‘Study and Stay’ Messaging Remains Pervasive

Part 3 of the Trust Through Information series

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‘Study and Stay’ Marketing Is Still Pervasive Online

Introduction

This paper is part of a research series designed to support cross-sector dialogue on strengthening integrity and accountability in the ecosystem of information provided to international students.

The research reveals critical shortcomings in the information that reaches international students. Official sources, defined as government (federal, provincial, and territorial) and post-secondary institutions (PSIs), provide inadequate guidance, leaving students reliant on intermediaries (people or organizations that provide education services in exchange for payment) and content creators. Artificial intelligence technologies draw from vast bodies of outdated or inaccurate information. These dynamics enable widespread circulation of misinformation, creating a damaging gap between what students expect, what they experience in Canada, and what policymakers intend. The consequences include harm to international students, erosion of global trust in Canada’s post-secondary education sector, and reduced policy effectiveness.

The series consists of an introductory paper, *Trust Through Information*, that summarizes all the challenges our research uncovered, followed by individual reports that go into depth on each one.

Each paper in the series elaborates on a single systemic challenge WES has identified, presenting the current state, desired outcomes, accountability mechanisms, and examples of good practice.

To read the full series, please visit the **WES website**.

Marketing messages and policy do not align

Until 2024, Canada distinguished itself from other study destinations by advertising an opportunity for international students to “study and stay”: to earn a degree, acquire work experience, and transition to permanent residence.

Study and stay was seen as a triple win:

- Canada would benefit from having new immigrants with Canadian credentials to address labour market and skill needs.
- Post-secondary institutions would attract students in a competitive international education market.
- New career and immigration opportunities would be unlocked for aspiring immigrants.

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Marketing study and stay, together with Canada's multi-step immigration system, helped secure Canada's position as a study destination of choice.[1]

However, achieving permanent residence is far from assured. International students' struggles to translate study in Canada into immigration opportunity has damaged the country's reputation as a study destination.[2] Recent changes to immigration policy have further weakened international students' pathways to permanent residence, making the transition from study to permanent residence even more uncertain. With more than 1 million current and former international students living in Canada[3] and 30,000 post-graduate work permits set to expire imminently,[4] immigration uncertainty will have wide-reaching impacts on international students and the communities they live in.

Yet even as Canada moves away from the education-to-immigration model, the message of study and stay is still circulating online. Promotional materials that positioned Canada as an education-to-immigration destination have not been retired or corrected to reflect this fundamental policy shift. This reflects the fact that outdated information about immigration prospects was the most common type of misinformation documented in our ecosystem mapping exercise. The persistence of this promotional messaging risks further harm to future students and to Canada's reputation.

International students navigating this complex information landscape face several key challenges:

- **Study and stay messaging appears in multiple forms online.** These include advertising of study as a stepping stone to immigration, co-marketing of study permit and immigration services as if they are connected, false claims about ease of immigration for international students, and vague or optimistic statements about international students' immigration opportunities. (See Figures 1–5.)

1 https://ielts.idp.com/canada/prepare/article-canada-leads-as-most-popular-study-destination-for-international-students; https://studytravel.network/magazine/news/0/30141
2 https://wenr.wes.org/2024/11/massive-growth-and-rapid-policy-change-what-the-data-tell-us-about-international-students-in-canada
3 https://open.canada.ca/data/en/dataset/90115b00-f9b8-49e8-afa3-b4cff8facaee; https://open.canada.ca/data/en/dataset/360024f2-17e9-4558-bfc1-3616485d65b9; https://www.theglobeandmail.com/business/article-international-students-visas-expiring-soon-what-happens-next; https://www.wes.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/0225-spr-international-student-policy-brief-digital.pdf
4 https://www.theglobeandmail.com/business/article-international-students-visas-expiring-soon-what-happens-next

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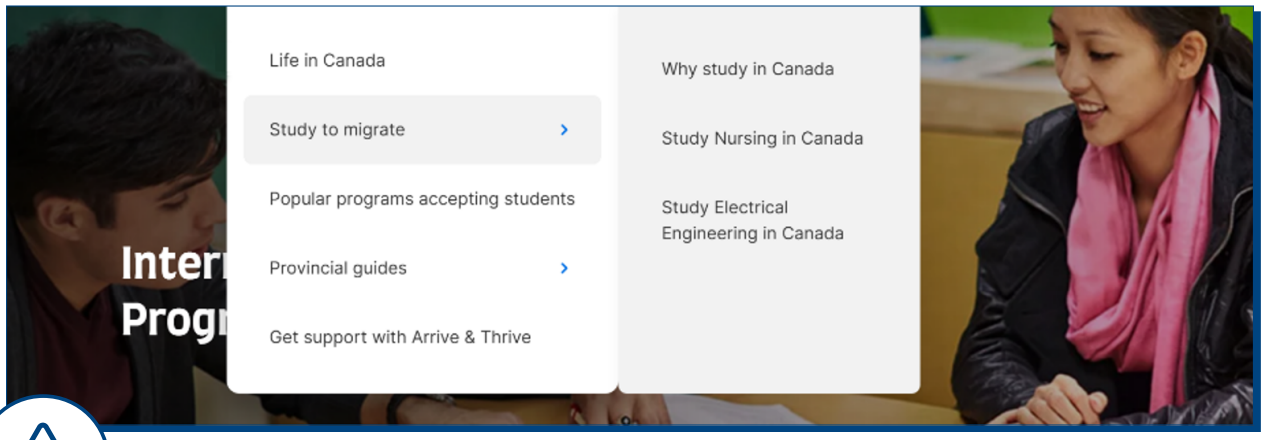
Figure 1



Example of an implied linkage between study and immigration.

Figure 2

- **Immigration Opportunities:** The advantages of studying in Canada extend beyond graduation, presenting pathways to Canadian permanent residency. This aspect holds significance for international students, whether they're pursuing scholarships to study in Canada or meeting the requirements to study in Canada, as it offers the chance for a seamless transition into establishing a long-term presence in this welcoming nation.

Example of content from an intermediary listing immigration opportunities as a reason to study in Canada. This example was captured in March 2025, long after policies that encouraged study and stay were revised. As of December 2025, it was no longer online.

- **Study and stay messages persist on government websites.** A significant amount of study and stay content remains available on government websites, including EduCanada and IRCC, despite policy shifts away from the education-to-immigration model. (See Figures 3–5.)

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Figure 3

- **Immigration pathways:** Canada aims to welcome hundreds of thousands of newcomers each year. Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2022

Paths to permanent residency and immigration in Canada

Many international students and their families have made Canada their home and become citizens. You could too! Find out different ways to continue building your life in Canada after graduation.

Just over 1.3 million new immigrants settled permanently in Canada from 2016 to 2021, the highest number of recent immigrants recorded in a Canadian census (Statistics Canada, 2022).

EduCanada
A world of possibilities

Apply for permanent residency

As a student in Canada, you're not a permanent resident or a citizen of Canada. When you finish your studies, you may want to start the immigration process to become a citizen. First, you'll need to apply for permanent resident status. This means you will:

- Apply for permanent resident status
- Remain a citizen of your own country
- Become a Canadian citizen when your immigration process is complete

Examples of study and stay content from the EduCanada website.

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IRCC is widely considered a reputable source, yet the IRCC website still includes content that promotes the possibility of study and stay. For example, a webpage on working in Canada post-study provides some information on practicalities related to the post-graduate work permit but then includes information on applying for permanent residence, and a two-minute IRCC video suggests that international students can pursue "a path to permanent residency" and "become Canadian." Previous research by WES suggests that the IRCC website is one of the most commonly consulted sources of information about rules and processes.[5] This makes the persistence of study and stay messaging particularly damaging, as prospective students may use the website to validate false claims and misinformation from agents or family members. (See Figures 4 and 5.)

Figure 4

Find out how you can live in Canada permanently

You've studied in Canada and maybe you even have Canadian work experience. Now you'd like to live here permanently. You have options to immigrate here.

Use our simple tool to explore your options.

Example of study and stay content from IRCC.

5 https://knowledge.wes.org/canada-report-insights-from-international-students-in-canada.html; https://choosing-canada.ca

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Figure 5

In a two-minute video on the IRCC website and YouTube channel, the narrator says, “Wouldn’t it be nice to apply all of your Canadian educational credentials and work experience to pursuing a career and building a life in Canada? Express Entry, the Provincial Nominee Program, or the Atlantic Immigration Pilot can be your path to permanent residency... After all this, maybe you too can become Canadian, eh?”

- **Immigration eligibility rules are complex, with tensions between levels of government.** There are often tensions between the position of the federal government and regional governments. Some provinces or regions are actively trying to retain international students, while the federal government is enacting policies to reduce the number of temporary residents, including current and former international students, in Canada. Misalignment between levels of government creates additional confusion about Canada’s policy position on international students transitioning to permanent residence.
- **Data on immigration outcomes are notably absent. Many intermediaries make vague or overly optimistic claims that study in Canada opens the door to future immigration.** These claims can be difficult to verify or disprove because of a lack of data on immigration outcomes of previous study permit holders. The ecosystem mapping exercise did not reveal a single example of a

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webpage made by an agent, lawyer, settlement service provider, government agency, or post-secondary institution for international students that provided statistics on transitions to permanent residence among previous study permit holders. While some of this data are available on Canada's Open Government platform, that data would not be easy for a prospective student to locate, and the data are not disaggregated in ways that would help inform international student decisions.

- **The combination of policy instability and misleading messaging about immigration has proved deeply harmful.** Confusion about immigration rules has had unintended consequences, enabling unscrupulous intermediaries to sell services based on false hope, and increasing the number of immigration applications that have a low chance of success. As a result, students waste time and money, and the processing capacity of government is strained.

Recommendations for Discussion

Clear and honest information about international students' opportunities to transition to permanent residence can improve the international student experience, which will then bolster Canada's reputation as a study destination. Closing the gap between study and stay marketing and immigration policy reality requires ensuring that promotional messaging—from both government and non-governmental sources—accurately represents current rules on permanent residence.

We offer these proposed outcomes and actions as a starting place for cross-sectoral conversation:

Proposed Outcomes

- Government messaging accurately reflects Canada's current policy on international students' transitioning to permanent residence.
- Marketing and recruitment materials by post-secondary institutions and intermediaries provide realistic information about immigration prospects.
- Prospective, current, and former international students have access to accurate information about Canada's current policy on international students transitioning to permanent residence in Canada, including accurate data on international student outcomes.
- Immigration information on government websites is explained in a clear and cohesive way, reducing reliance on and vulnerability to unofficial sources that may be financially motivated to overstate immigration prospects.
- Data on transitions to permanent residence among previous study permit holders are available on official webpages aimed at international students.

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Proposed Actions

- Study and stay promotional material is removed from government and post-secondary websites.
- Federal government maintains a single, centralized platform in plain language where international students can find all the information they need, including information about study permits, work permits, and immigration pathways, as well as data about transition to permanent residence.
- Post-secondary institutions, and education agents regularly update marketing materials to reflect current immigration policy.
- Websites about immigration options aimed at international students include prominent links to immigration outcome data for recent study permit holders.
- IRCC Comprehensive Ranking System Points Calculator results include a link to recent Express Entry draw types and to previous rounds of invitations under Express Entry.

Proposed Accountability Mechanisms

- Government requires that post-secondary institutions and their contracted agents ensure that marketing and promotion efforts do not make false promises related to immigration program eligibility or outcomes.
- Government requires that post-secondary institutions implement practices for effectively managing and monitoring the conduct of agents in relation to immigration information.
- International students are regularly surveyed about whether they understood their immigration options and whether they were given false information about immigration.
- Federal government commits to align messaging with policy through regular audits of official websites and removal of outdated content.
- Federal government creates a stable pathway to permanent residence specifically for international students that allows them to assess their own circumstances against clear eligibility criteria that remains consistent over time.

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Examples of Good Practice in Providing Immigration Outcome Information

Standards for provision of immigration data

The Manitoba International Education Act demonstrates a best practice in transparency by requiring post-secondary institutions and their recruitment agents to provide accurate immigration information to prospective students. The practical guide to the legislation also recommends provision of clear information regarding eligibility for the Manitoba Provincial Nominee Program as a best practice.[6]

This approach ensures that prospective international students have access to concrete eligibility criteria and can make informed decisions about their immigration pathways based on official, verified information rather than misleading marketing claims.

6 https://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/ie/pdf/code_of_practice.pdf

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Immigration Outcomes Data

Figure 6

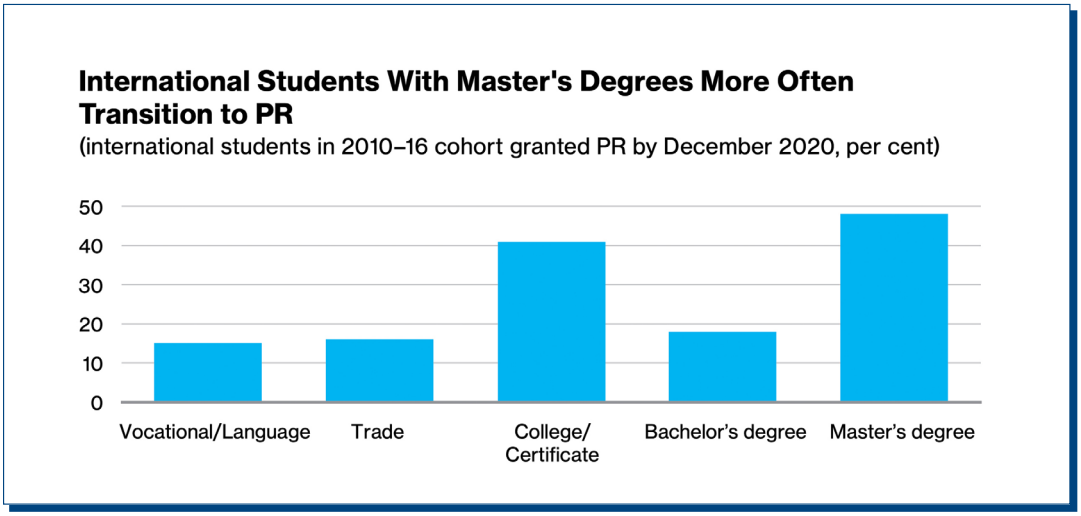
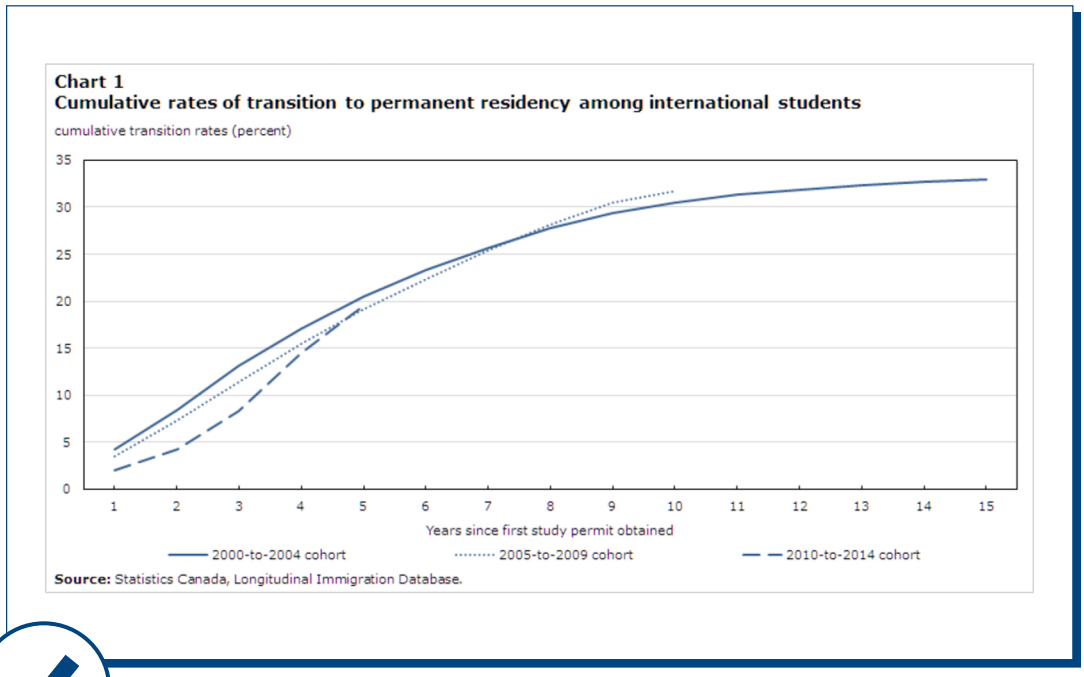


Figure 7



Examples of data that could be updated and presented to international students on webpages that provide information about immigration options.

Source (Figure 6): https://www.signal49.ca/product/from-student-to-immigrant-multi-step-pathways-to-permanent-residence/
Source (Figure 7): https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/36-28-0001/2021006/article/00002-eng.htm

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