



LEVEL
YOUTH POLICY PROGRAM

Building an Ethical
Relationship Between the
Province of British Columbia
and International Students

AIDA MWANZIA

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The LEVEL Youth Policy Program takes place on the traditional and unceded territories of the xʷməθkʷəy̓ əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), & səliilwətaʔ (Tsleil-Waututh) Coast Salish peoples.

ABOUT THE LEVEL INITIATIVE

LEVEL is a youth-engagement initiative of Vancouver Foundation that aims to address racial inequity. We do this by investing in the leadership capacity of Indigenous, racialized, immigrant, and refugee youth to create more opportunities throughout the non-profit and charitable sector.

Despite being the fastest-growing youth population in British Columbia, Indigenous, immigrant, and refugee youth don't have the same opportunities as other young people. Race continues to be a factor that hinders their ability to have a say in decisions that impact their lives.

LEVEL empowers these youth by building their capacity to challenge and change those systems that hinder their ability to build a more just world.

LEVEL CONSISTS OF
THREE PILLARS OF
WORK TO ADVANCE
RACIAL EQUITY:



ABOUT THE LEVEL YOUTH POLICY PROGRAM

The LEVEL Youth Policy Program (LEVEL YPP) brings together young people between the ages of 19 and 29 from across British Columbia who identify as being Indigenous or racialized immigrants or refugees. Indigenous and racialized Newcomer youth are disproportionately impacted by certain public policies and are rarely included in the development and implementation of public policy process. The LEVEL YPP aims to provide these youth with equitable training and leadership opportunities to better navigate the public policy landscape, and to develop new tools and skills to influence, shape, and advocate for policy changes that are relevant in their own communities. Having young people directly involved in shaping policies that impact their lives is essential to creating systemic, meaningful change. The LEVEL YPP's training is grounded from and within Indigenous peoples' worldviews, which the program acknowledges, could vary from person-to-person or nation-to-nation. Indigenous worldviews place a large emphasis on connections to the land. This perspective views the land as sacred; where everything and everyone is related and connected; where the quality of the relationships formed are key in life; where what matters is the success and well-being of the community, and where there can be many truths as they are based on individual lived experiences.¹ As such, an important premise of this training is to centre and place a particular focus on the fact that the work that has gone into developing this training, as well as the training itself, has taken and will take place on unceded (never given away/stolen) territories of the hən̓d̓əmin̓əm̓-speaking Musqueam peoples, of the Halkomelem-speaking Tsleil-Waututh peoples, and of the sn̓íchim-speaking Skwx_wú7mesh (Squamish) peoples.

1 <https://www.ictinc.ca/blog/indigenous-peoples-worldviews-vs-western-worldviews>



AIDA
MWANZIA

Aida Mwanzia is driven by her mission to connect and empower youth through transformative educational programs. With roots in Kenya, Aida has lived on unceded Coast Salish territories for seven years. The purpose of her work is to shift the narrative about migrant and Indigenous communities through reframing our collective past, present, and future.

Aida graduated from the University of British Columbia (UBC) with an honours degree in sociology. She has had the privilege of coordinating the Youth Exchanges Canada and Youth Peace Network programs, and currently serves as an advisor for the Simon Fraser University (SFU) Dialogue and Civic Engagement Certificate. Aida has facilitated dialogues and workshops for several clients, including the Canadian Race Relations Foundation, Check Your Head: The Youth Global Education Network, Immigrant Services Society of BC (ISSofBC), the Canadian Museum for Human Rights, the Equity and Inclusion Office at UBC, West Coast Leaf, and the British Columbia Civil Liberties Association. Through her dialogue facilitation and program coordination experience, she has seen the power of experiential education, storytelling, games, and relationship-building as pathways for decolonization and visioning.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Post-secondary institutions in Canada and around the world have made a concerted effort to internationalize higher education in response to an increasingly diverse and globalized world. For the purpose of this research, globalization is defined as a “multi-level process signaled by the rapid advancement in technology, transnational economic trade, and international dispersion of humans, plants, animals, cultures, and worldviews.” Internationalization refers to processes in post-secondary institutions to diversify the student body, faculty, staff, curriculum, hiring practices, strategic plans, policies, and other key areas. These processes take place in the context of a “post-colonial” world where the legacy of colonization has resulted in the valuation of Western education, epistemology, and institutions over those that exist within the Global South and local Indigenous communities. The implications of this are that, in many cases, Western degrees and citizenship offer more mobility, opportunities, and income potential in this current market. Without undergoing meaningful processes of decolonization, post-secondary institutions in Western countries continue to profit unethically from imbalanced North-South relations.

The purpose of this research is to explore ways in which the Province of British Columbia can begin to build an ethical relationship with international students, who often become future Permanent Residents and citizens. Studies have shown that 25% of international students admitted to universities in Canada in the early 2000s went on to become Permanent Residents (PRs) within 10 years after their graduation, with approximately half gaining PR status through the economic class of migrants. This indicates that a significant proportion of international students remain in Canada, and continue to contribute meaningfully to the Canadian economy, as they are required to engage in skilled work verified by the National Occupation Classification in order to gain status through the economic pathway to permanent residency. However, ethical engagement with international students requires moving beyond an economic analysis of their contribution to Canadian society and recognizing their humanity and complexity.

Through reading academic studies, news articles, reflecting on my own lived-experience as an international student, listening to personal stories from international students in British Columbia, and witnessing several post-secondary institutions increase international student tuition at astounding rates, it is clear that BC’s approach to international education has mostly focused on internationalizing the student body. This internationalizing seems to be primarily for financial reasons, and diversifying of faculty, staff, curriculum, hiring practices, strategic plans, and policies have been seriously neglected. The social and cultural value that international students offer, the support that they require, and the representation that they need in the curriculum, faculty, and staff needs to be recognized and addressed. It is also in BC’s best interest to increase subsidies for public post-secondary institutions in order to decrease the dependency on international students, as minor changes to the number of international students will result in major deficits that will effect education for BC citizens. This project proposes implementing a two percent tuition cap for international student tuition, which will allow for areas of international education other than recruitment to be addressed, while preventing the unregulated exploitation of international students for tuition.

PROBLEM DEFINITION

Public post-secondary institutions in BC have become financially dependent on international students to bridge funding gaps, which has led to:

- a. an increased risk for the province, which is subject to budget shortfalls when the market for international students fluctuates, and
- b. a vulnerable population of students who are subject to unregulated tuition fee increases at any given time during their degree.



International and domestic students at UBC learning about one another's cultures through the Global Cafe Program, which was designed by Aida Mwanzia and Michael Leff.

BACKGROUND

It is important to connect the topic of international education with other developments in education, particularly because the majority of international students in BC are learning on unceded territory. This research recognizes that any improvement to international education must be accompanied or preceded by improvements to education for Indigenous people in Canada. There is also a need to connect international students and Newcomers to Canada with adequate education about Indigenous people, culture, and history, and to involve them in Truth and Reconciliation initiatives.

BC's Strategic Plan for 2019-2022 was released earlier this year, and contained progressive developments toward poverty reduction in the province. In particular, the elimination of interest on provincial student loans, offering adult basic education and English-language learning programs for free at public post-secondary institutions, and implementing the first tuition-waiver program for former youth in care are some highlights of the new plan. Changes to the new BC curriculum and the reduction in class sizes from K-12 indicate that the current government in BC is taking strides to make education affordable and accessible for a wider range of people. Minister Melanie Mark's 2017-2018 mandate letter to public post-secondary institutions marked a departure from previous letters by calling for them to "work closely with [her] Ministry to develop a balanced approach to international education." By contrast, the 2016-2017 mandate letter called for institutions to "continue to deliver on the goals of the International Education Strategy including pursuing opportunities to advance the two-way flow of students." With all of this in mind, BC is well-positioned to continue its leadership in educational policy through the development of ethical relations with international students.

British Columbia currently hosts one-third of all international students in the country. A recent report revealed that international students make up approximately 20% of the total population of university students in the province, while paying close to 50% of BC's university tuition fee revenue. This has resulted in the average tuition for international students being \$20,485 annually, four times the amount of the average domestic student, which is \$5,397 annually. Funding for public post-secondary education decreased by 22% in the province between 2000 and 2015, and international student tuition has been crucial in filling that gap. At the same time, tuition has increased by 64% for international students in BC since 2006. A report by Roslyn Kunin & Associates estimated that institutions provide only one percent of tuition fees in the form of financial aid to international students. Current federal regulations limit the amount of time that international students can work off campus to 20 hours per week. Many of these policies operate under the assumption that international students are generally wealthy enough to effortlessly afford international tuition. A 2013 study surveying 3,000 international students in the United States suggests the contrary, it showed that 47% of international students did not, in fact, have strong financial resources.



RECOMMENDATION

Implement a two-percent tuition cap for non-resident student tuition

CONTEXT:

In 2005, a two percent tuition cap was implemented in BC for domestic students. This recommendation suggests extending this policy to include non-resident students. With international tuition averaging at \$20,485 per year (based on 2015 data), tuition would still be able to be increased up to \$409 per student annually.

RISKS:

- This policy could be seen as encouraging “brain drain,” the phenomenon in which talented youth and professionals from the Global South move to the Global North in search of better pay, opportunities, and mobility. Since tuition is currently so expensive that only a limited percentage of people in the Global South can afford to pay international tuition, this policy would not necessarily facilitate more people moving to Canada as much as it would create protections for those who are already able to study and complete their post-secondary education in Canada. Even so, brain drain is something that also needs to be addressed on a systemic level.
- If international tuition was capped, domestic tuition may increase as international tuition heavily subsidizes public post-secondary education. The assumption that the majority of the cost of post-secondary education needs to come from either international or domestic students is already problematic. By providing protections for both of these groups, the government may need to play a larger role in subsidizing public post-secondary education, and then public post-secondary institutions can re-balance their budgets and explore other avenues for funding.

BENEFITS:

- With more predictability, due to the regulation on tuition, international students would be able to financially plan for their degree(s).
- More international students are likely to graduate because they will be able to afford to complete their degrees.
- Students from a wider-range of socio-economic backgrounds would remain for a longer period in Canada, enriching its diversity.
- The province will be compelled to find a more sustainable source of funding for public post-secondary education, which would ultimately benefit domestic students.

Research shows that not only are international students primarily valued for their monetary contributions to post-secondary institutions, they tend not to be as valued for the intellectual, cultural, and social diversity that they offer. Through her research on decolonizing internationalization in Canadian education, Taqdir Bandal observes that the term “global” within the context of internationalizing post-secondary education “does not simply mean the transcendence of nations, but rather signifies a rhetoric of universal humanism based on a hierarchy of geopolitical location, Northern beliefs, and privileging economic benefits over social ones.” This rhetoric explains why diversifying faculty members and the curriculum are low-priority, supported by the fact that only five-tenths to five percent of faculty in Canada are from racialized communities. These are areas for growth both provincially in BC, and nationally. British Columbia is well-situated to make progress on these issues, and has already started to do so as is demonstrated by some of the developments listed earlier. Additionally, BC implemented a tuition cap of two percent for domestic students in 2005, which has been in place since that time. It would be in the interest of the provincial government to regulate international tuition, as this would enable the province to be more financially sustainable and less susceptible to the effects of fluctuations in the number of international students. This regulation would also be a meaningful first step in developing a less-predatory and more-ethical relationship with international students, many of whom will stay on to become Permanent Residents and citizens.

CONCLUSION

As post-secondary institutions collaborate with the Ministry of Advanced Education to develop a more “balanced approach to international education,” the dependence of the province on international education as BC’s third largest export needs to be addressed. With international-student spending amounting to \$3.117 billion per year, and with \$1.77 billion contributed to the provincial GDP, it is no secret that the province needs international students to sustain its economy. As more international students are recruited to attend post-secondary institutions, this increases the pool of potential Permanent Residents and citizens that Canada needs to sustain itself due to its aging population. Supporting the development of policies to protect international students is a solution that will improve students’ experiences of living, working, and studying in Canada, as they will feel as if their rights and dignity are respected even prior to gaining PR or citizenship. Policies like the two percent tuition cap for both resident and non-resident tuition also encourages BC to develop a stronger plan to sustain the province’s public post-secondary institutions.

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ABOUT VANCOUVER FOUNDATION

Vancouver Foundation is Community Inspired. We are a community foundation that connects the generosity of donors with the energy, ideas, and time of people in the community. Together, we've been making meaningful and lasting impacts in neighborhoods and communities since 1943. We work with individuals, corporations, and charitable agencies to create permanent endowment funds and then use the income to support thousands of charities. We recognize that communities are complex and that collaboration between multiple stakeholders is needed to help everyone thrive and evolve. Vancouver Foundation brings together donors, non-profits and charities, government, media and academic institutions, local leaders, and passionate individuals to build meaningful and lasting change in the province of British Columbia. We see young people, their voices and experiences as part of that vision to building meaningful change.



LEVEL

AN INITIATIVE OF **vancouver**
foundation

200-475 W. Georgia Street,
Vancouver, BC, V6B 4M9
604.688.2204

level@vancouverfoundation.ca
www.levelvf.ca

 @LEVELVF

 @LEVEL_VF

 @LEVEL_VF