Recruitment to Retention: Post-Graduation Adaptation of International Students

by

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Abstract

Coupled with strategic and recent immigration policy shifts, Canada has taken substantial efforts to recruit and retain international students. Viewed as a future Canadian-educated skilled workforce, international students will become part of the country’s future economic prosperity and labour-market. This study explores the impact of immigration policies that are rooted in the post-graduation adaptation of twenty former international students (FIS) through semi-structured interviews. Drawing from on the stress-adaptation-growth dynamic theory, the findings suggest previous experience of studying at the post-secondary level in Canada plays a role in the student-to-work transition. In addition, internal and external factors impact the stress and adaptation of FIS during their post-graduation transition as well as influence future intentions to apply for permanent residence. Oscillating between two choices, clear immigration policies and crucial support to enter and contribute to the Canadian labour market are necessary to retain international students. Discourse on future research is explored.

Keywords: international students transition, Canadian immigration policy, stress-adaptation growth dynamic, intercultural studies, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis
Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my family, who have taught me time and time again the power of love and the extent of sacrifice and support. I also dedicate this thesis to the many inspirational international students whom I have met over the years. Thank you for being a part of my life journey!
Acknowledgements

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I would also like to acknowledge the participants who openly shared their experiences. I am truly humbled by their interest in my research and would like to convey my utmost appreciation for the time they so generously gave in sharing their experiences.

To my friends and MAIIC cohort members – thank you for checking up on me and encouraging me throughout the entire process, a process that we were constantly told to trust. Thank you to the amazing MAIIC instructors, who nourished our learning, expanded our perspectives and delivered a program that I will hold very dear in years to come. Additional gratitude is offered to colleagues in the field of international education, especially to my ISS colleagues who provided endless encouragement and support as I worked to complete my program.

Words cannot express how grateful I am to my parents, sisters, brothers and family, both near and far, for the constant push to keep going and reminders of who I am. My puppy, Kai, provided cuddles and some welcomed distractions during the long nights of research and writing. Finally, my sincere and heartfelt thanks to my husband, Shaadi whose positive encouragement and consistent support helped me through some of the most challenging parts of this degree. We did it!
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<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CBIE</td>
<td>Canadian Bureau for International Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>CEC</td>
<td>Canadian Experience Class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CIC</td>
<td>Citizenship and Immigration Canada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-op</td>
<td>Cooperative Education Placements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DFAIT</td>
<td>Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EE</td>
<td>Express Entry Application Management System used by CIC</td>
</tr>
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<td>FIS</td>
<td>Former International Students</td>
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<td>FSWP</td>
<td>Federal Skilled Workers Program</td>
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<td>IRPA</td>
<td>Immigration and Refugee Protection Act</td>
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<td>IPA</td>
<td>Interpretive Phenomenology Analysis</td>
</tr>
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<td>LMIA</td>
<td>Labour Market Impact Assessment</td>
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<tr>
<td>NOC</td>
<td>National Occupation Classification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OCWP</td>
<td>Off-Campus Work Permit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PGWP</td>
<td>Post-Graduation Work Permit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PNP</td>
<td>Provincial Nominee Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PR</td>
<td>Permanent Residence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAG</td>
<td>Stress-Adaptation-Growth Dynamic Theory</td>
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</tbody>
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Chapter 1. Introduction

As a former immigrant from Zimbabwe, my own transition and adaptation experience ignited a passion to work in international education, a field that has evolved and grown as students, cultures and ideas continue to be exchanged. Close to 400,000 international students currently study in Canada (CIC, 2013c), a figure that has risen in the last decade. Combined with intensified fierce global competition to recruit and retain international students amongst many OECD countries, international education has become critical to Canada’s future of a skilled workforce (DFAIT, 2012; OECD, 2014b; Roslyn Kunin and Associates, 2012). With a growing desire to retain Canadian-educated skilled workers, shifts in immigration policies progressively treat international students both as a future source of skilled labour as well as potential immigrants due to the acquisition of Canadian credentials, proficiency in at least one of Canada’s official languages, and attainment of relevant Canadian work experience (CIC, 2013a; Gates-Gasse, 2012; Johnstone & Lee, 2014; OECD, 2014a; Sweetman & Warman, 2010).

Although immigration policies provide the legal means to make this transition possible, how it materializes becomes the responsibility of each individual student. The increased use of education attainment in Canada as a precursor to immigration and the recent immigration policy changes have sparked the discussion on how international students navigate the student-to-worker-to-permanent resident transition. Recent studies have begun to explore this area, however more understanding is required. Policy analysis, success and failures of immigration policies and the global competition for skills are critical components of this discourse; however, they were not the objectives of the study. Given the focus on retention, the purpose of the study was to explore the impact of immigration policies that are rooted in the intercultural experiences of
former international students (FIS) who have studied in Canada at the post-secondary level. Attention was also given to the decisions FIS have made to stay in Canada or leave.

Consequently, I focused on the post-graduation adaptation of FIS because the post-graduation work authorization period can be viewed as an extended transition for FIS. The overarching research question of the study was “how do former international students experience the transitional years of post-graduation work authorization in Canada?” With a paucity of studies on how international students are responding to the influx of policy changes, it is my goal to contribute and advance knowledge from an intercultural perspective on a current and pertinent issue critical to Canada’s future prosperity – the impact of Canada’s retention policy on international students.
Chapter 2. Literature Review

Canadian immigration policy shifts concentrated on retaining international students as skilled workers or skilled immigrants have occurred in recent years. As a new area of inquiry, to better understand and explore the research topic, I used a wide array of literature that drew from interdisciplinary fields such as intercultural studies. Any transitional experience can be better understood by examining it as an intercultural adaptation. I also expanded my search and reviewed research conducted in other OECD countries such as Australia, considered a leader in this current topic, as well as the U.S. Therefore, this literature review encompasses four areas and specifically defines international students as those who have studied at the post-secondary level.

The first area will provide a background on international students in Canada and the recent policy shifts that have occurred in an effort to retain these students. The second and third area will be a concatenation of research focused on student-to-worker transition and migration intentions of international students with respect to PR. The fourth will explore literature on transition and cross-cultural adaptation as well as introduce the theoretical framework used in the study.

2.1. Background and Immigration Policies

In the last decade, the presence of international students in Canada has grown. The traditional pathway that begins with entering a host culture and ends with re-entry into one’s home culture is not as applicable as it was before for this group. Rapidly increasing changes have led to more open and less restrictive Canadian immigration policies that have occurred across the different status categories of the current pathway international students navigate (see Figure 2.1).
Notable is the shift to a two-step migration that ends with viewing international students as potential immigrants (Hawthorne, 2010; 2012). Each immigration program sets out different eligibility criteria, requirements for compliance, caps/quotas, conditions and the type of activity the international student can engage in. Such changes are related to making Canada an attractive study destination, enriching the Canadian study experience and providing a straightforward and less stressful adaptation into the Canadian labour market.

**Figure 2.1. Pathways of International Students in Canada**

For example, in 2006 the Off-Campus Work Permit (OCWP) program was introduced to allow eligible international students to work twenty hours per week during regular academic sessions and full time during scheduled breaks. As of June 1, 2014, eligible international students can work off campus without applying for a work permit (Government of Canada, 2015a). In codicil, full-time international students are eligible to work on the campus of their institution without a work permit. International students are eligible to work full time in internships or cooperative education placements (Co-op) up to a maximum of 50% of the length of their
program to gain work experience related to their program while studying through the International Mobility Program (Government of Canada, 2015b). Such employment opportunities offer international students complimentary and valuable work experience in a Canadian workplace environment while studying.

This work authorization is also extended once international students complete their studies by way of the Post-Graduation Work Permit (PGWP) program introduced in 2006 and later revised in 2008. The PGWP is an unrestricted work permit that is not tied to a specific employer or occupation and may be valid up to three years (CIC, 2008). Full time international students who have completed an academic program of at least eight months at an eligible Canadian post-secondary institution may apply for a PGWP (Government of Canada, 2015c). With an impetus to retain international students, this open work permit plays a significant role in allowing international students to gain (skilled) work experience in Canada, thereby actively contributing to the Canadian labour market and economy. It is worthwhile to point out that all the work permits or work authorizations provided to international students do not require a labour market impact assessment (LMIA), making it attractive for employers to hire international students.

Given intensified competition to attract and retain the best and brightest international students, many OECD countries like Australia have changed immigration pathways to favour a smoother transition from temporary resident to permanent resident status. Canada has taken such steps by introducing the Canadian Experience Class (CEC) in 2008 and revising the program on an annual basis. CEC is federal immigration program that allows international students who have graduated from a Canadian post-secondary institution to apply for PR, provided they also meet
the language benchmarks and have one year of skilled, professional or managerial work experience under the National Occupation Classification (NOC) system in Canada (Government of Canada, 2015d). With the introduction of an application management system called Express Entry (EE) in January 2015, CEC applicants who create an online profile are assessed against human capital factors that provide an indication of the individual’s ability to fare well in the labour market by receiving a score under the Comprehensive Ranking System (CRS). Applicants who meet a specific CRS score are invited to apply with the promise of receiving PR status in six months (Government of Canada, 2015e).

Provincial changes have also occurred; Provincial Nominee Programs (PNP) provide provinces and territories with the authorization to create responsive immigration programs that retain international students. With the introduction of PNP in the mid-90s (see Figure 2.1 for start dates of each PNP), many PNPs now include an international graduate stream or streams geared toward retaining international students, occasionally from specific fields in their province. While PNPs are extremely attractive, the eligibility requirements and status of streams can change very quickly. As a result, policy shifts have supported efforts to recruit and retain the best and brightest by introducing a two-step process that similar to Australia, views and treats international students as ‘designer immigrants’ or ‘ideal immigrants’ (Gates-Gasse, 2012; Hawthorne, 2012; Scott, Safdar, Desai & El Masri, 2015).

However, the linear fashion depicted in Figure 2.1 does not seamlessly occur and changing from student to work can be stressful. Often, changing status from worker to permanent resident is based on strategic attempts to find the right type of job at the right time. Although current immigration policies may provide the legal means, the experiences FIS have, whether
negative or positive, impact the transition from student to worker making it critical to explore and better understand this transition.

2.2. Student to Work Transition

Before delving into current research, it is important to highlight the inherent assumption embedded within the immigration policies – the view that international students will integrate with less difficulty than their immigrant counterparts in the Canadian labour market due to their acquired Canadian education, proficiency in one of the official languages and relevant Canadian work experience (CIC, 2013; DFAIT, 2014). Looking to Australia as an example, this assumption has been contested. International graduates had lower salaries, relied less frequently on their formal qualifications obtained in Australia and reported lower job satisfaction than other migrants (Hawthorne, 2010). Thus, caution should be exercised and attention must still be given to how international students adapt to a new status of worker and the impact of policies on their transitional experiences.

Finding full time employment does not occur immediately after graduation. Based on an annual survey sent to both international and domestic (citizens and permanent residents) graduates conducted in Australia, 71.3% of the respondents found full time employment within four months of completing the requirements of their program (Graduate Careers Australia, 2013, p. 7). In the Canadian context, an Ontario government survey of graduates demonstrated that the average employment rate for graduates of university undergraduate programs was 87.4%. This figure rose to 93% two years after graduation (Council of Ontario Universities, 2014, p. 4). As a result, how this transition is experienced as an extension of the time already spent studying in a host culture is essential to consider.
International students use different types of strategies to acquire human, social, cultural and symbolic capital during their studies to assist with obtaining career-related work post-graduation (Bepple, 2014). Deciding to stay in one’s host country is influenced by a number of factors. Arthur and Flynn (2011) highlight four motivating factors that play a role in remaining in Canada post-graduation: career-related opportunities, enhanced quality of life, enhanced working environment as well as the safety and political stability found in Canada in comparison to an international student’s home country. Furthermore cultural, personal and systemic influences can impact the career ambitions and transition to PR status of international students (Arthur & Flynn, 2011).

While the decision to stay is important, Nunes and Arthur (2013) posit that key stakeholders such as Canadian employers and career service personnel play a vital role in supporting international students and therefore, put forward recommendations, from valuing international experience to building networks and employment contacts as efforts to better support the post-graduation transition of international students, new or current. Furthermore, key relationships can become a source of encouragement, referrals for job prospects and assistance with employment integration (Popadiuk & Arthur, 2013). The student-to-work transition and the potential accompanying challenges is a recent area of inquiry despite widespread and well-established research on the adjustment of international students to new cultural and education contexts (Smith & Khawaja, 2011). Studies focused on this transition as well as better understanding migration intentions demonstrate the depth of insight that can be gleaned from small sample sizes, qualitative approaches, and the emergent themes from recent and retrospective accounts directly from international students entering or having entered their post-
graduation transition. However, more immediate or recent accounts of navigating this transition may be fruitful in understanding how international students navigate and adapt to a new status in light of the embedded retention objective in immigration policies. Inextricably linked with the student to work transition, the intentions to stay permanently post-graduation elucidate the impact of immigration policies that expands the discussion to consider the worker-to permanent resident pathway.

2.3. Immigration Intentions

As an attractive study destination, Canada is also chosen for the opportunities to seek employment or permanently stay upon completion of studies. These intentions are often on the minds of prospective international students prior to arriving in Canada; 50% of international students surveyed by the Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE) indicated a long-term goal of becoming a permanent resident (CBIE, 2014). From 1999 to 2009, only 5.3% of international students in Canada have transitioned to PR (Ortiz & Choudaha, 2014). Although PGWP issuance and extensions have increased by 21% between 2012 and 2013 (CBIE, 2014), 6,905 PGWP holders became permanent residents in 2013 (CIC, 2013b). These figures are perplexing in light of the policy changes focused on retention.

Often, the intention to settle permanently in any host country is part of an ongoing decision-making process throughout the period of stay that is influenced by professional, societal and personal motivating factors (Alberts & Hazen, 2005; Hazen & Alberts, 2006; Soon, 2012). Conventional push and pull factors such as better employment opportunities, higher salaries, better benefits for dependents and economic or political stability in one’s home country play a role in this decision (Lu, Zong & Schissel, 2009). Gender differences surface when closely
examining intentions to stay in Canada. In a survey of 160 Chinese students conducted by Lu et al. (2009), male students were more likely to consider career-oriented attitudes (for example, occupational success) as part of their decision-making process while female students relied on relational and emotional factors (for example, parental expectations and family conditions).

In addition, family characteristics, structure and finances impact migration intentions. Students from families with divorced, separated or widowed parents were found more likely to have strong intentions to migrate in comparison to those who came from intact families (Lu et al., 2009). Keeping in mind the social and cultural backgrounds students have been immersed in prior to coming to Canada, the push and pull factors that impact the decision to stay permanently may not always be linked to economics or labour markets. While the decision to remain in Canada is made by individual students, how they make the decision and the key influencers are important to acknowledge. Previous studies show the important role parents and partners play in such decisions (Arthur and Flynn, 2011). Simultaneously, this decision may not be final, but part of an ever moving pendulum as better opportunities and quality of life play a role in a student’s decision to stay in Canada (Arthur and Flynn, 2011).

While understanding the facilitating factors is important, so are the barriers. Cultural differences, difficulty creating networks, and the fear of not obtaining employment often increase international students’ necessity to return to their home country (Arthur and Flynn, 2011). Exploring the intentions and decisions to stay in or leave Canada may shed some light on the reasons behind the statistics mentioned earlier as well as provide a deeper understanding into the significant role of push and pull factors. This is particularly true since CBIE’s recent report indicates a drop from a 57% to 50% in an intention to apply for PR (CBIE, 2014). Although
immigration policies may facilitate a fast-track route to PR status, the experiences of moving from one status to another is rooted in the adaptation process of studying, living and working in a cultural environment either similar or entirely different. For this reason, reviewing literature on transition and cross-cultural adaptation offered by intercultural studies meaningfully expands the discussion.

2.4. **Cross-Cultural Adaptation**

Studying and living in a new culture presents opportunities and challenges whereby learning the norms, rules, customs and language of a new culture can be both a source of dread and accomplishment. It is imperative then to explore literature on the cross-cultural adaptation of international students. Tseng and Newton (2002) identify four major categories of adjustment challenges faced by international students:

1. **General living adjustment**: adjusting to the host country’s food, climate, living/housing environment and transportation, and financial and health care system;

2. **Academic adjustment**: adjusting to the educational system and the lack of skills or language confidence that may affect the international student’s academic success;

3. **Socio-cultural adjustment**: experience of culture shock, adjustment to new social and cultural norms, and conflicts that may arise between the student’s home and host standards, beliefs and values;

4. **Personal psychological adjustment**: experience of homesickness, loneliness, depression, isolation, loss of status and feelings of worthlessness.

While not all international students face all four adjustment challenges, their status as
international students often defines their existence in Canada. Thus, cultural differences impact their adjustment more so than their domestic student peers (Andrade, 2006). Extensive research shows that common issues international students may experience include loneliness and a sense of not belonging to the host culture (Engel, Insalaco, Singaravelu, & Kristi, 2007; Al-Sharideh & Goe, 1998), homesickness and alienation (Olivas & Li, 2006), psychological strain such as anxiety and depression (Lin & Yi, 1997), as well as identity changes (Arthur, 2004). Such issues impact a student’s mental health and well-being. The loss of their immediate support network, a recurring issue experienced by international students (Lacina, 2002), combined with the common reports of having less frequent contact or social connectedness with local or host nationals (Zhang & Goodson, 2011), experiences of “social isolation” (Lin & Yi, 1997, p. 476) and loss in social status (Al-Sharideh & Goe, 1998) highlight the impact of social and psychological factors that encompass the cross-cultural adaption of international students.

However, the adaptation experiences of international students are not always bleak. Moores and Popadiuk (2011) elucidate the positive opportunities that come with studying abroad: developing a growing awareness and understanding of oneself as well as fostering new relationships and social networks. Yakunina, Weigold, Weigold, Hercegovac and Elsayed (2013) found that hardiness, an overall attitude of optimism, persistence and strength, promotes adjustment by partially reducing acculturative stress, and this, in turn is associated with greater adjustment. The resilience expressed by international students to overcome the challenges that are intricately linked with the process of adaptation highlights the importance of intercultural theory.

While much of the research has focused on the time spent while studying, theories within
the field of intercultural studies provides a theoretical foundation to better explore how adaptation can be described and understood over time given the deeply rooted intercultural experiences of the student to worker or worker to permanent resident pathways. Although models describing cross-cultural adaptation have varied foci and divergent approaches, the Stress-Adaptation-Growth Dynamic theory (SAG) describes and predicts the cross-cultural adaptation of individuals whose primary socialization occurred in a culture outside the host culture (e.g. Canada) and whose adaptation is dependent on the host environment and communication when relocating to a new environment for an extended period of time (Kim, 2001, 2005). This theory also underscores the necessity of adaptation that is primarily hinged on the interplay of stress as individuals new to a culture cope with uncertainty, unfamiliarity and cultural learning (Kim, 2005). Rooted in lived experiences, the SAG provided a theoretical understanding of adaptation and worked well with the methodological approach taken in this study (Kim, 2005).

Given that international students may have faced some of the adjustment challenges outlined earlier, the SAG provides a theoretical continuation of the adaptation process as international students undergo a constant negotiation and renegotiation of their transition to holding worker status in a culture they have become marginally familiar with. The constant internal conflict arising from the push of a new culture and pull of one’s old culture manifests as stress or disequilibrium. An individual is then faced with the choice to willingly or unwillingly change, referred to as a ‘drawback’. In an effort to restore harmony and adapt to an unfamiliar culture, individuals reorganize themselves and ‘leap forward’ in a constant spiral-like-process that leads to growth over time (Kim, 2005, 2012). Central to the SAG are the adaptive activities
one engages in as a means of meeting the challenges of the stress experienced and a greater
capacity to cope with the transition despite a natural tendency to resist change or retain old
cultural customs. This theory places communication at the epicenter and with exposure to
multiple intercultural interactions, individuals move towards intercultural transformation that
encompasses three facets: (1) increased functional fitness in carrying out daily transactions, (2)
Improved psychological health, and (3) movement towards an intercultural identity or
personhood. The study focused on the first facet, increased functional fitness in carrying out
daily interactions as a way of unpacking the functional activities engaged in as a means of coping
and the possible increased complexity that moves FIS towards adaptation, growth and maturity.
Given the length of time international students have spent in Canada during their studies already,
the post-graduation months or years become an extended part of this transition making the SAG
a relevant theory to examine the adaptation of such students.

As a result, this study had the aim of providing additional insight into the complexity of
the decision-making process of choosing to stay in or leave Canada by introducing an
intercultural theoretical framework that has not been apparent in past studies. By focusing solely
on the post-graduation period, the transitional experiences can be better understood by
examining it as an intercultural adaptation.
Chapter 3. Method

The overarching research question of this study was: How do former international students experience the transitional years of post-graduation work authorization in Canada? To delve deeper, three sub questions described in Figure 3.1 were also explored to gain a deeper understanding of the adaptation and experiences of former international students (FIS).

Figure 3.1. Sub Research Questions

To investigate these research questions, the definitions described in Table 3.1 were used.

Table 3.1. Research Definitions

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Term</th>
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<tr>
<td>International student</td>
<td>Individual who currently holds or held a Canadian study permit and studies or studied for an entire program that leads or led to a credential outside the country of their origin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Former international student</td>
<td>International student who completed a program of minimum eight months at a Canadian post-secondary institution and currently holds status of post-graduation authorization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience</td>
<td>The past and current reflections and future projections of each former international student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transitional years of post-graduation work authorization</td>
<td>The validity period conferred by the Canadian government for a former international student to work, that is from applying for the post-graduation work permit until the expiry date of the post-graduation work permit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stay</td>
<td>Have the intention to stay in Canada during the validity of the PGWP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leave</td>
<td>Have the intention to leave Canada during the validity of the PGWP</td>
</tr>
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Given the theoretical underpinnings of Interpretive Phenomenology Analysis (IPA) that stemmed from philosophers, Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger and, the meanings ascribed to and by individuals about events or phenomena are central and only accessible through an interpretive process (Deborah & Andrew, 2008). As a result, IPA was a suitable methodological framework for understanding the experiences of former international students (FIS) during the transitional post-graduation years in Canada because it allowed me as a researcher to ‘give voice’ to the descriptions of participants and make sense of their lived experiences as they navigated the student-to-work transition and made decisions to stay or leave Canada (Larkin, Watts & Clifton, 2006). The qualitative approach of IPA is rooted in the two major components: phenomenology which represents a concern with experiential realities and the hermeneutical concern of understanding. While participants communicated their experiences to me, as a researcher, I had the hermeneutic task of developing an understanding of their narrations.

With these two concepts in mind, I was able to take a fresh perspective that describes and interprets the first hand experiences of participants by employing *epoche*, a key part of IPA (Moustakas, 2004, p. 33). In the face of having professional experiences of working at a Canadian post-secondary institution, I remained open and receptive to listening and understanding participant’s experiences. In short, I chose IPA because of the appreciation that multiple realities exist and all have equal worth.

### 3.1. Data Collection

Most qualitative research is based on interviews since this method of data collection is extremely beneficial in allowing a researcher to reach areas of reality as well as people’s subjective experiences and attitudes that would be otherwise inaccessible (Perakyla &
Furthermore, interviews can be used to overcome distances in both space and time by shedding light on how people took part in past events (Perakyla & Ruusuvuori, 2011). Few studies have engaged FIS themselves on their perspective of navigating the status of being worker or exploring the impact of immigration policies. Empowering individuals to share their stories is an objective of qualitative methods (Creswell, 2013) that allows for a rich bricolage and better understanding of everyday experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

As a result, semi-structured interviews make better use of the knowledge-producing potentials of dialogues by allowing more leeway for following up on angles deemed important by the interviewee in addition to making the interviewer appear as a knowledge-producing participant in the process (Brinkman, 2013). With a strong commitment to vigilant planning, these types of interviews yield rich data despite being “high-preparation, high-risk, high-gain, and high-analysis operations” (Wengraf, 2001, p. 5) making semi-structured interviews in this study the most appropriate method as part of the research design to understand the participants’ experiences.

3.2. Recruitment and Selection

Upon receiving ethical approval, I emailed my extensive network of colleagues across Canada who engaged in similar work to assist with distributing an invitation to participate in the study to FIS who may have studied at their institutions (see Appendix A). Participants were recruited via institutional and international education list-serves as well as direct referrals. I also used snowball sampling to reach out to potential participants by asking participants to recommend anyone else who would be interested in the study (Creswell, 2013). Despite the
predicament of participants sharing similar experiences with using snowballing or ‘network sampling’, using different points of contact was one way of diversifying the sample (Seale, 2012, p. 145). FIS who met the following criteria were encouraged to contact me if they were interested in participating in the study: (a) 19 years of age or older; (b) held a study permit for the duration of their studies in Canada; (c) completed a program of at least eight months at a Canadian post-secondary institution; and (d) applied for or currently hold a post-graduation work permit.

A total of 32 FIS were in contact with me. Five did not meet the eligibility criteria and seven did not respond after requesting a convenient time to set up an interview either in-person or over Skype. Scheduling an interview occurred primarily over email and once the type of interview and location or Skype user ID was confirmed, a reminder email (Appendix B) was sent to participants one to two days before the scheduled interview. Interviews were conducted during the months of February and March 2015 and ranged from an hour to an hour and a half. Data were collected from 20 undergraduate and graduate FIS; all interviews were audio-taped and transcribed.

3.3. Interview Procedures

Prior to beginning the interview, consent was obtained both verbally and in written format (see Appendix C). Participants who attended interviews over Skype sent their completed research agreements to me prior to their interview. Participants were also asked to choose a pseudonym for themselves to protect their privacy and maintain confidentiality (see Appendix D) and were advised of the format of the interview. I followed a semi-structured interview protocol described in Appendix E that allowed me to engage participants in a discussion on four areas but
also left room to follow up on important details that might have been mentioned by each participant. Not all questions outlined in Appendix E were asked of participants; some questions were used to engage conversation and build rapport. For example, before beginning interview questions, I asked participants if I could call them by their first name out of respect and courtesy, an important step that can be off-putting if an assumption is made (Seidman, 1998). To ensure I was truly understanding and capturing the essence of a participant’s experiences, I would engage in a back and forth dialogue as a means of seeking validity in the participant’s articulations and descriptions. Table 3.2 describes the individual questions addressed in the four areas that specifically corresponded to the research and sub research questions.

**Table 3.2. Interview Areas, Questions and Corresponding Research Question(s)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Area</th>
<th>Question #(s)</th>
<th>Research Question(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Area 1: Experience with studying in Canada</td>
<td>1, 14, 15, 16, 17</td>
<td>Sub research question 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area 2: Post-graduation Experiences</td>
<td>1, 7, 8, 9, 10, 13, 14, 15, 17, 18, 19</td>
<td>Main research question</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area 3: Decisions about staying or leaving</td>
<td>1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 8</td>
<td>Sub research question 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area 4: Future Immigration Intentions</td>
<td>1, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9</td>
<td>Sub research question 3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Using Skype, a software application that can be used for video conference calls over the internet, I was able to interview eleven participants while nine participants were interviewed in person. This tool allowed me to interview participants at a time that was convenient for them as well as reach participants who did not live close to the province I currently reside in. All interviews were audio-recorded using a digital recording application on an iPad. As a token of appreciation, each participant received a $5 gift card for Tim Hortons.
3.4. Data Analysis

Over four hundred pages of transcription were generated from the interviews. To make sense of the data, I began with reading each transcript and analyzed the textural expressions in each transcript that were relevant to my research topic by paying careful attention to the corresponding questions as discussed in Table 3.2. This process of horizontalization treats each statement as having equal worth (Creswell, 2013). The goal of phenomenology is to arrive at textural and structural synthesis of meaning and essences of the phenomena or experiences being examined (Moustakas, 1994). To accomplish this, I clustered and thematized the significant statements into meaning units/codes, forming core themes of the experience of participants (Moustakas, 1994) under each of the research and sub research questions. I also noted patterns, commonalities and frequent words related to the emergent themes.

The final textural and structural descriptions highlighted in the next chapter on the research findings encompass the past reflections of studies, current reflections as a worker and future projections with respect to the experiences and intentions in light of immigration policies. Brinkmann’s three rules of authentically, inclusively and transparently provide a foundation to communicate qualitative findings (2013). As a result, participant quotes are highlighted in the next chapter to illuminate themes as well as ‘give voice’ to the participants whom I considered integral and active participants of this research process, thereby embracing the interpretive opportunities Interpretive Phenomenology Analysis offers.
Chapter 4. Research Findings

The subsequent sections introduce participant demographics and encompass the emerging themes in relation to the overarching research question as well as the three sub research questions.

4.1. Participants

The participants in the study came from diverse cultural backgrounds and were all residing in Canada at the time of the interview. Eighteen participants resided in the province where they completed their studies while two had moved to other provinces for employment reasons. All participants were in Canada on a post-graduation work permit (PGWP); all were international students on a study permit while studying at their host institution. Participants arrived in Canada at various ages and life stages, at an age range of 18 and 43 years old. Fifteen came on their own to Canada while five participants came with family members (spouse, children, or both). A few participants also had family or friends living in Canada. Seventeen participants attended a university (1 private, 16 public) and three attended a polytechnic institute. The numbers of years in Canada varied among participants with the highest being a little under seven years. Collectively, participants had the following previous credentials: Three certificates/diplomas, thirteen Bachelor’s degrees and seven Master’s degrees.

All participants spoke at least two languages with one participant proficient in seven languages. Nineteen participants received the full three-year PGWP while one participant received ten months (see Figure 4.1). Table 4.1 provides additional demographic characteristics of participants.
Table 4.1. Selected Demographic Characteristics of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Education level of studies completed in Canada</th>
<th>Country of origin</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Certificate</td>
<td>Afghanistan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Diploma</td>
<td>Argentina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Bachelor’s degree</td>
<td>Brazil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Master’s degree</td>
<td>China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Doctorate</td>
<td>India</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Italy</td>
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<td>Japan</td>
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<td>Kenya</td>
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<td>Korea</td>
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<td>Mexico</td>
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<td>Pakistan</td>
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<td>Russia</td>
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<td>Venezuela</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Afghanistan</td>
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<td>Brazil</td>
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<td>China</td>
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<td>Russia</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Venezuela</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age range</th>
<th>Province of studies completed in Canada</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>19 – 24 years</td>
<td>British Columbia 15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 – 29 years</td>
<td>Alberta 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 – 34 years</td>
<td>New Brunswick 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35 – 39 years</td>
<td>Prince Edward Island 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40 years+</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationship Status</th>
<th>Occupation status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Full time employed 17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Unemployed, but looking for a job 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separated</td>
<td>Unemployed, but not looking for a job 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>Self-employed 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widowed</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.2. Past Reflections: Early Adaptation is Critical

Cultural familiarity. Given the length of time FIS have spent in Canada, it was crucial to start the interview off with questions about their studies in Canada. While the acquisition of a Canadian credential was considered valuable, participants described the activities they engaged in during their studies as having an impact on their transition. Gaining transferable skills, learning to communicate in sometimes an additional language and working with students from diverse cultures exposed students to the host culture. In codicil, support from their institutions’
career centres, international offices and co-operative education (Co-op) offices were seen as helpful as they adapted to becoming a not only a student but a worker on a PGWP.

**Canadian Employment.** For many participants, gaining employment through on campus (35%), off campus (55%) or co-op/internship placements (60%) was very helpful in exposing participants to Canadian workplace culture and gaining Canadian work experience, an asset that we often hear is important in the Canadian context. Eighty percent of the participants also volunteered. While some participants mentioned previous employment outside of Canada, it did not arise as a dominant theme in the interviews. Co-op was seen as extremely beneficial especially in light of the number of participants who were able to secure employment post-graduation with their previous employers as described in the statement below:

The biggest benefit I had was, honestly, the co-op education job. That’s because it opened the door for me to lead to each of the others ones I had. That basically put me in the door to go forward. (Peter, Kenya)

**Networks and Connections.** From putting in a good word to referring the participant to specific jobs, the connections built during their studies assisted in the job search and these individuals along with the others described in the next section were instrumental in encouraging participants not to give up during times of stress:

I was talking to people, I was talking to my network now and by that time, I knew people working in the IT industry. So, because from my experience when applying for internships, that online applications…they just don’t work. It’s about network. If you know people, you will get a job. Yeah. That makes the transition from school to work and the labour market…it makes the transition quite hard for international students because we don’t know anyone. We are…well theoretically, some people have family here, but in my case, I came by myself. I didn’t know anyone in town. So it was quite hard. (Sophie, Brazil)
While the focus of this study was not on how participants adapted during their studies, the previous experiences of being immersed in a new linguistic environment, culture and educational context emerged as a key facilitator in assisting participants to transition to a different status of being a worker.

4.3. **Current Reflections: Internal and External Factors Impacts Continuous Adaptation**

**Stress-Adaptation-Growth.** The experiences shared by participants regarding their transition from being a student to a worker varied and often, their reflections seemed to be related to the time they had spent on their PGWP as outlined in Figure 4.1. Some participants expressed not recognizing the process as a transition necessarily, but more of a continuation from being a student, with little difference and more similarities. This is supported by the stress-adaptation-growth dynamic theory (SAG) which views individuals as reorganizing and renewing their sense of self as they adapt to stress that becomes less severe and intense over time (Kim, 2005). Others considered themselves ‘lucky’ to have found jobs and experienced a smooth transition. On the contrary, others shared how challenging the transition was by using words such as “lost”, “stressful”, “frustrating”, “discouraging” and “depressed” in their descriptions. One participant described their transition as follows:

> I don’t know about other people but it feels like there is a thing you have to go through, like a phase…when you have been a student for so long and then you are getting into being a worker, you have a new mindset so I think it takes time to come and it’s slowly developing into that. Otherwise, I kind of feel confused. I walk like a zombie because I’m at work, really enjoying my work but I don’t feel like I’ve fitted in yet. It feels strange every time I go into work and this is so not what I’m used to. I’m used to going to my lab and [talking] with my supervisor and you know…it’s just different. Totally different experience and industry is much more strict. (Lorna, Kenya)

Other participants expressed a sense of growth as they reflected on their experiences:
So the first few months when I couldn’t find a job, I was so depressed. I was crying. I was totally losing myself…just being sad. Because, you know, when you are at school, I did really well. Everyone sort of said…had really high expectations for me and said, “oh, you are going to be great in the future.” But then you realize the harsh reality when I can’t even find a job. So that was quite depressing but now I look back, I definitely understand why. It’s just because there is a gap between being a student and between being a professional because of that whole chunk of work experience. (Yvonne, China)

It was like a journey. At the beginning, I was trying to get a job mainly for immigration purposes but now; I am very satisfied with my job because I’m sure I am contributing to people’s society…Japanese society. And I have just finished my first year but [the] second year is more rich than the first year and now I’m thinking of passing on the heritage to the next generation…the younger generation…Now the job isn’t for my immigration status but I feel like my job is my life. I mean, life goal. That’s more meaningful and inside, it feels so…it was like a very long journey. (Misako, Japan)

The descriptions participants gave in response to questions about their transition were typically related to the finding employment. Nine participants began working immediately after completing their program, with six participants specifically working with their co-op or internship employer. For the rest of the participants, it took between two and seven months to find a job. Given the theoretical basis of the SAG, the adaptive activities one engages in is what leads an individual to the adaptive transformation and resolution of internal stress resulting in experiencing growth over time as they navigate an unfamiliar culture (Kim, 2001). As a result, participants shared what they did to adapt as well as the external factors that were helpful during their post-graduation work authorization.
Adaptive Activities. Although applying for many jobs and interviewing as much as one can was mentioned by a few participants, the most salient themes that emerged were around the participants’ internal approaches or shifts in their mindset as they adapted to becoming a worker. Responses of being more positive, open and persistent were often shared, especially when participants did not receive call backs after applying or receiving jobs after interviewing. Key strategies such as communication and socialization were viewed as critical in the job search process as well as in the workplace. In addition observing and understanding the new culture was seen as an important step in adapting:

My first strategy is to act...what’s that saying...when in Rome, do as the Romans do. So actually my first step is trying to learn the culture of the company because when I was a student, I was trying to learn Canadian culture. What is Canadian culture and based on what this culture was growing because it’s really important to understand why Canadians like to do it this way and not do it this way. I think it is easier to adapt is to mimic so that’s why I think. (Alby, Russia)

The importance of shifting expectations from imagined to real made some participants reflect and view the expectations as a student as being “divorced from reality.” For some
participants, physically moving to another a province for employment reasons was a means of adapting:

If I decided to stay in B.C. like no matter what, I could have also started working at the level in a completely unrelated profession. But I don’t know… it just got to a point where I told myself, “no, you are desperate for a job but if you have to do anything that counts, you have to leave B.C.” So at that point, I just stopped going lower and instead went broader. So I think that would have been helpful – the change in attitude and leaving B.C., that was helpful. (Richard, Kenya).

Such comments underscore the personal nature of the post-graduation transitional journey; when faced with uncertainty and unfamiliarity, the participants had to make choices, willingly or unwillingly, that increased their capacity to cope and adapt. The adaptive activities shared accentuate the increased functional fitness between participant’s internal responses and external demands of the host environment. Thus, the SAG puts forward the notion that as long as individuals remain in the host country, not all will successfully make the transition and this largely is attributed to an individual’s inner resources. However, it is noteworthy to mention that although transition is personal, it is also influenced by the context for which external factors should not be neglected.

**Support Mechanisms.** Although there were helpful factors linked to the time spent while studying that assisted with the transition of holding a new status as a worker, participants shared how important friends, family, advisors, former professors, co-workers, and parents (albeit far away) were critical in their transition. From providing support and encouragement to sending job postings, these individuals were regarded as helpful. Career centres and international offices were also highlighted as being helpful by participants who were able to seek assistance both
during and after completing their studies. The networks and connections cultivated during studies became the external expansive root that provided support.

4.4. Future Projections: Personal and External Factors Confluence on Intentions

Initial Motivations. Participants shared a motivation of coming to Canada for further education; however such intentions were also related to pursuing career shifts as well as seeking employment and immigration options post-graduation. Not all participants shared an interest in pursuing the latter at the beginning of their studies; these motivations evolved and solidified over time while they studied in Canada. In fact, participants saw applying for the PGWP as a natural extension of their stay that would allow them to explore multiple options that included staying in Canada or leaving. When asked how they considered applying for the PGWP, one participant indicated:

“Well there was no deciding. It is there for all international students.” (Ranjan, India)

Furthermore, participants shared the sentiment that the PGWP was straightforward and an opportunity not to be wasted. For some, the decision to apply solidified during the time they were studying:

So I decided to apply even before starting the Masters. That was my main goal. I had this idea in mind before starting the Masters but I also thought that maybe during the Masters, yes I might decide to change my mind and maybe I will get bored of Vancouver and after my Masters, I will go back to Italy but on the contrary, every day that passed by, I felt more and more convinced about getting the post-graduation work permit. (Caterina, Italy)

Semi Solidified Intentions. While the opportunity may exist to stay in Canada post-graduation, as discussed in the literature review, the open authorization of the PGWP does not require participants to stay in Canada after receiving the PGWP. Nineteen participants indicated an interest in wanting to stay in Canada while one participant arrived at the decision to leave
Canada during their post-graduation work permit. Participants’ intentions to stay in or leave Canada during their post-graduation work authorization period as well as beyond were inextricably linked to immigration as both external and personal factors converged, thus merging both sub research questions two and three.

The PGWP, seen as beneficial to both the participants as well as the Canadian government facilitates the transition from holding temporary residence to gaining permanent residence (PR) status. In light of this pathway, participants viewed the PGWP as a ‘bridge’ or ‘buffer’ that facilitates such a transition as well as leads to possibilities to stay and work, start or build a career, explore options or apply for PR in Canada. In addition, some participants mentioned that the three year window was enough time, a theme that surprised me. This was not the case for all participants as one participant whose PGWP was expiring soon indicated:

“My life is unfolding in a good way, and now I’m running out of time.” (Monica, China)

**Personal Decision.** Looking ahead to the expiry date of their PGWP, participants shared how their intentions and decisions to stay in or leave Canada are influenced by personal factors. It was apparent that participants were open to the possibility of remaining in Canada. To do so, many participants shared long-term plans by highlighting a Plan A, Plan B or a Five-Year or Eight-Year Plan that included both Canada and their home country as pivotal components. Others shared the importance of milestones:

Well, we are considering staying in Canada. We did have some decision points or like, milestones for my husband and I. I did have some milestones that I have to [achieve] because I have to be able to feed my kids. We want to stay and as long as we have a job, we will stay. (Maria, Argentina)
Participants also expressed a willingness to move elsewhere in Canada if better employment opportunities come up. Alberta and Ontario were often provinces mentioned as key ones to consider. One salient theme that emerged was that participants would likely base their intentions to stay or leave on being successfully employed and financially stable. This is not to simplify or reduce the intentions to these key points but to highlight that like any graduate, international or not, participants wanted to be able to contribute to the society in a meaningful way. The decision to stay varied in terms of ease and difficulty across participants but a key consideration is described:

The most important thing in the entire process if you are a student coming to Canada and wanting to immigrate is, you must have a full time job offer in your hand. That is the secret to your permanent residency. (Mal, India)

In addition to personal factors, four external factors emerged as dominant themes.

**Canadian culture.** Given the time spent in Canada as a student, participants immersed themselves as active participants who experienced and contributed to the community, culture and society of the province they studied in. Notable push and pull factors were highlighted. Interestingly, some female participants shared that the reasons for wanting to stay in Canada were related to the safety and independence they felt in Canada as well as the better opportunities available in Canada to build a career. Two participants shared:

For example, in Japan, people were expecting what I should be. As I said, they have a very strict instructive. So, I couldn’t be myself there but here I can express myself and of course, I have to think of people’s feelings as well but other than that, I can speak up about my opinions and it makes me very calm and peaceful and I wanted to stay here longer and that’s why I wanted to have the post-graduation work permit. (Misako, Japan)

Security, being a woman I have more rights here. I have more choices. I can be more independent. I can do my own thing and just be myself. It’s great to know that you can
have a career and hopefully no one will discriminate [against] you on the basis of your gender…I think overall, the security and the environment. (Zoe, Afghanistan)

**Immigration Policy Changes.** Major recent immigration policy changes in the last two years such as eliminating eligible occupations that qualify for permanent residence under the CEC, changing the legal definition of a dependent to introducing a new application management system called Express Entry were shared as having a significant impact on a few participants. Participants have no control of these changes and are sometimes left frustrated:

> It is very time-consuming and frustrating to have the law change every three months… They changed the age of dependent children when that was a decision point for me to come here and then they changed it while I was here and I couldn’t do anything to change that. (Maria, Argentina)

**Support Network.** The support and encouragement from spouses, parents and significant people in their lives was highlighted as pivotal in the decision-making process. Participants also acknowledged the network of close friends they had established in Canada as individuals important enough to consider when making the decision to stay or leave.

**Home Culture.** Lastly, participants spoke of the potential difficulty they would have with trying to find a job back home without any connections since they had been away from their home country for a significant time period. The constant comparison between Canada and one’s home country meant for some participants always being in a state of flux between the two decisions to consider.

Of the 20 participants, three had either been nominated or were waiting for approval of their PR application at the federal stage. Seven participants had applied through a Provincial Nominee Program (PNP) or the Canadian Experience Class (CEC) while eight participants were planning to apply for PR in the next six months. Two participants were unsure.
4.5. **Summary**

The authentic and real experiences shared by the participants in this study highlighted that while seeking higher education in Canada was invaluable, the necessity to adapt from a student to a worker is dependent on both the internal resources and adaptive activities of the individual as well as the contextual factors such as immigration policy changes that may not be within that individual’s control. Although personal and external factors may play a role in the decision to stay in Canada beyond the PGWP expiry date, it is important to recognize that the decision is not always firm:

So between family and the troubles that my country is facing right now, for now this was the best decision I could make. Maybe in the future, probably I will go back because there is nothing like home, but Canada is my home right now. (Gabriela, Venezuela)
Chapter 5. Discussion

International students represent a multiplicity of cultural, economic and social backgrounds. However, what former international students (FIS) who obtain a post-graduation work permit (PGWP) share is the experience of navigating the Canadian labour market and workplace culture. The small sample size of this study allowed me to interpret the individual responses and allowed for a comparison across participant responses to arrive at common themes that were related to the overarching and sub research questions.

International students are important because of the length of time spent in Canada acquiring knowledge as well as the acquired soft cultural skills and different forms of capital (Bepple, 2014). Previous adaptation during studies allows international students to acclimatize to Canadian culture and work towards the purpose of being in Canada – to complete a credential. This purpose is clear and laden with well-structured support as evident in the assistance provided by international offices and career centres articulated by participants. Given the increased demand for global skills explicated by Hawthorne (2008) and the participants view that changing one’s status change from student to worker is straightforward suggests that the first half of the two-step migration pathway may be working well to retain skilled workers. Despite this clear purpose, the adaptation process can be obscure as international students face novel adjustment challenges and stressful experiences of finding employment.

Navigating the post-graduation period is dependent on both internal and external aspects. Described in the researching findings, shifting one’s mindset or staying positive were extremely helpful. However, it is important to be mindful of the rhetoric or narratives that are being put forward surrounding immigration policies and international graduates with respect to how they
(should) fare in the labour market. As one participant pointed out, these can sometimes be misleading and disappointing if expectations based on such assumptions are not met:

Because everyone, including the media and everybody is saying, “Oh, university graduates can get such great jobs [in] the market and Canadian immigration policies are so great for graduates to get a work permit and then you immigrate.” Everything sounded easy and everyone was saying…Oh, this is really important to mention…everybody was saying volunteer or getting student leadership [positions] are the most helpful things you can do in your university time to get a job. And then I realized, no. They definitely help but those are not what the employers look for. (Yvonne, China)

More realistic messages on the indirect benefits of volunteering need to be emphasized. Furthermore, the role of the host community (i.e. Canada) must be acknowledged. How immigration policies are framed; how employers set their hiring practices; and how welcomed FIS feel to stay beyond their studies, play a role in whether international students choose to stay or leave before or after their PGWP expires. Although participants highlighted that the three years was more than enough, a theme that surprised me, they also made recommendations for an extendable option to be made available. Changes such as these are crucial to consider given that the search for a bright, creative young mind is both an asset and production factor in a global knowledge economy that continues to grow (Gürüz, 2011).

The interplay of external and personal factors on the transition from temporary to permanent status underscores how inaccessible or unclear immigration policies focused on retention risks losing potential skilled immigrants. This suggests that while the first half of the two-step migration may be straightforward, the latter half is not. This is particularly concerning since motivations to migrate may be expressed but are not always firm. Similar to past findings by Arthur & Flynn (2011), the participants’ intentions were impacted by a number of factors indicating the importance of contextual factors of the host country and home country as well as
personal circumstances. Such motivations are part of a decision-making process that involves a continuous assessment of personal, societal and professional factors (Alberts & Hazen, 2005; Hazen & Alberts, 2006; Soon, 2012). As a result, the post-graduation period is a crucial time period for this assessment. Although some participants in the study shared an interest in applying for permanent residence (PR), some expressed an intention to eventually go back home and saw such a move as a “reward” for their time spent outside of their home country. Intentions to return home were sometimes related to cultural obligations of taking care of parents or assuming cultural roles. Given the befuddled latter half of the two-step migration pathway and the focus on retention, begs the question, “how is retention currently measured?”

A strong reminder is then necessary to make: international students always have two choices (or possibly more) and the constant comparison between one’s host country and one’s home country makes solidifying any intention to stay or leave an important consideration. Furthermore, such choices are constantly impacted by global forces, cultural nuances and fierce competition. This is especially critical in light of participants’ calls to not make frequent immigration policy changes. In the last few years, major changes have been introduced that do not always place former international students at an advantage regardless of the rhetoric. This makes any intention to stay or leave filled with uncertainty, helplessness and frustration as described by the participants. An example of recent changes during the data collection period of this study are the introduction of a $100 privilege fee to all post-graduation work permit applications in February 2015 (Government of Canada, 2015f) as well the immediate pause as of March 31, 2015 of the BC Provincial Nominee Program regular intake for 90 days (Province of British Columbia, 2015). Although there are objectives behind such policy changes, these
changes may be viewed as barriers rather than facilitators. This is critical to consider since former international student’s paths are more strategic by way of gaining the right type of skilled work experience, time-consuming and extremely time-dependent as every day moves them closer to their PGWP expiry date.

In addition, such changes impact their family members too, key individuals who are often forgotten in the process. Although spouses of international students may be eligible for a work permit while the international student is studying, their ability to continuing staying in Canada on a work permit is based on the international student obtaining a skilled job of minimum six months immediately after completing their program. This policy appears to be counterintuitive to the open work authorization initially extended to spouses when the international student was studying and places unnecessary barriers in light of graduates taking a few months to find a job after completing their studies. For these reasons, more research on how FIS navigate the student-to-work transition and manage such immigration policy changes is needed.

5.1. **Continuous SAG Dynamic**

As FIS move from the status as a student to a worker, their adaptation takes place in a multi-dimensional context with a variety of factors influencing how they adapt to what has become a familiar environment that is accompanied with some nuances. Given the findings of the study and drawing upon the Stress Adaptation Growth (SAG) dynamic put forward by Kim (2001, 2005), I would like to put forward a SAG dynamic that describes the adaptation of FIS during the transitional years of the post-graduation work authorization. At the heart of the SAG is a human’s response to environmental challenges and it showcases the profound human
pliability, resilience and potential for growth (Kim, 1988). Considering what the SAG offers and posits, staying in the host culture (as a skilled worker or immigrant) or returning to their home culture – are both the purpose and choices FIS are presented with. While the stress experienced as they transition from a student to a worker may be less intense, they still experience some stress as they navigate a new role and new workplace culture. The internal (adaptive activities) and external factors confluence as FIS continue to stay in Canada on their PGWP. Adding to the complexity of adaptation is the ever-moving and shifting pendulum of immigration policies that impacts the choice FIS must face as they move closer towards the limited time imposed in the form of an expiry date – to stay in Canada or leave.

It is important to highlight that each FIS will approach the stressful encounters experienced during the post-graduation adaptation differently and if seen as placing too much pressure on the internal resources, the purpose of staying in Canada may become blurred and the choice to return home is made earlier than the PGWP expiry date. Many aspects must be taken into consideration if Canada would like to retain a potential skilled workforce educated on local grounds. This is extremely crucial if the retention policy is also meant to extend to solidifying migration intentions as well. One cannot direct or marshal a quick and smooth adaptation, whether it is cross-cultural or re-entry, rather, the process has to come from within the individual. Therefore, viewing the post-graduation work authorization as an intercultural transition that is impacted by internal and external factors as well as the immigration policies that provide the shifting ever-present backdrop highlights the complexity of the adaptation process experienced by FIS.
5.2. Limitations and Future Directions

This study drew a typical representative sample of participants from diverse backgrounds, education levels and experiences. It also drew a very engaged group of FIS who appeared to be active in Co-op, internships, volunteering and working on or off campus during their studies. Although small sample sizes are typical for qualitative studies, it would have been beneficial to expand the representative sample and speak with more FIS. One way of addressing this could have been to take a mixed methods research approach by surveying and reaching out to more former international students while still keeping the qualitative component of the study. Despite being open to interviewing participants who meet the eligibility criteria and were outside of Canada, the recruitment methods available to reach out to potential participants prevented me from reaching out to former international students who were outside of Canada. This may be in part due to outdated contact details. As a result, I was not able to interview any participants who may have applied for or obtained the PGWP, but had left Canada.

Further research on non-engaged students would be helpful to gain depth into their experiences of the student-to-work transition. As highlighted earlier, key relationships influence the success of the student-to-worker transition of international students and the decision to stay in the host country (Arthur & Flynn, 2012; Popadiuk & Arthur, 2013). More research on the power of a mentor, interpersonal relationships or key stakeholders may provide insight into the influence of relationships not only on this transition but also on intentions and the concrete steps to stay in Canada while highlighting the impact of the absence of such relationships. Similar to recommendations made in previous research, the necessity of longitudinal research that tracks FIS over their post-graduation transition would be extremely beneficial in providing a deeper
understanding of how the transition is experienced and the multiple factors that intersect in facilitating a smooth transition. Comparative research focusing on specific fields of study across countries will also allow for a better understanding of the career development trajectory of FIS.

Lastly, research involving employers or specific industries and the hiring patterns within those industries are indispensable in light of their role and the immigration policies that make FIS attractive as potential hires. Although relevant research is being conducted, more is needed given the potential prosperity FIS offer and contribute to Canada. In light of this, this study provided contributions to understand how participants experienced the post-graduation transitional years and the decision-making process of staying or leaving Canada of those in Canada.
Chapter 6. Recommendations

Although this was not the focus of the study, the findings can be applied and translated into recommendations that include participants’ interjections for key stakeholders who are integral to the post-graduation adaptation process and ultimately, the retention of international students.

6.1. Policy Makers

Policies and strategies related to internationalization of higher education at the national, sectoral, and institutional level are increasingly linked to immigration policies (Gürüz, 2011). To gather a sense of the impact of immigration policies, participants were asked, “If you could tell policy makers anything about your experience of being a former international student to a worker now and applying for immigration, what would you say?” Participants acknowledged the benefit of the post-graduation work permit and commended the Canadian government for providing them with the opportunity to study as well as work in Canada. A plea to not change the policy echoed amongst all participants. However, participants requested that the process for former international students (FIS) to apply for permanent residence be made simpler, more transparent, clearer and quicker. Although a three-year post-graduation work permit (PGWP) was viewed as sufficient, some participants commented that it would be helpful if the work permit was extendable to allow international students a one-time opportunity to extend the work permit for one more year.

This is important to consider since not all employment positions the participants in the study received were related to their degree. It takes time to find positions that are relevant, skilled and useful for immigration purposes. In reference to the policy of multiculturalism that
has become the fabric of Canada — simply making a policy does not mean it will be followed through. Although immigration policies enable the retention objective to be achieved, how these policies are experienced, viewed and ultimately used is the true test of its success. As a result, some policy changes could further enhance the two step migration embedded in the current pathway from applicant to permanent resident (Hawthorne, 2010; 2012).

As an example, the Australian government recognizes and awards points towards applying for immigration to international graduates who complete a professional year development program deemed eligible by the Minister in the fields of accounting, computer science and engineering (Australian Government, 2015). This program was designed as a ‘bridge’ to facilitate the transition from temporary to permanent while a former international student continues to hold a temporary graduate work visa known as a 485 visa. The opportunity to gain structured career support, become familiar with Australian workplace culture and earn points as part of one’s immigration assessment for permanent residency demonstrates the powerful impact of policies that facilitate and recognize the importance of assisting and retaining the skills international graduates offer.

Viewed as temporary residents in the Canadian immigration system, international students cannot access settlement support services such as language support, career advice, housing or other support services typically offered by agencies or community service units funded by the federal government. As a result, post-secondary institutions bear the responsibility of offering services and programs that attempt to meet the demands of an extraordinary diverse international student population as well as facilitate the Canadian government’s intended pathway from applicant to permanent resident (see Figure 2.1). Collaboration between the
Canadian government and higher education institutions to implement policy changes while offering settlement support could better support the student-to-work-to-permanent resident pathway that is has been cited as being isolating and stressful.

### 6.2. Higher Education Institutions

Placed at the epicenter, higher education institutions are becoming an integral nexus pushing forward the “red card to red carpet” (Walton-Roberts, 2011, p. 453). As a result, services and career-related programs and opportunities offered by and at post-secondary institutions are necessary conduits that offer student’s experience and skills. However, participants call for more public awareness and education of policies to encourage international students to take advantage of work opportunities. With the impetus to prepare graduating students to be ready to enter the workforce with necessary employable skills, understanding the experience of graduated international students may enable employees in international offices, institutional career centres, and alumni departments to create responsive transitional services and programs that assist students in achieving success. While Nunes and Arthur (2013) provide key recommendations for staff in educational institutions, more research that aims to better understand the factors that allow international students to be successful and the hurdles that could be overcome with responsive support services is needed.

This is particularly important in light of the critical role higher educational institutions play in facilitating the transition from temporary to permanent resident status. Given the importance of co-operative education or internship placements highlighted by participants, institutions should facilitate more pathways with employers to allow post-graduation work similar to co-op. Expanding community relationships and networks with organizations or
employers who have hired their graduates may in turn assist with hiring future graduates. Thus, institutions could potentially offer additional support to their graduates post-graduation beyond the current support provided around reviewing resumes, interview skills preparation and career guidance.

6.3. Employers

While opportunities like co-op or internships are offered at institutions, the experiences of being hired varied as described by one participant in reference to their experience applying for an internship:

We had someone that tried to hook us up with companies but the thing was certain companies refused to get international students. They [gave] preference [to] Canadians and they refused to take international students more because of the visa. At least that is how I felt. They didn’t want to take the risk of having to be involved with the paperwork and trying to retain that student. They kind of saw us as a potential headache. Like if they give us an internship, they might not be able to hire us in the future, so why take them. (Sophie, Brazil)

In agreement with Gates-Gasse (2012), employers need to be better educated on immigration policies with respect to the open work authorization given to international students that is labour market impact assessment (LMIA) exempt. Echoing this need, are the participants’ encouragement for employers to appreciate the straightforward and legal provisions given to them to hire international students. In addition to the economic contribution and potential skills that can be offered, international students are more attractive for employers than foreign graduates without local experience (Arthur and Flynn, 2011). With more awareness, employers may be less hesitant to hire international students and take advantage of hiring a workforce trained and educated in Canada.
6.4. **Social Support Network**

The complexity of cross-cultural adaptation is context-bound and influenced by sundry psychological, emotional, personal, social and cultural entities. In light of this, social support is critical in facilitating the intercultural transition of international students (Moores & Popadiuk, 2011). Parents, spouses, dependents and family members in and outside of Canada play a role in the experiences and decisions associated with the post-graduation transition. As a result, they should not be ignored in policies or support. As one participant describes in response to what helped them during their transition:

> To be honest, my family I think. Because [they are] really a huge motivator. I never had [this] huge motivation to work. Yeah, I think my family because I understand that I have my family here to support. I had a lot of motivation to work towards looking for work. And [they are] still my motivation and my inspiration. (Alby, Russia)

As a result, the social support network FIS have should be viewed as an important impetus for intentions and decisions. Consequently, their support, encouragement and referrals are critical and play a significant role. These connections should continue to be nurtured, kept intact and be reflected in the policies targeting the retention of FIS. By policy makers, institutions and potential employers working more closely together, both FIS and their social support network will have a firm desire and intention to stay, thereby pushing forward to agenda to adapt, integrate and retain former international students.
Chapter 7. Conclusion

With expanding immigration policies and programs that increasingly view international students as future skilled workers who should not only be recruited but also retained permanently in Canada, international education plays a critical role in Canada’s immigration and economic prosperity. However, viewing international students, key stakeholders in this outcome, as ‘ideal immigrants’ (Scott et al, 2015) is assumptive since little is known about the post-graduation transition or the intentions and experiences of applying for permanent residence of this group. The findings from this study demonstrate that even with immigration policies that facilitate the two-step migration (Hawthorne, 2010; 2012) from temporary to permanent, former international students ultimately have two choices: to stay or go. Students oscillate when making these choices and factors from their home and host culture are constantly reviewed, with significant people in their lives adding further insight and influence in the decision-making. Additionally, the constant flux in immigration policies can make the transition filled with uncertainty and frustration.

With the objective to retain the best and brightest, policy makers, higher education institutions and employers must work more closely together to offer clear policies and the necessary settlement and integration support at a time when it is needed the most – the post-graduation transitional years where no clear roadmap exists and a deadline in the form of an expiry date is imposed.
References


Graduate Careers Australia. (2013). 


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Appendix A

Letter of Invitation – Individual Interview

Recruitment to retention: Experiences of international students during transitional years of post-graduation work authorization

Researcher
This research is being conducted by Rohene Bouajram, BA, in partial fulfillment for a Master’s Degree in Intercultural and International Communications at Royal Roads University. The researcher is being supervised by Dr. Zhenyi Li, Associate Professor in the School of Communication and Culture at Royal Roads University.

Purpose of the Study
You have been invited to participate in this study, as you are a former international student. I am interested in learning about the experiences you have had during the transitional years of holding a post-graduation work permit, by asking you to reflect on the studies you have completed in Canada, your current experiences, as well as future projections and decisions.

Therefore, I am focusing on former international students who are 19 years or older, and have applied for or hold a valid post-graduation work permit to participate in my MA thesis research.

Description of Study
As a participant, you will partake in a 1.5 hour one-on-one interview either in person or over Skype at a mutually agreed upon time and location (in person only).

You will be asked to provide personal information during the interview that will be used to describe the demographics of participants; for example, the type of program you have completed, the length of time you have spent in Canada, etc. Information will also be gathered through open and close-ended questions to learn more about your experiences during the post-graduation transitional period. Sample questions include: Tell me about your experiences of studying in Canada? What did you do after receiving your post-graduation work permit?

Participation in this study is voluntary. By choosing to participate, there will be no influence on future relations with your former institution or any international student office, which may have helped to recruit participants. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and to stop your participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are allowed. At any point in the study, you may refuse to answer any particular questions or stop participation altogether.

Risks or Discomforts
There are minimal risks associated with this study. Should you feel uncomfortable or should any recollections during the interview become upsetting, you may pause, reschedule or discontinue
the interview, either temporarily or permanently, at any time.

**Benefits of the Study**
Although, there are no guaranteed direct benefits to individual participants, it is the hope of the researcher that the contributions you share will add to current research and knowledge about the transition of former international students. The findings from this study will serve the purpose of facilitating a better understanding of this transition period, so that service providers such as international student offices, career offices, and other stakeholders may enhance new and existing support services for future international students.

**Confidentiality**
Your identity and participation in this study will be kept confidential. At no time will your name and/or affiliation be disclosed. With your permission, the interview will be audio taped. All taped interviews and personal information gathered will be saved in the researchers password protected file and later archived after the study has been completed.

**Remuneration/Compensation**
For participating in this study, you will be given $5 gift card from Tim Hortons.

**Contact for information about the study**
If you have any questions about this study or would like to participate, please contact Rohene Bouajram at [email redacted]. You may also contact Dr. Zhenyi Li, School of Communication and Culture at [email redacted].

Thank you for your interest,
Rohene Bouajram
Appendix B

Reminder Emails – Skype and In Person

Reminder Email – In Person

Dear [Name],

This is a gentle reminder that we will be meeting on [date] at [time] at [location]. I look forward to learning more about the experiences you have had during the transitional years of having applied for or holding a post-graduation work permit as a former international student.

The interview should take no longer than 1.5 hours. Before beginning the interview, I will ask you to please read and sign a consent form confirming your voluntary participation in the study. Please don’t hesitate to ask me any questions during this time as well as during the interview.

After confirming consent, I will have a few questions related to your experiences. Please be reminded that at any point in the study, you may refuse to answer any particular question or stop participation altogether without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are allowed.

In preparation for the interview, please come with a pseudonym (fake name) that you would like me to use for the study.

I look forward to meeting you!

Rohene

Reminder Email – Skype

Dear [Name],

This is a gentle reminder that we will be meeting on [date] at [time] via Skype. Thank you for your Skype ID. Just in case, my Skype ID is [Skype ID redacted]

I look forward to learning more about the experiences you have had during the transitional years of having applied for or holding a post-graduation work permit as a former international student.

The Skype interview should take no longer than 1.5 hours. Before beginning the interview, I will ask you to verbally confirm that you have read and signed the consent form attached to this email. The consent form confirms your voluntary participation in the study. Please don’t hesitate to ask me any questions during this time as well as during the interview.
After confirming consent, I will have a few questions related to your experiences. Please be reminded that at any point in the study, you may refuse to answer any particular question or stop participation altogether without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are allowed.

In preparation for our Skype interview, please kindly complete, scan and email back to me the attached two forms (personal information form and research consent agreement form) by our meeting date on [date].

I look forward to meeting you virtually!

Rohene
Appendix C

Research Consent Agreement Form

Post-graduation Work Authorization of Former International Students in Canada
You are being asked to participate in a research study that will explore how international students in Canada experience the transitional years of post-graduation work authorization.

Before you give your consent to participate, it is important that you read the following information and ask as many questions as necessary to be sure you understand what you will be asked to do.

Study Title
Recruitment to retention: Experiences of international students during transitional years of post-graduation work authorization

Researcher
This research is being conducted by Rohene Bouajram, BA, in partial fulfilment for a Master’s Degree in Intercultural and International Communications, at Royal Roads University. The researcher is being supervised by Dr. Zhenyi Li, Associate Professor in the School of Communication and Culture at Royal Roads University.

Purpose of the Study
This study will explore and learn more about the experiences of former international students during the transitional years of post-graduation work authorization by reflecting on studies completed in Canada, current experiences and future decisions and projections. Fifteen former international students who have completed a program from a Canadian post-secondary institution have been recruited for interviews. Eligible participants include those who are 19 years and older and have either applied for or hold a valid Canadian post-graduation work permit.

Description of Study
Individual interviews lasting 1.5 hours will be conducted by the researcher with each participant at a mutually agreed upon location (unless over Skype) and time. You will be asked to provide personal information during the interview that will be used to describe the demographics of participants; for example, the program you have completed, the length of time you have spent in Canada etc. Information will also be gathered through open and close-ended questions by the researcher to learn more about the experiences you have had as a former international student during the transitional years of your post-graduation work authorization. Sample questions include: Tell me about your experiences of studying in Canada? What did you do after receiving your post-graduation work permit?
Voluntary Nature of Participation
Participation in this study is voluntary. By choosing to participate, there will be no influence on future relations with your former institution or any international student office, which may have helped to recruit participants. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and to stop your participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are allowed. At any point in the study, you may refuse to answer any particular question or stop participation altogether.

Risks or Discomforts
There are minimal risks associated with this study. Examples include experiencing physical discomfort with sitting for an extended time period, or boredom or discomfort with discussing a topic that is not of particular interest to you. Should you feel uncomfortable or should any recollections during the interview become upsetting, you may pause, reschedule or discontinue the interview, either temporarily or permanently, at any time. Should you choose to discontinue your participation permanently, your contributions will be omitted from the study. If you choose to withdraw from the study after your interview, please notify the researcher as soon as possible.

Benefits of the Study
Although there are no guaranteed direct benefits to individual participants, it is the hope of the researcher that the contributions you share will add to current research and knowledge about the transition of former international students. The findings from this study will serve the purpose of facilitating a better understanding of this transition period so that service providers such as international student offices, career offices and other stakeholders may enhance new and existing support services for future international students.

Privacy and Confidentiality
The researcher will use the contact information you provide only for the purpose of this study; for example, follow-up questions and a thank you message. By choosing a name that you would like to be used as a replacement for your real name, your identity will remain private and anonymous. Furthermore, the interview will be written up using interview numbers by the researcher to protect your anonymity.

All information will be kept confidential. The interview will be audio-taped to help the researcher accurately remember what you say. All taped interviews and all personal information will be saved in the researchers’ password-protected file and later archived after the researcher’s thesis has been approved.

Token of Appreciation
For participating in this study, you will receive a $5 gift card from Tim Hortons.

Questions about the Study
If you have any questions about the study, you are welcome to ask the researcher.
If you have any questions later about the research or would like to ask for a copy of the final thesis, you may contact the researcher or her supervisor:
Rohene Bouajram, Researcher
[Email redacted]
Dr. Zhenyi Li, Research Supervisor
[Email redacted]

Consent
By signing this letter, I have read and understood the information provided in this agreement, and have had an opportunity to ask questions to the researcher for which I have received satisfied responses. I understand that I do not have to participate in this study. If I choose to participate, I am free to withdraw at any time without prejudice. Similarly, if I choose not to participate in this study, this information will also be maintained in confidence.

Full Name (Please Print): _______________________________ Date: ____________________

Signature: _______________________________________ Contact: ________________

Note: A copy of this agreement will be given to you.
Appendix D

Personal Information Form

Top Section: To be completed by the Participant:

First Name: ______________________________________________

Last Name: ______________________________________________

Email Address: __________________________________________

Phone Number: __________________________________________

Mailing Address (for Skype interviews only) to be used to mail the $5 Tim Hortons gift card: __________________________________________

________________________________________

________________________________________

Please choose a pseudonym (fake first name that is different from your real name) that you would like to the researcher to use in this study: __________________________________________

Bottom Section: To be completed by the Researcher:

Pseudonym provided by participant: __________________________________________
Appendix E

Semi-Structured Interview Guide and Questions

Introduction (5 minutes)

- Introduce myself and encourage questions now or during the interview
- Introduce audio recording
- Introduce the purpose of the study
- Introduce how the information will be gathered, stored and kept protected and confidential

Consent and Personal Information (10 minutes)

- Introduce the consent process and obtain consent
- Ask participants to choose a pseudonym
- Explain the interview structure
- Ask participant if they have any questions
- Open interview with informed consent statement and reminder that interview will be recorded

Semi-Structured Interviews (60 minutes)

Interview Area 1

1. Can you tell me about your experience of studying in Canada? (15 minutes)
2. What did you enjoy about studying in Canada?
3. What type of program did you complete? What was your major?
4. Did you hold a study permit for the duration of your studies?
5. Which Canadian province did you complete your program?
6. What was the length of your program?
7. When did you complete your Canadian degree/certificate/diploma?
8. How old were you when you came to Canada?
9. How long have you been in Canada for?
10. Is this the only program you have completed in Canada? If no, where else have you studied in Canada?
11. Where is home for you? Is that your country of citizenship?
12. Did you come to Canada for your post-secondary education only?
13. Did you come to Canada on your own for studies? If no, who came with you?
14. Did you work on or off campus while you were studying? How long did you work during your studies?
15. Did you complete co-op/internship during your studies?
16. Did you hold any volunteer positions during your studies?
17. Reflecting on your studies, can you describe what helped you the most during your studies with the current post-graduation period you are in now?

**Interview Area 2**
1. **How did you decide to apply for your post-graduation work permit? (15 minutes)**
2. What made you apply for the post-graduation work permit?
3. What resources did you use to help you decide to apply? What was helpful and what was not helpful?
4. If just applied for PGWP, how long do you expect your post-graduation work permit to be?
5. When did you receive your post-graduation work permit?
6. How long is your post-graduation work permit?
7. What did you do after you received your post-graduation work permit?
8. What has your experience been looking for a job with your post-graduation work permit?
9. Have you been able to find a job related to your degree?
10. How long after receiving your post-graduation work permit did you get a job?
11. Is the job what you expected to be doing after graduating?
12. Is the job a skilled position based on the National Occupational Classification?
13. How did your studies in Canada help you find a job?
14. What has been helpful in looking for a job?
15. Did you have anyone help you during the process of finding a job?
16. How many languages do you speak? Has this played a role in finding a job?
17. How has the transition of holding the status of a worker been the same or different from the time spent in Canada as a student?
18. How would you describe the process of finding a job after completing your program?
19. Can you describe how the transition from student to worker has been for you? What were some of the things you did to adapt?

**Interview Area 3**
1. **How have you considered staying in or leaving Canada while holding your post-graduation work permit? (15 minutes)**
2. How easy or difficulty has this decision been?
3. If you are unsure, what are some of the issues impacting your decision?
4. What were some of the factors that influenced your decision?
5. Did anyone influence your decision?
6. Was this a personal decision?
7. How has your decision impacted significant people in your life?
8. How does/did your culture impact your decision?
9. Where are you currently living (in Canada or another country)?
10. Would you consider moving to another province in Canada?
Interview Area 4

1. **How is your post-graduation work permit related to immigration? (15 minutes)**
2. Would you like to leave Canada after your post-graduation work permit is expired?
3. What are your plans after your post-graduation work permit end date?
4. What strategies have you used (or will use) to successfully apply to immigrate to Canada?
5. What programs are of interest to you with regard to permanent residency?
6. When do you plan to start the process to apply for permanent residence?
7. Do you think other former international students might benefit from the post-graduation work permit? If so, how.
8. How has the length of your work permit impacted your decision to stay in or leave Canada?
9. If you could tell policy makers anything about your experience of being a former international student to a worker now and applying for immigration, what would you say?
10. Is there anything you would like to add or final thoughts that would like to share about how you have managed your experience of being a former international student and now, post-graduation worker in Canada?

**Wrap-Up (5 minutes)**

- Thank the participant for their time and provide token of appreciation
- Ask participants to refer anyone and check to see if I can contact them for follow-up question
- End interview