

Immigration**Post graduate work permit expansion for career colleges not needed | Sergio R. Karas**By **Sergio R. Karas**

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(February 24, 2022, 1:34 PM EST) -- Current immigration policy and regulations allow foreign students who graduate from Canadian universities and publicly funded colleges to obtain a Post Graduate Work Permit (PGWP) upon graduation. The PGWP is pushing the boundaries of immigration even during the Covid-19 pandemic. From January to November 2021, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) issued more than 126,000 PGWPs. The National Association of Career Colleges (NACC), whose members run private vocational colleges, is now putting pressure on IRCC to extend the availability of PGWPs to their diploma and certificate graduates.

This expansion would raise significant concerns, due to the level of education of the graduates and it would mean exponential growth in the number of PGWPs issued annually. NACC member colleges offer courses as short as six months in anything ranging from liberal arts to public relations management. This expansion would attract a vast number of foreign students to those colleges, looking to learn something that is not challenging, so they can find an entry level position and obtain permanent residence. Unlike university graduates, their goal would not be to start a career, but rather find a quick and easy way to obtain residency.

Many foreign students who attend career colleges are often "steered" by unscrupulous agents and unlicensed consultants who receive a commission from educational institutions and misrepresent the feasibility of obtaining residency. When foreign students become aware that they are not eligible for PGWP, the agents often blame the career colleges, or a change in government policy, and let them deal with the fallout. Others are simply looking for a way to obtain a work permit and do not even attend classes.

According to an April 2019 *CBC News* report, even publicly funded colleges and universities pay millions of dollars in commissions to agents overseas with a flat fee per student or based on first year tuition fees. "College fairs" are advertised heavily in many countries to attract foreign students. According to the Canadian Bureau for International Education, this has resulted in almost 600,000 foreign students coming to Canada annually. This number is already too high, eliminating the need for advertising or recruitment agents. The best recruiting tools are the quality of education imparted, and word of mouth from graduates who enjoyed a positive educational experience.

Even if career college students are genuinely looking to learn practical courses, this raises the question of whether the labour market can absorb so many young and inexperienced graduates. The market is in short supply of skilled, experienced workers in manufacturing, construction, engineering and other professions and trades, as the older cohort of Canadian workers are retiring. Employers trying to recruit skilled workers are often faced with the difficulties posed by a tight labour market, while at the same time, receiving hundreds of resumes from unqualified individuals. There is a significant disconnect between the labour market and the availability of workers in many positions.

Colleges and universities have become too dependent on foreign student tuition fees, which are often triple those of Canadian residents. Also, the large influx of foreign students from countries where English or French are not the languages of instruction, may have caused admission standards to be lowered and many courses to require less stringent writing ability. Many foreign students lack the

necessary language skills to function at a university level or in the labour market.

Colleges and universities should impose more stringent admission standards, focusing on the quality of the applicants, rather than on their high numbers, and should also ensure more country diversity. Currently, over half the foreign student population in Canada comes from only two countries, India, and the People's Republic of China, the latter also raising some concerns given the current geopolitical environment and reports about the Chinese authorities monitoring their students in Canadian campuses.

IRCC should prioritize foreign students pursuing studies in science, technology, engineering and mathematics and computer science (STEM) disciplines or apprenticeships in trades, instead of those studying business, humanities, health, arts, social science and education (BHASE) who may not have good employment prospects. There should be a discussion about the economic costs and benefits of the foreign student program. According to 2021 Statistics Canada figures, the country is quickly reaching the point in which the number of foreign college graduates in BHASE vastly outnumbers the number of graduates in STEM. Authorities should consider whether all foreign students should obtain residency or prioritize graduates in STEM disciplines.

Canada should not create false expectations of easy residency and employment prospects for graduates whose skills do not match the needs of the labour force. Any extension of the PGWP to career college graduates would be detrimental to the overall program as it will quickly overwhelm processing resources and result in lengthy delays for meritorious STEM university graduates.

The number of foreign students in Canada cannot continue to increase because they are crowding out other immigration streams and competing for processing resources. Foreign workers with experience are needed by many employers, rather than entry-level workers. Consider for example a foreign student graduating from MIT or Stanford with a few years of experience who has been trying to immigrate to Canada and has not been able to be selected in the last two years.

Current government policy suspending the processing of the Federal Skilled Worker program from overseas and favouring foreign graduates in Canada is ill-advised and penalizes some of the best and brightest who have excellent educational credentials and worldwide experience.

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