

International student numbers at Canada's universities have been increasing steadily for the last few years – showing a growth of five per cent between the 1998/1999 and 1999/2000 academic years – and international student advisers report encouraging results for 2000/2001.

Canada's universities attract students from a broad range of student markets – in 1999/2000, countries from five different continents were represented in the country's top 11 international student nationalities – and many report increasing student enrolments from a variety of nationalities last year. "Overall, the largest markets for [us] are Germany, France, China and the USA," says Ruth MacNeil, International Relations Coordinator at Wilfred Laurier University in Ontario. "However, we are seeing an increase in [students] from other countries such as Ireland, Japan and Korea. We have also seen our first students arrive from numerous countries."

Dan Rowe, Marketing Officer at the Alberta Centre of International Education, has also noticed significant growth from a number of student markets in institutions in Alberta. "Mainland China continues to be a major source for international student recruitment," he says. "Mexico is another major market for growth potential. New mobility programmes and institution-to-institution partnerships are helping to attract Mexican students to Alberta. Several countries in Nordic Europe and some of the stronger Eastern European countries may become strong student recruitment markets for the future."

China has been a growth market for many institutions around the world in the last few years, and Canada too is seeing increasing numbers of Chinese students enrolling at its universities. "China is showing great promise," confirms Mo Keshavjee, Marketing and Communi-

cations Officer at the University of Calgary in Alberta, "due to its joining the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and increased emphasis on education in the English language, coupled with its [large] population and the relatively low number of universities in China."

However, while education agents in countries such as China and Russia report that Canada is generally perceived by students to be a desirable study destination, they also point out that difficulties involved in getting a student visa mean that Canadian institutions often lose out to other destinations. "Students did not want to apply to Canadian universities [last year] because they were afraid they would be rejected [for] a visa," reports Catherine Antonova, Consultant at Education Centre "Intellect-Tour" in Russia. Jack Young, General Manager at Jiazhing Consultants in China, agrees. "For study in Canada, there has been the presumption [by Chinese students] of a high quality of education and life," he says. "The major barrier [to studying there] is the presumed difficulty in getting a student visa."

Antonova also points out that while Russian students have become more aware of the high quality of Canada's universities over the last year, it is not always easy for agents to do business with these institutions. "Top ranked universities [in Canada] are not always ready to work with agents and pay commission – and they are the ones where most students would like to study."

There is evidence, however, that universities in Canada are reviewing their marketing practices in a bid to compete more successfully with other major study destinations. Art Hamilton, Director of International Programmes at Royal Roads University in British Columbia, says that the university's overseas marketing strategy has undergone

#### Selection of higher education institutions in Canada

	Use agents	Number of students	% overseas students
Nipissing University, North Bay, ON	✓	2,000	1
Pitman Business College, Vancouver, BC	✓	150	55
Queen's University, Kingston, ON		14,000	8
Royal Roads University, Victoria, BC	✓	2,000	20
University of Calgary, Calgary, AB		21,700	7
Université Laval, Quebec, QC		36,000	7
University of Northern British Columbia, Prince George, BC		3,400	3
University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, SK		19,000	5
University of Toronto, Toronto, ON		52,792	5
Wilfred Laurier University, Waterloo, ON	✓	8,300	2

# Canada's promise

Universities in Canada reported increasing international student enrolments over the last academic year. Emerging new students markets as well as a consolidation of traditional ones have provided a solid base for future growth.



changes recently and now includes attending fairs and seminars, using education agents abroad and advertising. "To establish [our] presence in a market, we needed more visits and other measures to develop a profile for the institution," he says.

The University of Calgary too is currently in the process of reviewing its overseas recruitment strategy, which consists of a website, print materials, fair participation and the use of study guides. "The use of credible, government-approved agents is something that [we are] particularly interested in covering for the purposes of highly targeted marketing," says Keshavjee.

Increased marketing on behalf of individual institutions, as well as continued promotion by central organisations such as the CEC Network and the Council of Ministers of Education (CMEC) – both of which launched new websites last year to promote Canadian education opportunities overseas (see *Education Travel Magazine*, January 2002, page 5) –

Overseas students in Canada's universities

	1997/1998	1998/1999	% change 97/98 98/99	1999/2000 (excl. maritime provinces)	% change 98/99 99/00
France	3,534	3,992	13	4,482	12.2
USA	3,413	3,822	12	4,124	8
China	2,701	2,310	-14.4	2,901	25.5
Hong Kong	1,733	2,176	25.5	1,783	-18
Japan	1,307	1,414	8.1	1,401	-0.9
South Korea	741	774	4.4	1,070	38.2
Morocco	757	827	9.2	866	4.7
India	719	745	3.6	817	9.6
Taiwan	653	725	11	816	12.5
UK	605	690	14	788	14.2
Mexico	643	726	13	758	4.4
Germany	721	758	5.1	739	-2.5
Tunisia	560	479	-14.4	630	31.5
Malaysia	1,019	852	-16.3	614	-28
<b>Total</b>	<b>33,111</b>	<b>35,556</b>	<b>7.3</b>	<b>37,402</b>	<b>5.1</b>

Source: Statistics Canada

are essential if Canada is to compete more effectively in the future against its North American neighbour.

Nicholas Snider, Manager of the Office of Student Recruitment and International Initiatives at Queen's University in Ontario, believes that there are many reasons why international students should consider studying in Canada.

"Canada attracts international students because of the high quality of the educational institutions, the relative safety and cleanliness of its cities and institutions, a reputation for offering a warm welcome to students from a wide variety of ethnic backgrounds, comparatively low tuition fees and a weak Canadian dollar," he says.

## Looking to the future

The terrorist attacks in the USA in September 2001 sent shockwaves throughout the education travel industry worldwide, and institutions in Canada have reported mixed reactions from potential students since September. "Our member institutions' international recruiters have received different feedback from potential students depending on the market," says Dan Rowe, Marketing Officer at the Alberta Centre for International Education. "Some students and their families now look to Canada as a safer alternative to the USA for international study. At the same time, other students consider Canada part of the North American continent and hence more potentially dangerous."

Overall, however, the outlook for Canadian institutions remains positive. "In the immediate aftermath [of the terrorist attacks in the USA] our international enquiries might have been down by 10 per cent but it seems to be fine now," says Virginia Towers, from Pitman Business College in Vancouver. "The outlook is good for 2002."

Duncan Chase, from the Chase Foundation in Argentina, says, "Canada offers a good alternative for students, and parents that are concerned with their safety, after the events of September 11."

With the introduction of the new tracking system for student visa holders in the USA, which is due to be implemented this year (see page 10), as well as increased security checks for students applying for a US visa from certain countries, Canada can only benefit from students investigating alternative study destinations to the USA. Ruth MacNeil, International Relations Coordinator at Wilfred Laurier University in Ontario, says, "Although it was a tragic event, September 11 has played a part in enhancing Canada as a study destination."