

Proposal to Grey County: Owen Sound Campus – International Student Community Coordinator

Background

Georgian College's Owen Sound Campus currently enrolls approximately 300 full-time students in the summer term, 650 in the fall term and 750 in the winter term. Of these full-time students, between 50 and 70 each term are international students. The College intends to double the number of full-time international students at the Owen Sound Campus for the 2020-21 year and beyond, and increased international student enrolment is a key factor in ensuring the ongoing sustainability of the Owen Sound Campus. The international students come from a number of different countries, with India being the most common. Many of the international students already have postsecondary education at the bachelor degree level or above from their originating countries. Academic programs in the technology and health sectors are often among the most popular with international applicants.

International students are eligible to work for 20 hours per week while on a student visa. Those who complete a minimum of two years of postsecondary education at a public institution in Canada are eligible to apply for a three-year Canadian work permit. Many international students express an intent to apply for the three-year work permit, and an interest in applying for permanent resident status following the three-year work permit. In 2018, almost 54,000 former students became permanent residents across Canada.¹

Issues

Some of the issues faced by international students are similar to those facing other newcomers to the region, but are more acute for international students, as they are also dealing with adjusting to a new culture and possibly a new language, and often do not have supports or contacts in their new community to help them adjust. Additionally, most international students find they must, for financial reasons, work the maximum 20 hours per week permitted. This, along with carrying a full-time academic load and adjusting to their new community, can create significant time pressures and stress. The issues most commonly raised include difficulty in finding affordable housing; access to public transportation, especially after 6pm; and social isolation.

¹ <https://www.international.gc.ca/education/strategy-2019-2024-strategie.aspx?lang=eng>

Georgian College, and the Georgian College Students' Association (GCSA) are working hard to address these issues. The College is currently exploring options to provide some affordable evening transportation solutions for those in class beyond 6pm, when the local public transportation system ceases, and the GCSA is active in providing social interaction opportunities. International students also have access to the same academic counselling and other support services that all other Georgian students have. These services are, however, generally internal in nature and do not focus on community integration issues. Georgian is also planning to offer 60 \$1,000 bursaries to international students studying at the Owen Sound Campus in 2020-21 to help offset transportation costs.

Request

Employers in Grey County are facing a labour shortage, and this situation is expected to worsen. International students who experience positive interaction and integration with the local community may be far more likely to remain in the area and seek long-term employment and immigration opportunities. As such, supporting their community integration and taking measures to ensure as positive an experience as possible will help to address both short and longer-term labour shortages.

Georgian College would like to create a position at the Owen Sound Campus for a term of 12 months, with responsibility for facilitating community integration for international students. This individual would create an inventory of services already available to international students in the community, including affordable housing options, part-time employment opportunities, transportation options, health services and cultural and social groups, and would facilitate connecting international students to those opportunities and services. They would also assist international students facing barriers or challenges outside of school in resolving those issues. In addition, they would be responsible for evaluating and developing new initiatives with a focus not just on school, but on community integration. These might include, for example, creating a mentorship program and platform to connect international students with service groups or members of the community interested in assisting international students.

Grey County is in an excellent position to both assist with, and benefit from, this work. The current resources in Grey County Economic Development include much of the local market intelligence which would be utilized, and there is already a strong connection with local employers and industry, and a focus on newcomer attraction and retention which could be leveraged. These assets provide a strong foundation and launching pad for the work to be done in this new position, which would apply an international student lens and perspective to the issues facing newcomers. In addition, this work aligns strongly with Grey County's upcoming Local Immigration Partnership initiative, and would assist in promoting local integration of services, identifying needs and gaps, creating welcoming communities, and increasing the number of newcomers interested in settling in the region.

This request is for Grey County to contribute 50% of the salary and benefits cost of this position. At an hourly rate of \$32.15 per hour, with a 12.8% allowance for benefits and vacation pay, at 35 hours per week, this would result in a total cost of \$66,000, with a 50% share being **\$33,000**. Georgian College will provide the remaining 50%, and will provide the required office space and technology, and supervision. A quarterly report on activities and outcomes will be provided to both Georgian College and Grey County.