANC Orientation and Settlement Services](#), incl. family support, health, interpretation & translation
- [ANC Employment Services](#), incl. skill development, employment readiness & matching
- [ANC Community Connections](#), incl. Newcomer Match Program, English as second language & events
- [End Homelessness St. John's Assistance](#)
- [FFTNL Compas : Service d'accueil et de soutien aux nouveaux arrivants francophones](#)
- [FFTNL Réseau immigration francophone de Terre-Neuve-et-Labrador](#)
- [Food First NL Information](#)
- [Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of Labour Resources](#)
- [PLIAN Newcomer Legal Support](#)
- [YWCA Employment Programs](#) for newcomer women & gender diverse folks
- [YWCA Workplace Language Development Program](#) for newcomer women and gender diverse folks
- [YWCA LGBTQIA+ Programs](#)

Information on Student Initiatives and Services at Memorial

- [Childcare Centre](#)
- [Enhance Development of the Graduate Experience](#) - EDGE (Graduate Studies)
- [Information for International Student on Arrival Preparedness, Housing, Visa and Immigration, Health Coverage and Family Support](#) (Internationalization Office)
- [Racialized Graduate Student Collective](#) (Faculty of Education)
- [Student Supports and Services](#)
- [Career programs of MUN](#), incl. the Professional Skills Development Program
- [Embark](#), incl. career & employment advising (Faculty of Business Administration)
- [Graduate Students Services](#), incl. family, wellness & housing support (Graduate Studies)

Information on Provincial Services

- [211: Directory to Community, Government and Social Services](#)
- [IENL Study and Stay NL Program](#)
- [Labour Standards and Labour Relations at Work](#)

Information on National Overview, Programs and News

- [2023 National Survey on International Student Experiences](#)
- [New Post-Graduation Work Permit Program Changes 2024](#)
- [Canada to Stabilize Growth and Decrease Number of New International Student Permits](#)
- [Study and Stay – Connect Project](#)

This project was made possible by a financial contribution from the Office of Public Engagement of Memorial University (Accelerator Fund) and additional support from the Nexus Centre and the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Memorial University.

References

- E Brewis, T Brotherhood & L Yang. 2024. Higher Education and National and Global Public Good(s) in Ontario, Canada. *Higher Education*. doi.org/10.1007/s10734-024-01327-6
- MJ Calder, S Richter, Y Mao, K Kovacs Burns, RS Mogale & M Danko. 2016. International Students Attending Canadian Universities: Their Experiences with Housing, Finances, and Other Issues. *Canadian Journal of Higher Education*, 46(2), 92-110.
- A El Masri & N Khan. 2022. International Students' Lived Experiences: A Literature Review. *Report 2022-1*. Centre for Global Education and Internationalization, Sheridan College.
- F Garon, JM Montsion & A Pyée. 2022. Toronto's Francophone Voluntary Sector Under Pressure: The Challenges of Immigrant Integration in a Linguistic Minority Context. *Canadian Journal of Nonprofit and Social Economy Research*, 13(1): 44-63.
- L Gien & R Law. 2009. *Attracting and Retaining Immigrants to Newfoundland and Labrador: Voices from the Newcomers and International Students*. Project Report. The Harris Centre, Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador.
- N Graham. 2019. The Experiences of Immigrant Entrepreneurs in a Medium Sized Canadian City. Master Thesis, Department of Geography. Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador.
- AH Kim, E Buckner & JM Montsion. 2024. The Federalization of Education Migration: Redefining Success. In AH Kim, E Buckner & JM Montsion (eds). *International Students from Asia in Canadian Universities: Institutional Challenges at the Intersection of Internationalization, Inclusion and Racialization*, pp. 1-14. New York: Routledge.
- X Li & H Que. 2016. Integration and Career Challenges of Newcomer Youth in Newfoundland in Canada. *FIRE: Forum for International Research in Education*, 2(3): 44-62.
- JM Montsion & D Caneo. 2024. Framing International Students from Asia in Ontario Universities: Provincial Priorities, Deficit-focused Services, and Economic Benefits. In AH Kim, E Buckner & JM Montsion (eds). *International Students from Asia in Canadian Universities: Institutional Challenges at the Intersection of Internationalization, Inclusion and Racialization*, pp. 44-56. New York: Routledge.
- JM Montsion, AH Kim & E Buckner. 2024. Building on Success from the Bottom-up? Institutional Challenges, Racialized Experiences and Opportunities for Further Research. In AH Kim, E Buckner & JM Montsion (eds). *International Students from Asia in Canadian Universities: Institutional Challenges at the Intersection of Internationalization, Inclusion and Racialization*, pp. 243-253. New York: Routledge.
- R Oliveira Soares, MO Magnan, Y Liu & F Melo Araneda. 2024. Voices from Chinese International Students on Resources Offered by Montreal Universities. In AH Kim, E Buckner & JM Montsion (eds). *International Students from Asia in Canadian Universities: Institutional Challenges at the Intersection of Internationalization, Inclusion and Racialization*, pp. 131-143. New York: Routledge.
- A Parasram, M Gateman & A Kazmi. 2024. An East Coast Racial Reckoning: International Students and the Politics of Race at Dalhousie University. In AH Kim, E Buckner & JM Montsion (eds). *International Students from Asia in Canadian Universities: Institutional Challenges at the Intersection of Internationalization, Inclusion and Racialization*, pp. 188-201. New York: Routledge.
- D Philpott, David, K Kennedy & M Greene. 2014. Strengthening the Value Chain: Supporting International Students and Building Intercultural Competence at Memorial University. University Report. Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador.

- Y Pottie-Sherman & N Graham. 2022. Higher Education, International Student Mobility, and Regional Innovation in Non-Core Regions: International Student Start-Ups on “the Rock”. *The Canadian Geographer*, 66(2): 234-247.
- AO Saif. 2021. *Barriers and Facilitators in Accessing Child Health Services and Social Supports: Perceptions of International Graduate Student Parents in Newfoundland and Labrador*. Master Thesis, Faculty of Medicine. Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador.
- J Worae & JD Edgerton (2023). A Descriptive Survey Study of International Students’ Experiences at a Canadian University: Challenges, Supports, and Suggested Improvements. *Comparative and International Education*, 51(2), 16-67.