A BMRC RESEARCH DIGEST
Fall 2021

Explaining the Structure and Mechanism of Recruiting

International Students to Community and Privates Colleges in the Greater Toronto Area

BMRC IRMU

Click here to insert the image

(Recommended size: 1275 x 433px)

optional photo caption

What you need to know

The economic benefits associated with the increasing admittance of international students to Canadian postsecondary educational institutions (PSEIs) is undeniable (Plumb 2020). With their numbers increasing annually, PSEIs are paying more attention to students from India. Currently, they are being admitted mainly to colleges rather than universities (CBIE 2020). This study investigates the recruitment strategies used by Canadian colleges to attract Indian international students.

What is this research about?

This study documents and analyzes how community and private career colleges in the GTA recruit Indian international students. The research reports on the roles, interconnections, and relative importance of government and non-governmental actors such as third-party transnational educational consultants, financial institutions, and students' social networks in the recruitment of Indian international students. We ask whether there are similarities and differences in the recruitment strategies of government funded community colleges and privately operated career colleges, identify the recruitment challenges facing these institutions, and examine how they overcome them.

How was the research carried out?

We analyzed the web sites and visited the campuses of five community colleges and forty private colleges in the GTA. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with purposefully selected 15 key informants, including college administrators, recruitment officers, instructors, and education consultants, and 30 Indian international students (19 from community colleges and eleven from private career colleges) selected using snowball sampling. Transnational connections between non-governmental actors were examined by visiting selected college campuses in the National Capital Region in India, attending international edu-fairs, and conducting interviews with 5 education consultants in India.

What have we learned from the research?

As the Ontario provincial government's funding for higher education stagnated, PSEIs relied more and more on unregulated tuition fees from international students as a source of revenue. As a result, PSEIs compete with one another and strategize to maximize international student recruitment. Even though federal and provincial governments benefit from international students' economic and socio-cultural contributions, neither level of government is involved directly in recruitment. Also, while third-party transnational education consultants act as the conduit between community colleges and potential students, for most private colleges, the students' social networks are more impactful. The recruitment strategies of government-funded community colleges and large corporate-owned private career colleges are similar. These two types of colleges hire third-party education consultants in Canada, who in turn rely on sub-agencies in India to recruit students. The Indian sub-agencies represent Canadian colleges at edu-fairs, prepare potential students for International English Language Tests and medical examinations, guide decisions about where to study and in which program, and assist with organizing education loans. Consultants work on commission simultaneously for multiple PSEIs in Canada and other countries, often showing little loyalty to individual Canadian colleges and programs. In this competitive recruitment environment, some colleges and programs flourish, at least for a while, while others are threatened with closure. In contrast, the recruitment strategies of medium and small private colleges in the GTA rely on the owners' social networks in Canada and India for recruitment. Often owned by immigrant families, these institutions enroll fewer international students and cannot afford third-party education consultants. Such differences in recruitment strategies play an important role in creating distinct assemblages of Indian international students in GTA colleges, their associated on- and off-campus challenges, and social resilience.

How can you use this research?

The study documents community and private career colleges' recruitment activities and the challenges facing colleges and students who rely on third-party educational consultants. The research findings demonstrate the need for more oversight of third-party consultants. They can be used by educational institutions and Canadian governments to evaluate policies and practices regarding the recruitment of international students.

Who is leading this research?

Dr. Sutama Ghosh is an Associate Professor in the Department of Geography and Environmental Studies at Ryerson University, Toronto. The research was funded by BMRC-IRMU, and assisted by Sohail Shahidnia, PhD candidate Policy Studies, X University.

Learn more

Sutama Ghosh and Sohail Shahidnia, "'Arrangements': Explaining the Structure and Mechanism of Recruiting Indian International Students to Community and Private Colleges in the GTA", (forthcoming) in Leaving to Learn: Mapping the Place of Resilience in the Journeys of International Students to Canada (UBC Press).