Assessing International Student Mobility in Canadian University Strategic Plans: Instrumentalist versus Transformational Approaches in Higher Education

Kate Grantham, Ph.D.
Research Associate
McGill University
Canada

Keywords: international student mobility; university internationalization strategies; student accessibility; transformational learning

ABSTRACT: This paper examines the strategic commitments made by Canadian universities around international student mobility, and evaluates whether these commitments provide an appropriate foundation for delivering strong mobility programs adopting “transformational” approaches. Through a content analysis of university strategic plans, I examine the nature of international student mobility discourse, ideas and objectives in Canadian higher education. This locus of examination is important because the strategic plan sets the tone and commitments for the university, and has significant power to influence decision-making at the program and department levels. This analysis also helps us to see the ways that university administration understands the purpose of international student mobility, and where gaps exist. The findings demonstrate that current conceptualizations of student mobility in the Canadian university context are: 1) Instrumentalist in the sense that they are near-exclusively designed to promote the university, and 2) Do not lay the foundation for strong international mobility programs.

Introduction

International student mobility programs involving Canadian students travelling to other countries (frequently in the Global South) for educational purposes is a growing trend.¹ A greater number of Canadian post-secondary students are enrolled in international exchanges, volunteer positions, internships and service learning courses than ever before.

¹ The term “Global South” is used, not unproblematically, to refer to countries that are characterized by the United Nations Human Development Index (HDI) as possessing low composite levels of income, life expectancy and educational attainment rates.
(Tiessen & Heron, 2012; Tiessen & Huish, 2014; Turner & Robson, 2008), and 97 percent of universities in Canada now offer international experiences to their students (Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC), 2014, p. 4-5). Calls to increase the number of university students taking part in mobility programs are also widespread, including, for instance, proposals to grow student participation rates from 11 percent to 25 percent over the next ten years (Study Group on Global Education, 2017), or a tripling of those going abroad by 2020 and again by 2025 (Canadian Centre for International Policy Studies, 2015). These calls are supported by research and news media reports linking mobility programs to Canada’s own economic wellbeing, the production of globally minded leaders and improved intercultural competency and job-preparedness for students (CBIE, 2014 and 2016; Fortier, 2016; Mulroney, 2016; Study Group on Global Education, 2017; University Affairs, 2016; Universities Canada, 2014).

Private, for-profit sending organizations are important players in marketing and selling these types of opportunities to students, who are increasingly treated like consumers of overseas experiences (Georgeou & Engel, 2011). Universities are also important players in this field. More and more, universities advertise international mobility programs as opportunities for students to develop marketable skills and to access real world job training for the globalized economy of the twenty-first century. They promote international mobility options by way of program delivery, course requirements, travel scholarships and bursaries, among other means. Ultimately, however, these programs fall under broader strategic commitments made by all levels of university governance—commitments that are laid out most definitively in university strategic plans.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the strategic commitments made by Canadian universities, and to evaluate whether these commitments provide an appropriate foundation for delivering strong international mobility programs adopting “transformational” approaches. By this, I am referring to institutional and pedagogical models for student mobility characterized by sustainability, reciprocity and the pursuit of global social justice. Through a content analysis of 33 university strategic plans, I examine the nature of international student mobility discourse, ideas and objectives in Canadian higher education. This locus of examination is important because the strategic plan sets the tone and commitments for the university. Drafted by the highest levels of university administration, the strategic plan has significant power to influence decision-making (around funding allocation, course offerings, etc.) at the program and department levels. This analysis also helps us to see the ways in which university administration understands the purpose of international student mobility, and where gaps exist. In other words, strategic plans can help us to understand whether universities are “on track” to do international mobility well. The findings of this analysis demonstrate that current conceptualizations of student mobility in the Canadian university context are 1) Instrumentalist in the sense that they are near-exclusively designed to promote the university, and 2) Do not lay the foundation for strong international mobility programs. In
light of these findings, I advocate that universities adopt more transformational approaches for higher education and for student mobility in particular.

**What the Literature on University Internationalization and Student Mobility Tells Us**

A growing number of scholars point to economic motivations as the driving force behind universities’ shift towards internationalization (see the edited collection by Molesworth et al., 2010, for example). In their research examining university mission statements in the United Kingdom, Sauntson and Morrish (2010) document a predominantly neoliberal discourse, in which marketization, commodification and globalization of the university landscape play key roles, thereby helping to construct students as consumers of university education. Corroborating this idea, Sharpe (2015) writes:

Critics have drawn attention to the entrepreneurial and consumer-oriented flavor of contemporary education abroad [EA] and have suggested that although EA programs claim to promote global citizenship, they seem to be more highly valued as a marketing strategy to attract top-level students (Breen, 2012; Ogden, 2007) and as a way for universities to generate additional revenue from students who pay a premium to participate in EA programs (Lewin, 2009). (p. 228)

Critical scholarship published by Sharpe and others illuminates the prevalence of instrumentalist approaches to higher education, which are concerned primarily with generating increased student enrollment and revenue. When applied to commitments around student mobility, instrumental approaches contribute to poorly designed and executed programs that prioritize institutional benefits over the goals of sustainability, reciprocity and global social justice.

Given the growing focus on students as consumers of post-secondary education, it is not surprising to learn that students are frequently motivated to participate in mobility programs for the personal benefits they offer—benefits like cross-cultural learning, improved language skills, job training and enhanced employability (Rothwell & Charleston, 2013; Tiessen, 2012 and 2014; Tiessen & Heron, 2012). Other commonly cited reasons for participation include adventure and travel opportunities (Tiessen, 2008), and the desire to “help” others or “make a difference” (Cook, 2008; Heron, 2007; Sharpe, 2015, p. 228). These motivations correspond with the perceived benefits of participation in non-academic volunteer abroad programs (see McBride et al., 2012). Critical development scholars and educators have criticized student motivations based on personal benefit for being misguided or self-serving at best, and at worst, borderline neocolonialist (Palacios, 2010; Sharpe, 2015).
The literature also tells us there are important considerations for international student mobility in the university context; chief among them are matters pertaining to program accessibility, ethics and evaluation. If universities want to do student mobility well, then they need to understand and address these issues.

**Accessibility**

Existing research acknowledges numerous barriers that prevent students from participating in international mobility programs. The Institute for the International Education of Students (IES Abroad, 2014) has categorized these barriers as the “three Cs”: cost, curriculum and culture. Of these, cost is consistently the main issue raised by students, followed by curriculum demands and an institutional cultural that does not adequately support international opportunities. Others have added a fourth “C” to this list. For instance, Martin (2015) asserts that “circumstances” having to do with health, family or work obligations can prevent students from having the opportunity to travel for long periods of time. Alternatively, Goodman (2014) proposes that universities need “champions” on campus to get students interested in mobility opportunities and to support them at every stage of their international experience.

Issues of accessibility are also connected to the participation rates of diversity groups. It is known that students experience barriers to participation unevenly, with male students, students of colour, student with disabilities, LGBT students, single parents, mature students, first generation students and Indigenous students disproportionality less likely to participate in mobility programs (CBIE, 2009; IES Abroad, 2014; Universities Canada, 2016a). Few studies have assessed the causes for limited participation rates of diversity groups, be it financial, cultural, attitudinal, privilege or discrimination based. Greater awareness and data collection on the part of universities is required in order to understand and close the gaps in student participation rates.

**Ethical Issues**

The rapid growth of international mobility programs in universities has raised questions regarding whether this growth may in fact be driven by less than ethical motivations (Sharpe, 2015, p. 227). Responding to such concerns, Karim-Haji et al. (2016) recently published a resource guide for achieving improved ethical practice in international experiential learning programs in the Canadian university context. This guide offers critical perspectives on a range of issues such as unequal power relationships, exploitation of host communities, unethical advertising and marketing of programs, among others. It offers a starting point for universities to consider the ethical implications of their mobility programming. Publications like this one reinforce the idea that universities have a responsibility to act ethically, to work with other local and global institutions to address the social, economic and political issues of our time (Jorgenson & Shultz, 2012, p. 12), and to not act in ways that reinforce existing inequalities.
When designing international student mobility programs, universities have an ethical responsibility to promote responsible forms of global engagement, sometimes termed “thick” global citizenship (Andreotti, 2006; Dobson, 2006). A thick conception of global citizenship, according to Cameron (2014) involves more than just compassion for the vulnerable—that deeply problematic “helping imperative” common among post-secondary students interested in international mobility programs in Global South countries. Instead, a thick global citizenship attempts to actively influence the structural conditions faced by vulnerable groups by first understanding individuals in the Global North as implicated (often as beneficiaries) in those very structures. Students must then operationalize their learning and undertake informed political action aimed at ending the suffering of others in which they are implicated (Cameron, 2014, p. 33). Cameron (2014) explains that thick conceptions of global citizenship are actually quite difficult to implement in practice:

One of the practical implications of “thick” conceptions of global citizenship is that, by emphasizing complicity in the suffering of others and moral obligations to fulfill negative duties not to contribute or to benefit from that suffering in addition to positive duties, the range of actions that quality as global citizenship is significantly reduced. (p. 32)

Fostering thick conceptions of global citizenship in the context of international student mobility programs requires a long-term commitment and a deliberate political undertaking by university students, professors and administrators alike.

The ethical principles underpinning thick global citizenship are jeopardized when the benefits of mobility programs are felt exclusively or primarily by Global North students. For universities wanting to develop strong mobility programs, strategies must be employed to teach students about the moral obligations that follow from international cooperation, to build ethical engagements with Global South partners and host communities, and to ensure that mutual learning and benefit results.

Program Evaluation

Several scholars have called for more rigorous evaluation of Canadian university mobility programs (Bennett, 2009; Grantham, 2016; Rathburn & Lexier, 2016, p. 18; Tiessen & Epprecht, 2012). Universities Canada (2016b) recently published an issue brief listing the core challenges that prevent universities from properly measuring and evaluating their mobility programs. One issue raised in the brief is the inconsistent and insufficient collection of information by universities. According to Universities Canada, “most, if not all, universities in Canada keep track of the program and year of study for students taking part in mobility programs. Some also keep data on trip-related information (country destinations and length of stay)” (p. 2). However, very few universities collect more detailed information, such as demographic data on students travelling abroad, the quality of student experiences or the impacts of programs for host partners and
communities. As a result, very little is currently known in Canada beyond the number and destinations of students going abroad.

A second core challenge to program evaluation has to do with the difficulty of classifying an ever-growing amount of diverse student mobility options, including anything from field research, to practicum placements and field courses, to voluntourism and study abroad, among others (Universities Canada, 2016b). Across the country, universities employ their own language and definitions too. Agreeing to nationally recognized typologies of mobility programs is an important first step for enabling consistent data entry and evaluation. CBIE’s (2015) “Education Abroad Lexicon” represents a positive step towards creating a comprehensive and authoritative vocabulary for student mobility. The adoption of this vocabulary by universities in Canada is intended to “promote consistency in statistical reporting and understanding of the types of education abroad activities Canadian students are undertaking” (CBIE, 2015). Without clear definitions in place it is impossible for Canadian universities to identity, let alone evaluate, the benefits and limitations of different mobility program types.

Evaluating student mobility also poses numerous conceptual challenges due to the complexity of defining and measuring program outcomes. Concerns have been raised regarding the lack of clarity around the meaning of terms frequently associated with student mobility, such as “global citizenship,” “intercultural competence,” “self-awareness” and “personal growth,” to name a few (Bennett, 2009; Jorgenson & Shultz, 2012; Rathburn & Lexier, 2016; Sharpe, 2015). This raises ethical questions about the kinds of ideas, values and understandings student mobility programs are contributing to (Cameron, 2014, p. 25). In a practical sense, it begs the question of what exactly we might measure when evaluating mobility program outcomes. Research conducted by Nelson and Child (2016) in South India documents the added difficulty posed when different partners involved in running mobility programs have conflicting ideas about which outcomes are most important to evaluate, and how they are best defined and measured.

If Canadian universities want to do international student mobility ethically and effectively then they need to understand and address these issues highlighted within the literature. Strategic plans offer a useful entry point for examining universities’ commitments to addressing these issues, and for identifying areas where gaps exist.

Research Approach and Methods

Existing literature tells us about the formative role played by university strategic plans, sometimes drawing links to globalization and the internationalization of higher education. In their research examining trends for global citizenship education in North America, Jorgensen and Shultz (2012) maintain that strategic plans serve a didactic function for universities. According to the authors, as the content of strategic plans is adapted to reflect the goals of internationalization, “members of the academic staff are encouraged to reexamine their curricula to identify ways in which departments can incorporate a focus on
global issues and global thinking in the classroom” (p. 7). In this way, strategic plans are framed as being instructive documents, used to guide the actions of university faculty, staff members and students and bring them in line with broader institutional mandates. Other literature that documents the formative function of university strategic plans includes that by Larsen (2015), Morphew and Hartley (2006), and Shultz and Viczko (2008).

Feminist geographers like McDowell (1999) and Massey (2005) contend that all space—including policy space and global space—is relational, and reflective of existing power relationships. Their research maps the hidden power dynamics embedded within specific discursive practices, including university strategic planning. Matus and Talburt (2009), for instance, argue that strategic plans serve a performative function, through which universities portray themselves as secondary actors responding to broader economic and political shifts taking place under globalization. The authors characterize university strategic plans as dynamic spaces that not only guide action and report progress toward institutional missions, but also serve to constitute an institutional identity through the use of select practices and discourses (p. 519). As a result of this framing, “institutions’ constitution of space and place in the context of internationalization becomes an incontestable discourse or way of doing that makes invisible universities’ complicity in the reproduction of the instrumental logic of economic globalization” (p. 516). Universities can justify their international policies and programs as necessary for adapting to globalization, while at the same time avoiding scrutiny for any potential negative impacts of said activities.

In order to determine whether the strategic commitments made by Canadian universities provide an appropriate foundation for delivering strong student mobility programs, I analyzed all Canadian university strategic plans available online. Included in this study are universities with strategic plans renewed as of 2013 or later, a timeframe chosen to correspond generally with the mainstream surge in interest around student mobility within the Canadian academic community. Of the 98 universities in Canada, 33 met the criteria for inclusion in this research (see Appendix A for a list of university strategic plans included in this study). This includes universities from nine different provinces and territories in Canada, and three francophone institutions.

All of the strategic plan documents analyzed include either a mission or vision statement, often both. The majority of plans also include a list of strategic directions, values, priorities or goals, and about half identify indicators for tracking their progress or achievement over time. The level of detailed information provided in the documents varies significantly, with plans ranging anywhere from 2 pages in length in the case of Nipissing University, to 52 pages in the case of Mount Royal University. Most plans are between 10-25 pages long. As previously stated, all of the strategic plans included in the study are dated 2013 or later, covering periods as far into the future as 2023. Results are current as of April 2016.
Using quantitative and qualitative analysis of selected key terms, I assess current approaches and commitments to international student mobility by Canadian universities. The terms selected for use in the study were chosen based on a review of common keywords listed in journal articles published on the topic of student mobility. They include (alphabetically):

- Global citizen / global citizenship
- Global engagement
- Internationalization
- International experiential learning / international exchange / international internship
- Mobility / student mobility / international mobility
- Study abroad / learning abroad / activities abroad

This content analysis sheds light on how Canadian universities frame discussions about international student mobility for the purpose of program and policy development, as well as public relations. Ultimately, it serves to elucidate the principles and priorities that guide Canadian universities on this issue.

**Findings**

The findings from this analysis underscore three key trends pertaining to the nature of student mobility discourse, ideas and objectives in Canadian higher education. These trends are summarized as: what is included, what is excluded and what is obscured within Canadian university strategic plans.

The first trend to emerge from the content analysis regards what is “included” in the strategic plans, namely, the use and frequency of certain key terms. Key terms are present a total of 151 times in the 33 strategic plan documents reviewed for the study, and 85 percent of the plans reference at least one key term. Key terms appear in the plans in the following order of frequency:

- Internationalization (n=39 references)
- Global citizen / global citizenship (n=39)
- International experiential learning / international exchange / international internship (n=38)
- Study abroad / learning abroad / activities abroad (n=15)
- Global engagement (n=12)
- Mobility / student mobility / international mobility (n=8)

Numerous versions of the “world as your classroom” metaphor are also employed across the strategic plans. In particular, the language of extending students’ learning “outside of” or “beyond” the classroom is used in 20 (or 61 percent) of the strategic plans reviewed.
Other non-key terms used repeatedly include: service learning or service-based learning, global opportunities, international educational experiences and international fieldwork or field schools.

The use and frequency of key terms tends to vary according to universities’ wider institutional mandate or priorities. Universities with the greatest number of references to selected key terms typically have established and sometimes highly centralized international offices on campus devoted to providing students and faculty with support for international activities. This includes the University of Waterloo (n = 16 references to key terms), the University of Regina (n=14), Western University (n=14) and the University of Ottawa (n=13). Having an international office on campus suggests that internationalization is already an established priority for these institutions. Apart from the University of Regina, these universities are all large institutions with enrollments of at least 25,000 full-time undergraduate students and significant funds to devote to international activities (Universities Canada, 2015).

Conversely, universities possessing a distinct cultural mandate or mission tend to use fewer key terms in their strategic plans, sometimes none at all. For instance, First Nations University of Canada and Université Sainte Anne make no reference to student mobility objectives in their strategic plans, possibly because of their institutional prioritization of objectives related to the preservation of Indigenous and Francophone culture, respectively. There are also differences in the language adopted by different types of institutions. Universities with a religious affiliation—such as St. Jerome’s University and Trinity College—tend to use different terminology, framing discussions about student mobility in the context of “service” or “service-based learning,” in keeping with religious virtues around service to others.

The relatively high number of references to “global citizen(ship)” and “internationalization” (39 references each) are not surprising. Their growing usage has been documented elsewhere (see Jorgensen & Shultz, 2012, or Rathburn & Lexier, 2016) and is reflective of broader trends in academia resulting from the increasingly globalized and competitive neoliberal environment of higher education. In today’s information economy, branding a university as “international” can also serve to indicate cutting-edge education and enhance a university’s brand (Garson, 2012, p. 3; Swanson, 2011). The analysis finds that universities use key terms in their strategic plans mainly for branding or image-creating purposes.

The second key trend to emerge has to do with what is “excluded” from the strategic plans. The use of language denoting thick conceptions of global citizenship are notably and problematically absent from discussions around student mobility, as is language framing student mobility as an ethical pursuit. No reference is made in the plans to the goals of global social justice, solidarity or human rights. Instead the purpose of offering more mobility options is framed as being pedagogically innovative and as a vehicle for meeting
the evolving expectations of students and their future employers. Consider the following strategic plan excerpts, for example:

Today’s students seek to round out their degrees by applying their acquired knowledge and skills in hands-on, real-world settings. *Students and employers alike expect to do this* through such learning activities as: participation in internships, co-op, and job shadowing programs with industry partners; service-learning projects with non-profit community groups; study-abroad and academic exchange programs. (Western University, 2014, p. 12, emphasis added)

We believe that there is no substitute for face-to-face instruction in a classroom setting, and this will remain our predominant method of delivering a high quality educational experience. *We must also adapt to the signals in our environment and develop a response* by incorporating technology and experiential learning in ways that enhance learning. (University of Winnipeg, 2015, p. 20, emphasis added)

The strategic deployment of mobility opportunities as a tool for meeting the expectations of students and employers, and for generating institutional revenue and prestige is evident across the strategic plans. This suggests that discussions around the ethics of student mobility are at best a secondary priority for Canadian university administrators. It also demonstrates that there is a neoliberal focus on the development of Canadian students through international experiences to be good, competent citizens and workers.

This finding coheres with the results of a national survey conducted by Universities Canada in 2014 identifying the main reasons why Canadian universities promote internationalization. The top five reasons reported include: (1) to prepare students to be internationally and interculturally competent; (2) for the potential revenue generated; (3) to build strategic partnerships with other universities around the world; (4) to internationalize their campus; and (5) to increase the university’s global profile (2014, p. 12). Evidently, universities’ interest in international mobility is geared mainly toward generating benefits for students and for universities themselves, with little attention paid to the impacts (positive or negative) for host partners and communities. This is not due to a belief among administrators that ethical issues are outside the scope of the strategic plan; commitments around social justice and social equity are raised in 22 (or 67 percent) of the strategic plans, but not once in the context of discussing international student mobility options.

In terms of other notable exclusions, the strategic plans make no reference to the accessibility of mobility programs for diverse groups of students. Gender, class or race-related considerations are never acknowledged in relation to student interest and participation in mobility programs. This is true for virtually all universities included in the study, except for St. Thomas More College, where, in relation to the strategic priority of “Indigenous Engagement,” the strategic plan includes goals to engage Indigenous students
more directly in service-learning programs, develop more service-learning opportunities and provide foundations for Indigenous student to have international experiences (St. Thomas More College, 2015, p. 8). No other strategic plan specifies current demographic trends or future goals to increase the participation rates of diversity groups.

Related to the above, questions about student motivations for participating in international opportunities are entirely absent from the strategic plan documents. This is despite the fact that, as previously explained, student motivations have been the subject of much scrutiny in the academic literature on international student mobility (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Chan & Dimmock, 2008; Tiessen & Heron, 2012). This raises questions about whether universities are concerned with student motivations in practice, how student motivations are assessed, and what impact (if any) demonstrating the “wrong” motivations has on students’ ability to partake in international opportunities. In an institutional setting where the expectations of students and employers are prioritized above all else, it is unlikely that mobility program administrators screen students thoroughly to ensure they possess virtuous motivations. Yet, in order to avoid reproducing exploitative colonial relationships, it is imperative that individuals driven by self-interest are not accepted for international mobility placements, particularly those located in socially and economically vulnerable communities in the Global South.

The third and final key trend has to do with what is “obscured” about student mobility within the strategic plans, specifically, the content and impacts of such programs. When key terms relating to student mobility options (i.e. “international internship”, “international exchange”, “study abroad” or “learn abroad”) appear in the strategic plans they are never defined outright and sometimes used interchangeably. Key terms relating to student mobility are also frequently used elusively and not tied to learning outcomes or broader institutional rationales, giving them the appearance of buzzwords (as Cornwall, 2007, might characterize them). Yet universities need to be clear on the implications of their work in this area, “given the wide range of intentions and practices that this discourse may convey” (Jorgensen & Shultz, 2012, p. 2). It is important to clarify what is meant by the use of terms like internationalization, global engagement and global citizen(ship) in the strategic plans, as well as the philosophical, pedagogical and practical issues associated with implementing them on campus (Jorgenson & Shultz, 2012; Shultz, 2007). Defining student mobility programs and objectives concretely is a vital first step to developing strong policies and program models.

Numerical and statistical goals for increasing the number of students participating in international experiential learning, internships and exchanges are the only metrics present in the strategic plans for measuring international student mobility objectives. Mount Royal University, University of Ottawa and University of Regina all cite specific numerical targets for increasing the number of students travelling abroad. For instance, the University of Ottawa states its aspiration to “double the number of students taking part in mobility programs (to 1,000 a year)” by 2020 (University of Ottawa, 2014, p. 8). In other cases, such as Huron University College and University of Prince Edward Island, the simple goal
of providing “more” or “increased” opportunities for student mobility is the sole indicator offered (University of Prince Edward Island, 2013, p. 18; Huron University College, 2013, p. 8).

The tendency for universities to use key terms related to international student mobility elusively and without tying them to learning outcomes or broader institutional rationales for increasing student mobility is partly the result of their conceptual ambiguity (which has been documented elsewhere by Jorgenson & Shultz, 2012, and Rathburn & Lexier, 2016, for example). It also points to an underlying assumption held by university administrators that the goal of increasing international opportunities for students is inherently good. Authors, many from critical development studies, challenge the presumed goodness of international mobility programs and question whether Canadian students’ involvement with vulnerable communities can ever be justified as learning opportunities (Andreotti, 2016; Sharpe, 2015; Tiessen & Heron, 2012). At minimum, the notion that student mobility is inherently good is rendered suspect by the lack of institutional evaluation of mobility programs.

**Analysis: Instrumental versus Transformational Approaches to Higher Education**

What is significant about these findings is, first, that current approaches are shown to be highly instrumentalist, used mainly by universities for strategic purposes to enhance branding and generate increased student enrollment and revenue. Second, current approaches do not lay the foundations for creating strong mobility programs, characterized by sustainable and reciprocal agreements with host country partners and “through which students are led towards developing a more globally aware and justice-oriented worldview” (Sharpe, 2015, p. 227)—what I term “transformational” approaches to higher education. Yet opportunities for transformational approaches exist, and post-secondary institutions could build on such examples in order meet broader educational and ethical guidelines. Exemplars of institutional commitment to transformational approaches to student mobility include the growing prevalence of online mobility courses involving students enrolled at multiple institutions internationally, and that stress collaboration and reciprocity of opportunity. Innovative experiential learning programs offering local placements for students and South-North mobility options are also being offered in pockets at universities across the country.

There are limitations to this study, since programs may do much more than the university strategic plan lays out. Indeed, the above-mentioned examples of innovative programs are not documented in the strategic plans of the universities that run them. This may indicate that one of the limitations is that strategic plans tell us about what is important for strategic framing of a university more than practice on the ground. This is why stronger data collection and documentation of what is taking place across individual universities is needed. Further clarification, elaboration and discussion of the issues
assessed here may also be present in other university documents, policies and publications. But as I have argued, strategic plans are important for their role and function in laying a foundation and establishing institutional commitments for doing international student mobility well. Based on this analysis, current approaches are shown to be highly instrumentalist and therefore limited in their ability to meet the broader educational and ethical standards that underpin transformational approaches to higher education.

One final observation to come out of the content analysis concerns how the strategic plans position universities as higher education institutions in relation to globalization. Corroborating the findings of Matus and Talburt (2009), universities included in the study frequently portray themselves as merely “responding to” or “accommodating” globalization, as opposed to actively shaping its processes. The plans reference "dramatic changes in higher education related to the intensification of globalization" (Matus and Talburt, 2009, p. 515), and the resulting need to provide students with international skills and knowledge to help them manage their new global environment. This type of wording came up in ten (or one-third) of the strategic plans. For example:

New graduate programs must continue to be developed and to flourish in response to the multi-dimensional needs of an increasingly complex surrounding society. At the same time, new teaching and learning modes and strategies must be developed and implemented in response to the needs of our students as citizens of an increasingly global and interactive world. (Brock University, 2014, p. 2)

Our graduates in humanities and journalism are thoughtful, critical thinkers who have learned to flourish in community and are well prepared to become fully engaged local and global citizens. In short, we seek to prepare students to be “fit for life” in all its facets. (University of King’s College, 2013, p. 4)

In today’s knowledge-based global economy, the demand for individuals who can create new knowledge or who can critically assess and apply new knowledge continues to rise. Our society also needs people who can provide leadership in recognizing, defining, and engaging the world’s increasingly complex challenges… We will achieve this goal by providing the educational programming, research training and experiences that develop the talent of our undergraduate and graduate students, postdoctoral scholars, medical residents and fellows so that Western graduates are well prepared to be leaders in their chosen endeavours on the global stage. (Western University, 2014, p. 8-9).

In this context, internationalization activities (including student mobility opportunities) are framed in the strategic plans as being necessary for universities’ evolution and relevance; indeed, for their very survival. Within this logic of “globalization-as-cause and
internationalization-as-effect” (Matus & Talburt 2009, p. 515), conversations about student mobility are overwhelmingly instrumentalist in their conceptualization, while the possibility, let alone the necessity, for more transformational approaches is eclipsed.

Conclusion: Why Strategic Plans are Important for Student Mobility

Universities are by no means “outside of” or “disconnected from” globalization; they in fact possess a great deal of autonomy and more than a limited number of options for ways to engage with and enter new global spaces. Numerous innovative student mobility programs exist in Canada. I have documented a few examples of such programs here. Unfortunately, small pockets of innovative or promising programs are insufficient for meeting broader educational and ethical standards outlined within existing scholarship on student mobility. Even the most innovative and well-designed student mobility programs can only prove effective in the sense of offering transformational experiences when they are accompanied by an institution-wide commitment to addressing the issues associated with student mobility—issues of accessibility, ethics and program evaluation. This is why strategic plans are a crucial part of the conversation around student mobility; they are a uniquely deliberate and public space where institutional commitments and agendas are forged, and where discourse and policy-making is reified.
References


Universities Canada. (2016a). “Global Possibilities: An Examination of N-S Student Mobility Programs Offered Through Canadian Universities.” Ottawa, ON: Universities Canada.


## Appendix A – University Strategic Plans Included in the Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University Institution</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Title of Document</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bishop's University</td>
<td>2013 – 2018</td>
<td>Untitled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brock University</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Knowledge, Engagement, Transformation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carleton University</td>
<td>2013 – 2018</td>
<td>Collaboration, Leadership and Resilience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concordia University</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>Strategic Directions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dalhousie University</td>
<td>2014 - 2018</td>
<td>Inspiration and Impact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Nations University of Canada</td>
<td>2013 -2018</td>
<td>Lighting the Path</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Huron University College</td>
<td>2013 – 2023</td>
<td>Critically Engaged</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kwantlen Polytechnic University</td>
<td>2013 – 2018</td>
<td>Vision 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lakehead University</td>
<td>2013 – 2018</td>
<td>Nurturing a Passion to Lead</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MacEwan University</td>
<td>2014 – 2019</td>
<td>A New Beginning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memorial University</td>
<td>2014 – 2017</td>
<td>Untitled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mount Royal University</td>
<td>2015 - 2025</td>
<td>Learning Together, Leading Together</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mount Saint Vincent University</td>
<td>2013 – 2017</td>
<td>Mount 2017: Making a Difference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nipissing University</td>
<td>2015 – 2020</td>
<td>Untitled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queen's University</td>
<td>2014 – 2019</td>
<td>Untitled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Royal Roads University</td>
<td>2014 – 2019</td>
<td>Untitled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ryerson University</td>
<td>2014 – 2019</td>
<td>Our Time to Lead</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Jerome's University</td>
<td>2015 – 2020</td>
<td>Untitled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Thomas More College</td>
<td>2015 – 2020</td>
<td>Untitled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The King’s University</td>
<td>2015 – 2020</td>
<td>Shared Vision 2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thompson Rivers University</td>
<td>2014 – 2019</td>
<td>Redefining the Modern University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trinity College</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>People, Program, Place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Universite Sainte-Anne</td>
<td>2013 – 2018</td>
<td>Untitled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Alberta</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>For the Public Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of King's College</td>
<td>2013 – 2016</td>
<td>Untitled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Lethbridge</td>
<td>2014 – 2020</td>
<td>Destination 2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Manitoba</td>
<td>2015 – 2020</td>
<td>Taking Our Place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Ottawa</td>
<td>2014 – 2020</td>
<td>Destination 2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Prince Edward Island</td>
<td>2013 – 2018</td>
<td>Untitled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Regina</td>
<td>2015 – 2020</td>
<td>Together we are Stronger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Waterloo</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>A Distinguished Past – A Distinctive Future</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Winnipeg</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>Growing Leaders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western University</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Achieving Excellence on the World Stage</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Author Biography

Kate Grantham is a Research Associate with McGill University’s Institute for the Study of International Development and Managing Editor of the GrOW Research Series on women’s economic empowerment and economic growth in low-income countries. Kate Grantham obtained her PhD from The University of Western Ontario in 2016, and in 2017 completed a Postdoctoral Fellowship with the School of International Development and Global Studies at the University of Ottawa.