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The University of British Columbia's International Student Initiative Implications for Provincial Public Higher Education

Peter Wylie

University of British Columbia, Okanagan

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Abstract

The public and private universities and colleges of the Province of British Columbia (BC) have been given a green light to admit as many international students as they can by Canada and BC's international education strategies, becoming important instruments of not just higher education policy, but also immigration, trade and labour market policy. This paper examines the local effects of this issue in context of a specific and nuanced case study of BC's flagship public university, the University of British Columbia (UBC), and the implications of the issue for both UBC and the BC higher education system in general. The paper finds a neoliberal policy disconnect between immigration, trade and labour market policy on the one hand, and domestic higher education policy on the other, in the UBC context. With public universities such as UBC aiming to have over 30 percent of their students international by 2022, does attention to attracting international students reduce attention to the skills and training of BC and Canadian students, especially in programs and courses particularly popular with international students? This specific case study should be read in the context of the larger trends across universities in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom and Australia.



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Introduction

Colleges and universities of the Province of BC have a green light to admit as many international students as they can by BC's and Canada's international education strategies, enlisted to meet not only education but also immigration, trade and labour market policy goals (Government of BC, 2012, Government of Canada, 2014). Canada's integrated offer to post-secondary international students is to study (a Canadian export, trade policy), work while studying and after graduation (labour market policy), and potentially immigrate (immigration policy) to Canada and join the labour force. What however is an appropriate number and proportion of international students in undergraduate degree programs in BC? In this paper I examine this issue in the context of a case study of BC's flagship public university, UBC, and within the context of the larger trends across universities in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom and Australia. The paper finds a policy disconnect at the undergraduate level between Canadian immigration, trade and labour market policy on the one hand, and Provincial and Canadian higher education policy on the other, in the UBC context. With UBC aiming to have over 30 percent of its total students international by 2022, this is translating into almost 70 percent in some undergraduate programs, such as economics. Is this attention to attracting international students to UBC reducing our attention to the training of BC and Canadian students in such programs and courses? Also, international undergraduate students at UBC come almost exclusively from just one socio-economic group -- the quite and extremely wealthy. Are Canadian students from less-advantaged backgrounds being squeezed out of undergraduate programs at UBC such as economics by these growing numbers of international students from high-wealth backgrounds? The paper provides some preliminary empirical indications based largely, as a case study, on data on international and domestic students at the undergraduate level at UBC over the last ten years or so.

The optimal proportion of international students in any university or most programs is more than zero, but less than 100 percent – it is clearly not an all-or-nothing proposition. In Australia, international students make up about 25 percent of higher education enrolment, and in some subjects, such as business, about 50 percent; for Australia, higher education is a major export. So would say for BC a similar 25 (or 40?) percent be an appropriate target for the publicly-funded colleges and universities, given that it would mean 50 (or 80?) percent in some programs (e.g. economics and business) and zero in others (e.g. medicine, law, education, nursing, dentistry), maybe 35 (or 50?) percent in some institutions (e.g. the research-intensive universities such as UBC) and say 5 percent in others (e.g. the northern colleges), and larger percentage in some spatial agglomerations (e.g. the lower mainland of BC) than others (e.g. Northern BC)?

Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) estimates indicate that the flow of international students (students attending universities and colleges in countries other than their country of citizenship and/or permanent residence) approximately doubled from 1.8 million in 2000 to 3.5 million in 2012, and then rose again to 5m in 2016. This total is expected to rise to around 6, 7 or 8 million by 2025 (*The Economist*, 2016). Actually the latest estimate are for 10m within the next decade -- this is tied to the rise of the middle classes in emerging markets (RBC Economics Research, 2017). China has been the number one source of these students in recent years and is expected to continue to be so, followed by India. Asian and Pacific Rim markets are currently the largest for international student mobility, which however may in fact be only a relatively temporary phenomenon as nations in these regions ramp up their

own higher education systems; African markets such as Nigeria are expected to dominate in the future (British Council, 2017).

Some stylized facts on the market for international students are that Canada's global share has been fairly constant in recent years at about five percent, much lower than the share of Australia (despite Australia being smaller in population than Canada) at ten percent, the United Kingdom (UK) at ten percent and the United States (US) at 20 percent (Government of Canada, 2011). In Australia (as already noted), and the UK, international students account for 20-25 percent of total enrolment in public higher education. Even though of course the US has by far the most international students of any country, these students make up only about five percent of total enrolment in public and private colleges and universities, relative to around ten percent in Canadian public and private higher education. Other big players in the international student market include France and Germany, and other European nations. Hence for Canada to maintain its five percent global share of this expected growing market to 2025, it will have to approximately double the number of international students in Canada from about ten percent of total post-secondary enrolment currently to about 20 percent, closer to the proportion of Australia and the UK (Government of Canada, 2011). Actually Canada is now thinking in terms of having a 10 percent global share of international students within the next decade, meaning about 1m international student in Canada by say, 2030. There were 495,000 at all levels in 2017, 371,000 at the post-secondary level, 212,000 in universities, predominantly from China, and 161,000 in colleges, predominantly from India (Canadian Bureau for International Education, 2018). In 2017 then, Canada's target for 450,000 international students in Canada by 2022 (Government of Canada, 2014) was surpassed five years early.

A target of 1m in Canada by 2030 would imply about 300,000 in BC, of a total provincial population of over 5m. With around 13 percent of the Canadian population, BC has about a third of the international students in Canada and hence the highest per capita enrolment of international students of any province in Canada. International student enrolment at UBC Vancouver has grown to 14,685 in 2017-18, 11,209 undergraduate and 3,467 graduate students, representing over 26 percent of total student enrolment (UBC, 2018a, p. 9, 12). UBC's drive is to increase its number of international students to over 30 percent of all students by 2022. UBC has been designated by *Times Higher Education* as North America's "most international university" for the last four years running (UBC, 2017a p. 15). In fact, UBC, in fall 2016, had the highest proportion of admitted international first-year undergraduate students among all admitted first-year students of all universities in Canada, at 31 percent (*Maclean's*, 2017).

This paper examines the implications of these facts for both UBC in particular and the BC higher education system in general. The first section is a case study of UBC's admissions policy with respect to domestic and international students, and changes in this policy in recent years, as UBC has viewed itself as less and less a provincial flagship university, and more and more, an international university and global brand. The second section examines the issue of UBC tuition fees for international students, and how these has impacted university revenues, and the use to which these tuition revenues have been put. A third section considers if international students displace domestic students from some programs at UBC. Concluding comments follow.

International Student Admission Policy at UBC

Before 1996, UBC was focused on providing education to BC and other Canadian students at the undergraduate level, but allowed small numbers of international students to attend as long as their grades were exceptional, exceeding those of domestic student entrants. However, UBC received no government grant funding for such students, unlike than for domestic students, did not charge them higher tuition fees than domestic students, and began feeling, perhaps correctly, that it was losing money on admitting them. Given the rising numbers of international students in the mid-1990s, and the costs of educating them, the University first introduced higher-than-for-domestic-student undergraduate tuition fees for international students in 1996. However, at the same time, UBC was concerned about the impact these higher fees might have on incentives for program administrators to seek to bolster international student numbers in their programs, for revenue purposes. Hence the Senate, the academic governance body of the University, passed a policy in 1996 that stated that; one, the number of international students admitted to any undergraduate program can be no more than 15 percent of the number of domestic students admitted to that program in the previous year; two, programs must annually report the number of international students they have admitted; and three, international student admission Grade Point Averages (GPAs) must meet or exceed those of domestic students. The obvious principle underlying one was capacity; two, transparency and accountability; and three, fairness and equity -- international students should not be given favourable access to UBC just because they pay a lot more than domestic students to attend.

Hence, before differential tuition fees for international students were brought in at UBC in 1996, there were differential admissions standards; international student GPAs had to exceed those of domestic students, not just meet them. The differential admissions standards for international students before 1996 became, after 1996, differential tuition fees.

However by the first decades of the new millennium many programs and Faculties at UBC were exceeding the limit of point one (apparently with no administrative consequences), as was UBC overall, as international students as a percent of total enrolment exceeded 15 percent overall in 2012-13, and has since grown to over 26 percent overall in 2017-18 at UBC Vancouver, with a total headcount of all students of 55,780 and a total headcount of international students of 14,685 (UBC, 2018a, p. 9, 12). The forecast for this percentage is it to grow to around 30 percent by 2022 at the undergraduate level (UBC 2017b, p. 9), or around 35 percent at the overall level, inclusive of graduate students (who are of course traditionally more international than undergraduate students, but maybe soon not to be). This number was already, by 2016/17, almost 40 percent at the undergraduate level in some Faculties, for example the Faculty of Commerce/Sauder School of Business (UBC 2017b, p. 9).

Around the same time, 2012-14, BC's and Canada's international education strategies provided the green light to UBC to admit as many international students as it can (Government of BC, 2012, Government of Canada, 2014). The University become an important instrument of provincial and national immigration, trade, and labour market policy. Hence in March 2014 UBC administration decided that the 1996 Senate policy was "out-of-step with the University's internationalization and diversity goals" and the Vancouver campus Senate (there was as of 2005 two campuses and two Senates at UBC, Vancouver and Okanagan, with UBC's expansion to the Okanagan campus in 2005), and on the recommendation of the administration, agreed to replace the 1996 admissions policy with an amendment to the University's *Principles of Effective*

Undergraduate Admission (earlier established by the Vancouver Senate in 2008). This was to the effect that one, the University will set enrolment targets separately for domestic and international students in each undergraduate program by taking into consideration capacity and resources; two, student demand for admission relative to these targets shall determine the competitive admissions standards separately for domestic and international students, and the University will separately adjust admissions averages for domestic and international students to meet its targets; and, by corollary, three, the University shall meet its Provincial enrolment mandate for domestic undergraduate students (UBC, 2014b, p. 11-15).

UBC cited point three above, the “non-displacement of domestic students”, as the key principle of the new policy. For example, the UBC Vice-Provost is quoted as recently stating: “There is no competition for seats between domestic and international students because they belong to different admissions streams” (*Vancouver Sun*, 2017b). However what is obviously more pertinent is two; that this new policy allowed for differential admissions standards of domestic and international students. For example, in programs like Commerce, where there is vast unmet domestic student demand, the competitive standards for domestic students to be admitted is in the 90s. However, for international students, there might be only be a small excess demand relative to supply of seats targeted, so they might get in with grades in the 70s, because they are competing in a different and potentially less-competitive admissions stream. In this way UBC is able to maximize revenue and not turn away international students paying high tuition fees just because they don't meet the very high GPA standards needed of domestic student applicants in many programs, the latter due to the vast demand of domestic (e.g. BC) students to attend UBC, their home province flagship university, relative to the supply of seats offered to domestic students. As the UBC Director of Undergraduate Admissions explained at a UBC Okanagan Senate Committee meeting in March 2017;

...the intention is to aim for the domestic target [and] if the program has more domestic applicants than it can accommodate, the cut-offs go high. But if they do not have as many international applicants and can accommodate, as long as the Faculty feels those students will be successful, then a different GPA can be used... In terms of outcomes since 2014, these revisions have allowed Vancouver get to target on international students but has led to a variation on competitive admission criteria. Therefore one area to focus on is what is meant by comparable admission standard. Different Faculties look at it in different ways. The argument to be made is that as long as those international students prove to be successful, then it is okay. International students shouldn't be disadvantaged because competition in the domestic market is so high if they present criteria that would make us think they could be successful. There is on the other hand a fairness issue...whether international students should be disadvantaged if the domestic market is so competitive or if minimizing the disadvantages that could lead to a form of inequality because they then could get in with a lower competitive score compared to domestic students. It [is] a complicated argument. (UBC Okanagan, 2017a).

But obviously not too complicated, because the “meet or exceed the GPAs of domestic students” wording for international students of the 1996 policy was replaced by the 2014 policy of “international students will be admitted to undergraduate programs using criteria and

procedures which ensure, at a minimum, international student quality comparable to that of domestic students” (UBC, 2014b, p. 1). These criteria and procedures are simply that grade cut-offs in each admission stream will be adjusted to meet the prior set targets. International students are deemed to be of a “minimum comparable quality” to domestic students if they are fit to be admitted to UBC (they meet the minimum admissions standards of 67 percent) and turn out to be as “successful” at UBC as domestic students, that is, that they pass their courses. This is an *ex post* rather than an *ex ante* comparison criterion. So as long as UBC thinks *ex ante* that an international student “will be successful” (i.e., pass their courses), then they can be admitted, no matter how their GPA compares to the competitive GPA required of domestic students. Since “of comparable quality to domestic students” is defined in this *ex post* manner, it is entirely possible, and perfectly acceptable according to the criteria and procedures, for international students to be admitted to UBC with lower grades than those needed of domestic students in any particular undergraduate program. In effect, they are able to buy their way in by being an international student in a different admissions stream, paying high fees, in a manner that domestic students cannot. So UBC now adjusts the admissions cut-offs so that the supply target is entirely filled for both domestic and international students, but entirely separately. So a BC student with an 85 percent average could be denied admission, but if they were an international student with the same 85 percent average, but paying the high international student tuition fees, they might get in. This then in effect sells seats at UBC to the highest bidders (international students) and domestic students are unable to bid.

Table 1 shows UBC Vancouver first-year new-to-program intake targets and the actual intakes for domestic and international students 2014-15 to 2017-18, for four major programs, the Bachelor of Arts (BA), the Bachelor of Science (BSc), the Bachelor of Applied Science (BASc, Engineering), and the Bachelor of Commerce (BCom). These data show that targets and intakes match more or less identically, demonstrating that UBC at its main campus in Vancouver does in fact follow the basic principles of its 2014 amendment described above to its *Principles of Effective Undergraduate Admission*. An anomaly here is that intake of first-year undergraduate international students in 2017-18 in the BA and BASc programs both significantly exceeded targets. However, of course, UBC has the justification provided by the *Canada International Education Strategy* and the *BC International Education Strategy* to admit as many international students as they feel that can take, even exceeding their own targets, regardless of them meeting the admissions standards required of domestic students. This illustrates a policy disconnect between immigration, trade and labour market policy on the one hand, and domestic higher education policy on the other.

With UBC in Vancouver full-to-overflowing with domestic students, UBC opened its second campus in Kelowna as UBC Okanagan (UBCO) in 2005 by taking over one of the Kelowna campuses and all of the university functions of the existing Okanagan University College (Wylie, 2017, 2018a, 2018b, Whitely, Aguiar & Marten, 2008). The issue of

Table 1

UBC Vancouver Targets and Actual First-year New-to-Program Enrolment, 2014-15 to 2017-18, Selected Degree Programs

	2014-15		2015-16		2016-17		2017-18	
Domestic	Target	Actual	Target	Actual	Target	Actual	Target	Actual
BA	1590	1596	1800	1769	1590	1683	1590	1597
BSc	1400	1446	1400	1369	1400	1481	1350	1317
BASc	546	553	546	539	546	562	545	535
BCom	380	401	380	365	400	410	400	402
	2014-15		2015-16		2016-17		2017-18	
International	Target	Actual	Target	Actual	Target	Actual	Target	Actual
BA	615	601	685	679	685	677	685	803
BSc	252	256	275	294	275	283	280	279
BASc	211	231	235	293	256	221	245	302
BCom	314	333	314	286	267	282	267	282

Source: Academic Year Undergraduate Enrolment Targets, UBC Vancouver, various years

international students was not mentioned at all in any of the agreements at the time such as the Memorandum of Understanding between UBC and the Government regarding the functions and projected growth of the new UBCO campus (MoU, 2004). This new campus failed to meet its provincially-mandated domestic enrolment targets in all but one of its first twelve years, but the number of international students admitted expanded at a fairly constant rate. The Principal of UBCO was quoted in late 2012 as saying: “International students make up about 8 percent of our total student enrolment, and our goal is to increase that to 20 percent by 2017” (*Canadian Press*, 2012). This target for international students has also not been met; international students made up about 16 percent of total enrolment in 2017-18, a total headcount of all students of 9,120, and a total headcount of international students of 1,473 (UBC 2018a, p. 9, 12).

UBC’s 2014 amendment to its *Principles of Effective Undergraduate Admission*, especially point three: “The University shall meet its Provincial enrolment mandate for domestic students” has either not applied to, or has not been applied, at UBCO, as it has continued to increase international student enrolment despite targets for domestic student enrolment not being met. So seats at UBCO that might have gone to domestic students (via adjusting admissions averages so that intake equates to the supply of seats, along the lines of UBC’s *Principles of Effective Undergraduate Admission*, point two: “...the University will adjust admissions averages for domestic students to meet its targets”) have in fact gone to international students, even as the campus failed to meet its domestic student targets. Table 2 below shows UBCO first-year intake targets and the actual intakes for domestic and international students 2012-13 to 2017-18 for four major programs, the Bachelor of Arts (BA), the Bachelor of Science (BSc), the Bachelor of Applied Science (BASc, Engineering) and the Bachelor of Management (BMgmt). These data show that UBCO has not adjusted competitive admissions averages for domestic students so that domestic student admissions have equated to the target supply of seats, and

hence fell well below their domestic student targets (i.e. did not follow the basic principles of the 2014 UBC amendment described above to its *Principles of Effective Undergraduate Admission*, as UBC in Vancouver did). Hence UBCO violated the Vancouver Senate policy that “UBC will meet its Provincial enrolment mandate for domestic students” (i.e. what UBC argues is its “non-displacement of domestic students by international students” policy) and has also violated the policy that student demand for admission relative to targets shall determine competitive admissions standards for domestic and international students, and that UBC will adjust admissions averages for domestic and international students to meet its targets. Admitted domestic students (but not international students) have fairly consistently fell well below targets at UBCO. In May 2017 the UBCO Senate approved the application of the Vancouver policy at UBCO (UBC Okanagan, 2017b). Since then, domestic student targets have been met.

Table 2

UBC Okanagan Target and Actual First-year New-to-Program Enrolment, 2012-13 to 2017-18, Selected Degree Programs

	2012-13		2013-14		2014-15		2015-16		2016-17		2017-18	
Domestic	Target	Actual	Target	Actual	Target	Actual	Target	Actual	Target	Actual	Target	Actual
BA	675	561	515	426	430	352	400	343	400	408	410	376
BSc	505	526	450	523	500	445	500	486	600	516	600	560
BASc	200	173	175	187	175	167	200	210	250	234	255	246
BMgmt	180	133	150	127	140	120	140	126	160	163	200	155
	2012-13		2013-14		2014-15		2015-16		2016-17		2017-18	
International	Target	Actual	Target	Actual	Target	Actual	Target	Actual	Target	Actual	Target	Actual
BA	70	53	50	65	65	75	75	94	100	86	100	118
BSc	40	47	45	66	100	57	65	78	86	116	130	167
BASc	29	24	23	21	25	19	24	57	50	49	50	60
BMgmt	54	55	40	84	50	50	67	66	70	78	90	66

Source: UBC Annual Report on New to Program Enrolment targets, Okanagan Campus, various years

International Tuition Fees, Revenues, and Expenditures

UBC has an additional and increasing incentive to admit as many international students as it can: the very high international student tuition fees it now charges. Prior to quite recently, UBC claimed that the international student tuition fees it charged were set to simply cover the cost of providing education per student as a public, non-profit institution. The Provost at UBCO stated in 2012: “International tuition fees are set at a cost-recovery level – no more, no less” (*Daily Courier*, 2012). UBC has more recently switched to a strategy of a profit-seeking monopolist with the tuition fees it charges (price) set by demand (what the market will bear) rather than cost of supply (cost of production). The Vice-Principal of Students at UBCO was quoted as saying in the UBCO student newspaper in late 2014: “If the market is willing to pay that much, why wouldn’t we charge it”? (*The Phoenix*, 2014).

UBC hence now engages in monopolist profit-maximizing behavior of setting price to international students and quantity of international students admitted to maximize revenue and profit to the University from international students. International students at UBC as of 2018-19 pay over seven times the domestic rate for tuition, \$36,588 for one year full-time (30-credits) in the BA program, relative to \$5,293 for domestic students, by far the highest tuition rates for international students in the province and with only the University of Toronto (UofT) and McGill (for the BSc and other programs, but not the BA) higher in Canada. But unlike most monopolists, constrained by a downward-sloping demand curve for their product, who can choose price or quantity but not both, UBC (or indeed UofT or McGill) can choose both, by adjusting admissions standards for international students. So it can choose both a high price and a high quantity. UBC does both. If it sets a high target admission for international students and under its *Principles of Effective Undergraduate Admissions* as amended in 2014, it can adjust the admission standards for these students in order to meet the target. UBC's tuition fee revenue from undergraduate international students for 2018-19 is forecast to be \$351m, up from \$75m in 2009-10, and now much higher than the \$236m it forecasts it will receive in domestic undergraduate student tuition fees in 2018-19, up from \$188m in 2009-10 (UBC 2018c, p 8).

International students are hence a massive revenue and profit centre for UBC, as their cost of education is much less than the tuition fees they pay. One might say that UBC is using its internationally-recognized brand which it has been fortunate and skilled enough to build up over the past century or so, largely financed by generous and prescient government funding, to, in effect, now print money. Once its provincial mandate for domestic students is met, an additional international student is worth over seven times to UBC what an additional domestic student is worth; this gives UBC a large incentive to admit as many international students as it can, and by corollary an incentive never to exceed the funded provincial domestic student mandate. As the UBCO Registrar is quoted as saying in 2012, that UBC “need[s] to manage domestic students to ministry levels, any more than that we are losing money.” (UBC Okanagan, 2012). And it has the full backing of the provincial and federal governments to do this, under their respective international education strategies.

Moreover, for an international student, perhaps the easiest way to buy a way into UBC might be via UBC's Vantage College (VC), a year-one-only college for international students only, ones whose English proficiency scores fail to meet normal UBC requirements for admission. VC, established in 2012, had an intake target of 395 across four programs for 2018-19. In 2017-18, VC had a target of 450, but admitted only 392. With a fee for its combined academic and English skills first-year-only programs of over \$50,000 in three of its four programs and over \$48,000 in the other, there might actually be less demand than supply of targeted seats, so that all international students who meet the minimum grade average to enter UBC (67 percent) might be admitted, as long as their English skills are inadequate enough to qualify for VC. If only 400 or so students across these programs apply, a student may well be admitted with the minimum for UBC of 67 percent as long as UBC thinks *ex ante* that that student “will be successful” (i.e., able to pass their courses). In that way a VC student can be determined *ex post* by UBC to have been of “comparable quality” to all other domestic and international students, that is, that they have passed their courses as all of the other students have. And the \$50,000 in fees gives UBC a strong incentive to admit any international students that meet the minimum entrance requirement for UBC of 67 percent.

However, universities such as UBC claim that these high fees that international students pay (\$351m in forecast revenue for 2018-19) allow them to hire more faculty, and put on a greater selection and number of courses for all students, including domestic students, presumably so that class sizes can go down and class choice and diversity go up, to the benefit of domestic students. In August 2013 the then AVP Enrolment and Academic Facilities for UBC, stated: “International students do not displace Canadian students at UBC. To the contrary, more students on campus means UBC can hire additional faculty and offer broader choices of courses and research for all of our students” (*Vancouver Sun*, 2013). A story in February 2013 reported: “UBC leaders are clear on this point: international students do not displace domestic students... international students pay the full cost of their education to add more spaces” (*UBC Reports* 2013). The UBCO Principal was quoted in November 2012 to say: “Foreign students do not reduce the number of spaces available for Canadians at UBCO...in fact, the opposite is true. International students help fund positions for Canadians that wouldn’t otherwise exist” (*Canadian Press*, 2012). The UBC Vancouver Vice-Provost is recently quoted as stating: “[international students] pay so much more so we can hire more faculty and have more support services in place” (*Vancouver Sun*, 2017b).

It cannot be true that more international students add more spaces for domestic students at UBC in the aggregate. Funded domestic student undergraduate seats across BC post-secondary institutions, including UBC, are quotas set by the Government, and UBC makes sure it fills these quotas, and no more. But have there been more faculty hired for UBC to put on more classes for both international and domestic students, as international students as a percent of total enrolment in direct entry undergraduate programs have gone from an average of 13 percent in 2010-11 to an average of 24 percent in 2017-18 (and forecast to reach almost 30 percent by 2021-22), and UBC’s international student tuition fee revenue has gone from \$75m in 2009-10 to a forecast \$351m in 2018-19, an increase of almost \$300m? Have average undergraduate class sizes at UBC gone down over this period? According to data released by the Research Universities’ Council of BC and published as the British Columbia Higher Education Accountability Dataset (bcheadset.ca), “created to demonstrate accountability on the part of British Columbia's higher education institutions, and contain[ing] data on key measures of public interest”, the answer is, quite emphatically, no.

Table 3 shows the headcount of undergraduate international students at UBC Vancouver, the number of full-time, permanent faculty, and the average undergraduate class sizes at the lower level (first and second year courses) and upper level (third and fourth year courses), in 2010, 2013 and 2017. The number of international undergraduate students have much more than doubled between 2010 and 2017, and the fees per student increased by over 70 percent, but the number of permanent faculty has increased little and average class sizes have increased. With this much more than doubling of international students and significant increase in international tuition fees on the Vancouver campus since 2010, UBC on this campus has taken in about \$270m in additional annual revenue. Permanent faculty members only increased by 100 in this period, an annual cost of about \$10 million. With the most recent dramatic increases in international student fees of 15 percent in 2016-17, 15 percent in 2017-18, and 7 percent in 2018-19, UBC established an “Excellence Fund” to use additional revenue for temporary increases in spending on faculty, staff and student initiatives, but this fund was only \$6m in 2016-17 of consolidated UBC revenue of over \$2b (UBC 2017a, p. 78, 80). One of the principles of expenditure from the Excellence Fund is that “funds may not be invested in permanently recurring expenditures” e.g. permanent faculty (UBC 2017c, p. 19). For example, one of the

initiatives in 2016-17 was that UBC “invested funds to market the University to students outside the province – most notably in Ontario” ((UBC 2017c, p. 19).

Table 3

Undergraduate International Students, Number of Faculty and Average Class Sizes, UBC Vancouver 2010-2017

	2010	2013	2017
UBC Vancouver			
International undergraduates	4,477	6,324	11,209
Number of faculty	2,326	2,417	2,426
Average class size lower-level	73	77	79
Average class size upper-level	45	47	48

Source: BChadset.ca

The same pattern has been displayed at UBCO as international students as a percent to total enrolment in direct entry undergraduate programs has gone from an average of six percent in 2010-11 to an average of 14 percent in 2017-18, generating about \$30 million more in additional revenue to the campus. Table 4 shows the headcount of undergraduate international students at UBCO, the number of full-time, permanent faculty, and the average undergraduate class sizes at the lower level (first and second year courses) and upper level (third and fourth year courses), in 2010, 2013 and 2017. International undergraduate students have tripled between 2010 and 2017, but the number of faculty have increased little and average class sizes have increased quite dramatically. In fact, UBCO now has the largest average class sizes at the lower level of any BC post-secondary campus, even larger than UBC in Vancouver, and the second largest (after UBC Vancouver) at the upper level. International students increased by 540 between 2013 and 2017, generating \$20 million in more revenue to the campus, but faculty numbers did not increase at all, and average upper level class sizes increased by almost 30 percent.

Table 4

Undergraduate International Students, Number of Faculty and Average Class Sizes, UBC Okanagan 2010-2017

	2010	2013	2017
UBC Okanagan			
International undergraduates	415	659	1,199
Number of faculty	304	353	353
Average class size lower-level	79	83	84
Average class size upper-level	33	38	43

Note: Between 2010 and 2013, UBC Okanagan was increasing its faculty members due to increasing numbers of domestic students admitted. Source: BChadset.ca

Displacement of Domestic Students

Continuing with this case study, perhaps the major public policy issue of international students in BC's public universities and colleges is the one of whether growing numbers of these students might displace domestic BC and Canadian students from their desired courses and fields of study. Melanie Mark, the Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Training in the BC provincial government is quoted as recently saying: "The intentional growth by the former government of international student numbers over the last four years has created a complex situation that cannot be looked at in isolation of other pressure points in the post-secondary sector." (*Vancouver Sun*, 2017a). However, 13 administrators representing 6 different colleges and universities interviewed by the *Vancouver Sun* newspaper in late 2017 "insisted that international students do not displace domestic students." (*Vancouver Sun*, 2017a)

The official position of UBC is that international students do not take seats away from domestic students, because funded domestic student targets set by the government are met and hence there are no fewer domestic students attending UBC due to there being more international students. The international students are simply "on top" of the domestic students. Former UBC President Stephen Toope in a direct quote in BC's *International Education Strategy* document stated simply: "Not a single BC student is displaced by international students at UBC. The premise that UBC's recruitment of international students is at the expense of our mandate to serve BC is false." (Government of BC, 2012, p. 22). The constant repetition of this mantra, repeated by UBC in six of its most recent annual enrolment reports (*Vancouver Sun*, 2017b) is as far as UBC takes its analysis of the effects of international students on domestic students.

It is obviously true that no matter how many undergraduate international students UBC takes in, its funded domestic undergraduate student quota and domestic student enrolment in the aggregate is entirely unaffected, neither reduced nor increased. See Machin and Murphy (2017) for such findings in the UK case, of no crowding out, nor in. At the graduate level, effects are different, see Shih (2017) for US findings.

However, contrary to what some of the statements above claim — if one claims that international student seats do not take away domestic student seats in the aggregate, it is entirely inconsistent to claim that they add them in the aggregate — it is not true that there is no displacement of domestic students from courses and programs that are especially popular with international students, within the aggregate. It is a question of micro and macro, and to say there is no displacement is a good example of a fallacy of composition. So when UBC argues that international students do not displace domestic students, it does so at the aggregate macro level, and when it argues international students add seats for domestic students, it does so at the micro level. True, at the macro level, the aggregate of undergraduate seats is unchanged for domestic students, but the composition of the seats will change, depending on what seats the international students sit. So, is there displacement at the micro level of seats left for domestic students in some undergraduate courses and programs especially popular with international students, such as for example the UBC BA Major in Economics, or the UBC Bachelor of Commerce? Very likely so.

Yes indeed, the data in fact show that there is, and has been. Table 5 and Chart 1 show the number of domestic and international students enrolled in the BA Major in Economics including the Combined Majors in Economics and Math, Economics and Philosophy, Economics and Statistics and Economics and Political Science at UBC in Vancouver, all highly-competitive

undergraduate majors programs for which there are many more applications to enter than acceptances. As the number of international students enrolled in these programs has risen from 97 in 2009-10 to 303 in 2017-18, the number of domestic students enrolled has fallen from 326 to 207 in the same period. International students have risen from 23 per cent of all students in these programs in 2009-10 to 60 per cent in 2017-18. In other words, tuition funds from rising international students in these programs have not been used to open up more seats for domestic students. Seats for domestic students have in fact dramatically declined as international students have increasingly taken these seats. So this is not a problem in programs where there are no or extremely few international students at UBC, such as medicine, law, dentistry, nursing, education, and perhaps history or anthropology, but is potentially a big problem where there are many international students, such as economics, commerce, math and computer science. For example it has not been the case that sufficient seats for domestic students have been added in the BA Major in Economics as UBC has received increasing numbers of international students and their fees.

Table 5

UBC Vancouver Total BA Majors in Economics 2009-10 to 2017-18 Students Registered

	Domestic	Internatl	Total
2009-10	321	97	418
2010-11	326	129	455
2011-12	309	143	452
2012-13	282	161	443
2013-14	287	189	476
2014-15	276	196	465
2015-16	278	213	491
2016-17	247	268	515
2017-18	207	303	510

Note: includes Combined Majors in Econ-Math, Econ-Stat, Econ-Phil and Econ-Poli

Source: UBC Office of Planning and Institutional Research

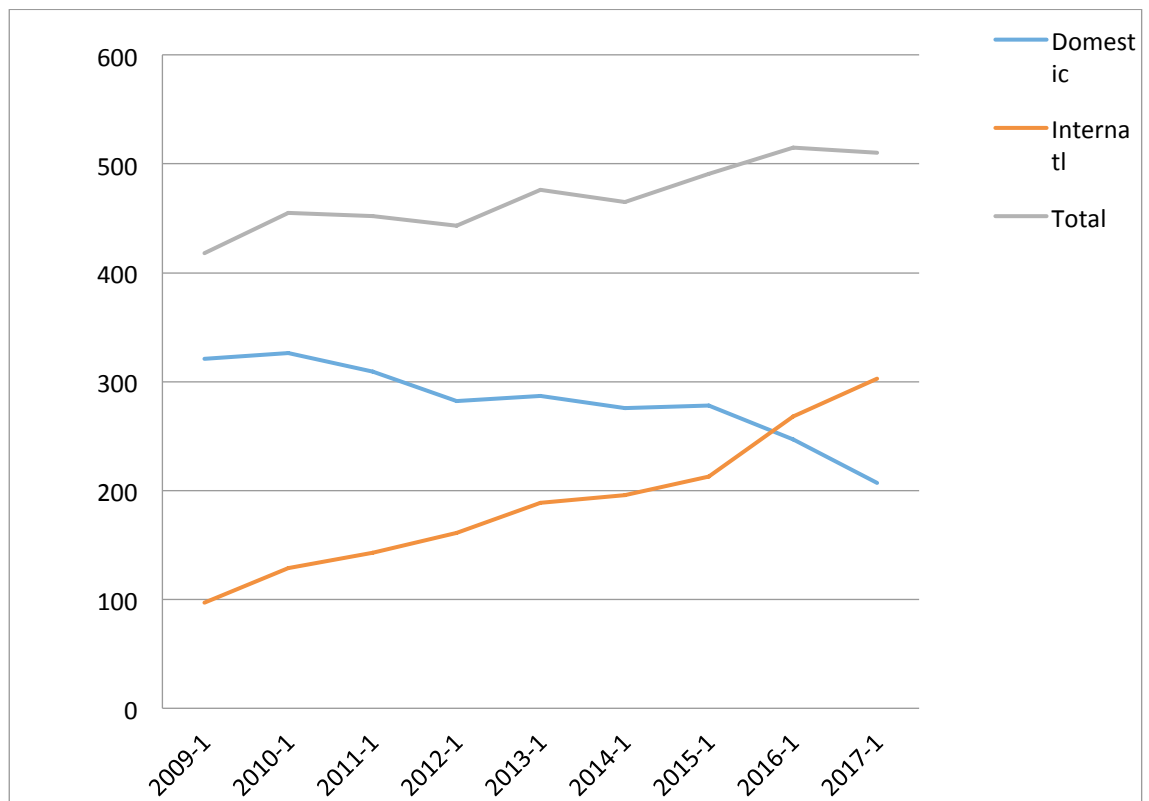


Figure 1: UBC Vancouver Total BA Majors in Economics 2009-10 to 2017-18 Students Registered

Note: Includes Combined Majors in Econ-Math, Econ-Stat, Econ-Phil and Econ-Poli).

Source: UBC Office of Planning and Institutional Research

At UBCO, the picture is a bit more complicated because domestic student enrolment in the BA program at UBCO has fallen precipitously as the campus has concentrated on increasing domestic student undergraduate enrolment in programs other than the BA, especially since 2014 or so, such as in engineering, management, life sciences, nursing, and the lab sciences, and has reduced admissions to the BA program, to allow for growth in these other programs. Domestic student enrolment in both the BA and BSc majors in economics (UBCO offers both, unlike UBC in Vancouver) has fallen in recent years, as international student enrolment has risen or remained stable. International students now make up almost 50 percent of enrolment in the BA and BSc majors in economics at UBCO, up from just over 25 percent in 2009-10 (see Table 6 and Chart 2).

Table 6

UBC Okanagan Total BA and BSc Majors in Economics 2009-10 to 2017-18 Students Registered

		Domestic	Internatl	Total
2009-10		46	16	62
2010-11		40	16	56
2011-12		59	20	79
2012-13		64	32	96
2013-14		91	42	133
2014-15		115	49	164
2015-16		113	54	167
2016-17		81	49	130
2017-18		55	47	102

Source: UBC Office of Planning and Institutional Research

It is also found to be the case that international students displace domestic students at UBCO if one looks behind the macro aggregate numbers and into the majors, programs and especially courses at the micro level. Within the BA and BSc, international students tend to focus on certain majors and programs, as Table 7 below shows, and on certain courses within programs. Programs with more than 20 declared majors students and a large percent (greater than 10 percent) of international students in total students declared as majors in these programs are, for the BA, economics (38 percent), international relations (15 percent), politics, philosophy and economics (14 percent) and philosophy (11 percent) and for the BSc, again economics (25 percent) mathematics (11 percent) and computer science (11 percent). Programs such as international relations, political science and philosophy have had no net new teaching faculty hiring at UBCO since 2007 and a declining number of courses, sections and student seats offered over the past number of years, and economics relatively little, despite the growing number of international students in these courses and programs. Most courses fill to capacity (especially in

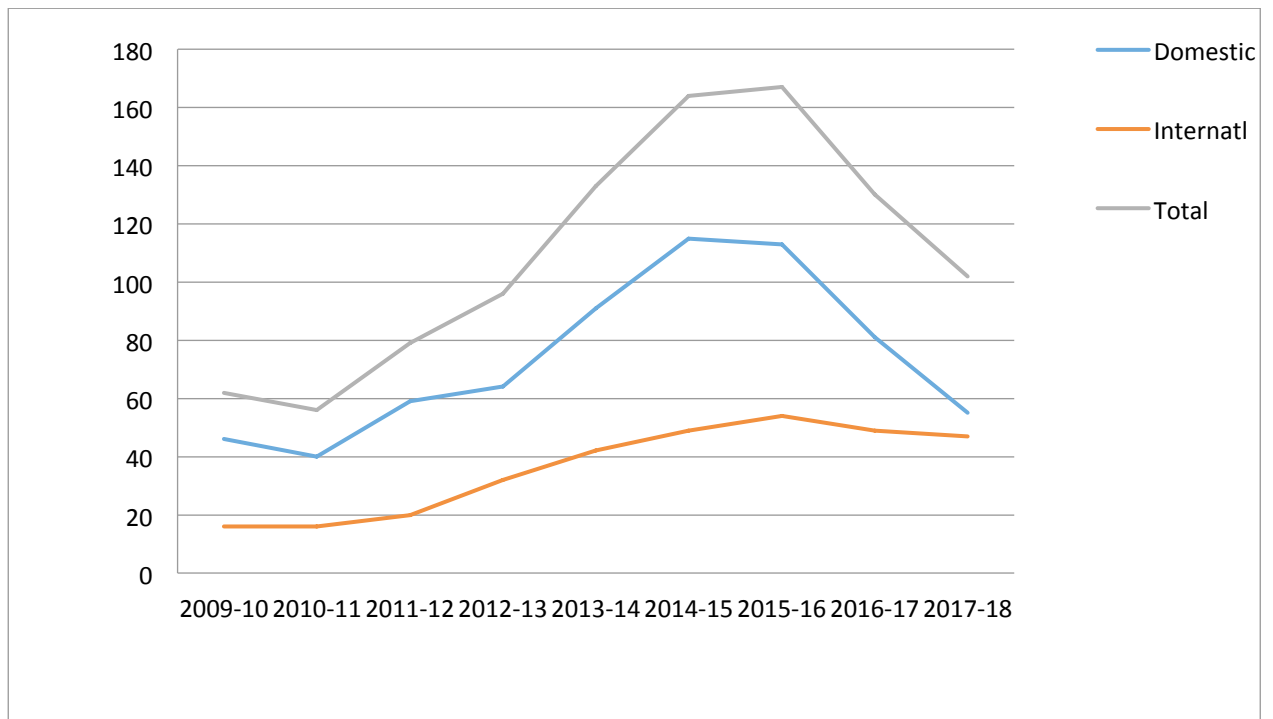


Figure 2. UBC Okanagan Total BA and BSc Majors in Economics 2009-10 to 2017-18 Students Registered

Source: UBC Office of Planning and Institutional Research

international relations and political science across the board and in many economics courses) so it would be entirely reasonable to recognize that some domestic students have been displaced from these courses and programs due to the growing number of international students at UBCO, as the total number of seats and courses in these programs has not been increased (actually fallen) and as international students in these courses and programs have increased.

Table 7
Declared BA and BSc Major Students, UBC Okanagan 2013-14

	Total	Intl	% Intl		Total	Intl	% Intl
Bachelor of Arts				Bachelor of Science			
Psychology	648	27	4	Biology	441	18	4
English	109	3	3	Biochemistry	281	14	5
Economics	108	41	38	Earth and Environmental Science	144	4	3
Anthropology	98	4	4	Psychology	139	6	4
History	94	0	0	Chemistry	104	3	3
Geography	72	2	3	Mathematics & Statistics	95	10	11
International Relations	65	10	15	Computer Science	84	9	11
General Arts	48	3	6	Physics	82	7	9
Sociology	44	3	7	Zoology	67	1	2
Political Science	40	2	5	General Science	66	1	2
Philosophy	27	3	11	Economics	48	12	25
Philosophy-Politics-Economics	21	3	14	Environmental Chemistry	19	1	5
French	20	1	5	Freshwater Science	13	0	0
Creative Writing	20	1	5	Total	1583	86	5
Computer Science	18	1	6				
Cultural Studies	16	1	6				
Art History	14	2	14				
Indigenous Studies	13	0	0				
Mathematics	12	5	42				
Spanish	10	0	0				
French and Spanish	10	0	0				
Latin American Studies	4	1	25				
Gender and Women's Studies	3	0	0				
Earth and Environmental Science	2	0	0				
Total	1470	113	8				

Source: UBC Student Information System (SISC)

The problem is especially acute for economics. In 2017-18, one of the author's courses was at 60 student capacity, the majority of whom were international students, and two other of their courses were full at 60 and 40 room capacity each, with at least half of the students registered in each international students, and with many domestic students on the waiting lists to get into these courses. So for these courses, domestic students were blocked from them while international students were enrolled in them. So international students definitely do displace domestic students at UBCO. Given the large number of international students who want to take economics courses, the capacities for domestic students in many of these courses are actually less than they were when the courses were last offered by the previous institution OUC, before 2005, when there were few international students on the campus. Another good example is the author's Go Global programs. Their program in China in summer 2018 had 22 students enrolled, 15 of whom were international students. Of the 7 Canadian students enrolled, 3 were of Chinese descent, so the program, designed to introduce Canadian students to economics in China, had only 4 non-Chinese-descent Canadian students in it, out of 22 students (which was above the capacity of 20 set).

BC campuses such as UBCO are planning to continue to substantially increase their number of international students; the revenues and profits they bring are an additive drug. This will displace more domestic students from programs and courses especially popular with international students, such as economics, unless expenditures on additional faculty, courses and seats increase in these programs. Either additional seats are opened up and additional courses are

put on using the international student tuition revenue from expanding international student enrolment, in which case new seats and courses open up to both international and domestic students, or they are not, with the increased revenues going to administrative bloat perhaps, hence displacing more and more domestic students from these courses and seats.

Some BC colleges and universities recognize this. Simon Fraser University in Vancouver argues that caps on the number of international students in some programs are necessary, and decided not to admit further international students in its spring 2017 session (*Globe and Mail*, 2017). In an article about Thompson Rivers University, in Kamloops, where international students in 2017-18 made up 28% of the on-campus student population, the chairperson of the B.C. Alliance of Students, in reference to the growing number of international students across BC's colleges and universities generally, said: "It may put a strain on class sizes and resources for students. It definitely can't keep increasing like this. The worst thing an institution can do is...to jeopardize the education of Canadian students. We don't want to take any of their seats away. We must prepare to handle it." (*The Omega Student Newspaper*, 2017). In the neighbouring Canadian province of Alberta, the University of Alberta Vice-Provost and Registrar is quoted as recently stating: "We're very cautious about displacing Alberta students. We have chosen not to grow our international enrolment to more than 15 per cent." (*Edmonton Journal*, 2017). The President of Universities Canada, an organization that refers to itself as "the voice of Canada's universities", is quoted as saying: "Over the next decade, Canadian universities expect further upward growth in international students...How much of it Canada wants to have is really a matter of public policy choices" (*Maclean's*, 2017).

For a good example, UBC in Vancouver introduced in 2014 a Bachelor of Media Studies (BMS) as a cost-recovery program (unfunded by the Government) with higher fees for international students than for domestic (in 2018-19, \$7,000 for domestic and \$36,000 for international). The acceptance rate into the program is low; for 40 seats, there are 700 applications per year. The co-founder of the program is quoted (*The Ubysey*, 2019): "We get hundreds upon hundreds of applicants each year...about 90 per cent or more of our students are international students –that was a very interesting surprise." If they are Chinese nationals, they are forbidden from working in foreign media, such as Canada's.

Conclusion

UBC has redrafted its admissions policy and now admits as many international students as it can. This has implications for Canadian and BC higher education policy as well as immigration, trade and labour market policy. The issue of the number of international students at UBC is a complex one, as I hope this nuanced case study of that university has demonstrated. That an institution such as UBC has been able to increase tuition fees for international students by over 70 percent in recent years yet has been able at the same time to admit many more international students, suggests that academic admissions standards for international students perhaps have been reduced to mesh with government policy. Most likely, UBC, somewhat unique for a monopoly supplier, is able to choose both the price of admission for international students and the quantity of seats sold to them, via adjusting its admissions policies accordingly. With UBC now basically selling access to the highest bidders, international students, questions of equity and fairness arise. We might ask; do Canadian and BC students and citizens have some rights to seats in UBC programs such as the BA Major in Economics, or the Bachelor of Media Studies, over and above international students? Or is UBC no longer a public university for

provincial school-leavers, but an international university, for the world? With UBC one of Canada's and BC society's premier social and public goods, the fruits of successful nationhood and province hood over the last 100 years or so, should Canadian and BC public policy do more to protect the interests of domestic citizens? With institutions such as UBC aiming to have over 30 percent of their students international by 2022, this is translating into up to 70 percent in some programs such as economics. Does attention to attracting international students reduce attention to the skills and training of BC and Canadian students? Is UBC now a global luxury brand, such as Prada, rather than a provincial public university? Should tax-paying British Columbians have some say in what it is, and should be? Who indeed are the major Western Canadian provincial flagship universities, such as the Universities of BC, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba, ultimately for? International students at UBC also come predominantly from just one socio-economic group -- the quite and very wealthy. Are Canadian students from less wealthy backgrounds getting squeezed out of UBC by the growing numbers of international students?

These are all questions pertinent to the future of transnational, neoliberal higher education, in BC, Canada, and around the world. As the authors of another paper put it, in acknowledgment of the larger trends across university systems in Australia, Canada, the UK, and US:

In the context of the ongoing commodification and internationalization of education, does a tension exist not only within the domestic sphere but also in terms of a responsibility to provide some degree of "international social good"? In this way, the globalization of higher education may involve an ongoing political contestation, at a domestic and an international level, over the definition, ethos and meaning of the so-called international university" (Gillen, Damachis & McGuire, 2003, p. 1403).

The large balance of universities is mimicking each other in inordinate hikes in international student tuition along with recruitment quotas and volumes. The large balance of universities is targeting the same countries – China, India, and the oil rich gulf states. The large balance is relying on national government economic policies that recognize higher education as a key, untapped export for increasing GDP. In Australia and Canada, international student fees and other products are among its top three export products. So I hope and trust that this specific case study of UBC provides a nuanced look at some of the local effects of these trends.

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Author

Peter Wylie is an Associate Professor of Economics in the Irving K. Barber School of Arts and Sciences at the University of British Columbia, Okanagan.

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