



Immigration Policy Changes in Canada and Tuition Hikes



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Introduction

Over the past academic year, international students in anglophone universities in Quebec have been targeted by the CAQ-imposed hikes on international and out-of-province student tuition starting in the fall of 2024. Despite the outrage and attempts at negotiation, the CAQ has remained steadfast in their decision, and Higher Education Minister Pascale Déry believes the measures to be imperative.

Despite multiple media outlets addressing the situation and both Concordia university and McGill publicly denouncing the disastrous effects of the hikes in the student bodies of their institutions, the situation of international students within the context of the hikes has seldom been addressed. International students make up a high percentage of patrons at both institutions, and for many, a Canadian university degree means a pathway towards immigration.

In order to better address the disastrous effects of the hikes on the international student community, we must first understand the hikes. In an article by Sidhartha Banerjee for The Canadian Press Global News published on October 13th, 2023 titled [Quebec Plans to double university tuition for out-of-province students by 2024](#), the newly announced hikes are addressed. The initial press reports said that Quebec was doubling tuition for out-of-province students (who are mostly from Ontario) claiming that “taxpayers shouldn’t subsidize English-speaking people who leave after graduating”. This leads to tuition for out-of-province students being raised from \$8,992 to \$17,000, as it was announced by Higher Education Minister Pascale Déry. Additionally, the government will charge universities \$20,000 for each international student and will redirect that money to francophone higher learning institutions, thus, the government is allowing universities to charge as much as they decide for international student’s tuition. McGill and Concordia University are the main universities affected by this.

The overarching claim for the tuition hikes according to Déry, is the fact that out-of-province and international students leave the province after graduating, as she stated “it costs the government of Quebec and the taxpayers of Quebec a very high amount of money for students who come here and who don’t stay here”. The attempt is to allow the government to collect the money from the increased tuition fees and use it to aid French institutions, while allowing Universities to arbitrarily decide the cost of tuition for international students. Although Déry stated that “This is not a measure against anglophones [...] I’m not closing the doors to any anglophone students who want to come to McGill, Concordia, Bishop’s, they will be able to come, it’s just that we’re not ready to continue... (paying) \$110 million for students that mostly are not staying here.”, the hikes ultimately return to the already persistent claim of the decline of the French language in Montreal. The language minister Jean-François Roberge stated that out-of-province students and international students are “heard speaking only English in the city’s downtown and elsewhere”. Nevertheless, the attempts of protecting the French language have often been used as a leeway to impose racist and xenophobic measures against immigrants and asylum seekers across the province.

Thus, this rhetoric follows the current government’s emphasis that the insufficiency in public services and the economic decline of the province is the result of an overhaul of temporary residents, such as international students. However, approximately half of Concordia’s international

students remain in the province in order to pursue post-grad education or work. This bleeds into the xenophobic remarks made by Premier Francois Legault on multiculturalism, who stated that “It’s important that we don’t put all cultures on the same level; that’s why we oppose multiculturalism” (CBC), a rhetoric that has been reflected in the tightening of immigration laws over the past year, creation of a cap on the number of study permits approved per year, additional requirements that make multiple applications for study permits invalid, among others. Furthermore, there are inherent contradictions behind the justification for the hikes. In most of Déry’s initial statements back in October last year, she emphasizes that the increase in fees is a result of the province no longer being able to subsidize the education of out-of-province students and international students because they leave the province after graduation and don’t contribute to Quebec’s economy, yet, immigrating to Quebec permanently has become nearly impossible for English-speaking international students seeking to achieve permanent residence: particularly, if they don’t have economic solvency or access to immigration lawyers.

Changes to Immigration Laws in 2024

Requirement of Visas in order to Curb asylum seekers and immigration– Changes to Electronic Travel Authorization (eTA) and visitor visa requirements for Mexican citizens:

As of 11:30 p.m. Eastern time on February 29, 2024, Mexican citizens travelling to Canada need to meet new requirements for the obtaining of an (eTA). They are required to apply for a visitor visa if they are not eligible for an electronic travel authorization. This eligibility is dependent on Mexican nationals having a valid American tourist visa. This shift in requirements was not only arbitrary and rushed but deeply dependent on the status of Mexican citizens in relation to the United States. Citizens who have a valid American Visa are only required to apply for an eTA, while those who have an expired American visa or don’t have one at all, are required to undergo a long and complicated process that the Canadian consulate in Mexico City does not have the personnel or resources to address in a fluid and efficient manner.

The changes to the requirement apply regardless if Mexican citizens had pre-booked travel or already valid eTAs. According to the [Government of Canada Website](#), if Mexican nationals had their eTA issued on their passport before 11:30 p.m. on February 29, 2024 and they don’t have a valid work or study permit, it was automatically cancelled. Meaning that, citizens who had already paid for the eTA processing fee and made travel plans prior to the shift in regulations would have to go through the process again and potentially be unable to travel to Canada altogether: independently of the reason for travelling.

According to the Government of Canada website, these are the new eligibility requirements for obtaining an eTA: 1) Using a Mexican passport to fly to Canada, coming to Canada for a temporary stay (6 months), either currently hold a valid United States nonimmigrant visa or have held a Canadian visitor visa (temporary resident visa) in the past 10 years (important to note that having held an eTA in the past 10 years is not the same as having held a Canadian visitor visa. If

the citizen is not eligible for an eTA, they will need a visitor visa. 2) The application of processing of the visitor visa costs CAN \$100, along with a collection fee of CAN \$85 for biometric information (fingerprints and photo). 3) Although there have been no changes made to eligibility requirements for work or study permits for Mexican nationals, a visa will now become a part of said process. This process is not only more expensive than the processing of an eTA, but is also more complicated and bureaucratic. Additionally, the deciding factor being whether or not a Mexican national holds an American Visa is not only inaccessible, since the United States Consulate in Mexico City is still dealing with post-pandemic backlogs in applications, but also problematic because of the extremely difficult process of obtaining an American Visa as a Mexican citizen (going through a series of interviews in English, requirement of a proof of income, proof of employment in Mexico, etc.)

Cap on Mexican asylum seekers

The Canadian government's justification behind the re-instatement of the temporary visitor visa is the fact that Mexican asylum claims have risen significantly since 2016. Going from 250 claims in 2016 to 25,236 in 2023. This reflected as an 18% of all asylum claims in Canada being comprised of Mexican citizens.

In the article *Canada bringing back visa requirements for Mexican nationals to curb asylum seekers* published by CBC News on February 28, 2024, it is stated that Québec premier, François Legault, was the one to call upon the federal government to take action towards slowing down the influx of asylum seekers into the province. He called for the reinstatement of the visa requirement in Ottawa a week before it was put into motion. Additionally, the United States government has asked the Canadian government to bring back the visa requirement to reduce the amount of illegal crossings from Mexican immigrants from Canada into the United States. This comes along with the aforementioned fact of Mexico being the top source of asylum claims over the last year. In relation to this, Legault expressed to Trudeau that "Asylum seekers have trouble finding a place to live, which contributes to accentuating the housing crisis".

In another CBC News Report titled *'Breaking point': Quebec premier asks Trudeau to slow influx on asylum seekers* Legault is reported as being very concerned over Mexican nationals placing significant pressure on public services. He stated that Quebec is no longer able to provide asylum to such great numbers of immigrants. This is in addition to Trudeau's remarks stating that higher education companies and organizations should "find their own housing solutions" for temporary residents (such as international students and temporary workers) who reportedly have a greater impact on the current housing crisis being experienced across Canada. The federal minister of public safety, Dominic LeBlanc, stated that the federal government has supported Quebec monetarily to provide accommodation to asylum seekers with \$374 million between 2017 and 2020, as well as \$700 million annually in "reception and integration" payments to the province. The head of the Parti Québécois, Paul St-Pierre Plamondon, stated that "Quebec needs to be able

to control its own borders and set its own immigration policy [...] why we need to decide for ourselves instead of begging Ottawa's collaboration”.

Cap on student visas: [News Release, January 22, 2024 – Ottawa](#)

Additionally, the Canadian government has continued to attempt to slow down the influx of temporary residents across the country by the instatement of a cap on the number of approved student visa applications; dramatically reducing the number of international students who enter the country each year. This comes hand-in-hand with the development of new requirements for the student visa application, such as an attestation letter from the province the students are seeking to study in. These shifts were announced in a news release from Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, published on January 22nd, 2024, titled [*Canada to stabilize growth and decrease number of new international student permits issued to approximately 360,000 for 2024.*](#)

The news release states that “the integrity of the international student system has been threatened” by institutions seeking to increase their revenue which has led to international students arriving in Canada without the “proper support they need to succeed” which has allegedly put pressure on housing, healthcare and other public services. The position from the press release is one of attempting to “protect” international students as well as “support sustainable population growth in Canada” through stabilizing measures on the number of international students accepted yearly. The release goes on to discuss Marc Miller's announcement of the cap on international study permit applications to stabilize population growth throughout a two year period. **For 2024 this cap is expected to decrease approved study permits by 35% from the 2023 number. Additionally, provincial and territorial caps have been established weighed by the population index of each territory.** This cap does not apply to master's and doctoral degrees, or elementary and secondary education.

It is emphasized that these measures are temporary and will only be in place for two years. Additionally, there have been shifts for the eligibility for a postgraduation work permit, where international students who begin a study program that is a part of a curriculum licensing arrangement will no longer be eligible. Miller is then quoted in saying “International students are vital to Canada and enrich our communities. As such, we have an obligation to ensure that they have access to the resources they need for an enriching academic experience. In Canada, today, this isn't always the case. Today, we are announcing additional measures to protect a system that has become so lucrative that it has opened a path for its abuse. Enough is enough. Through the decisive measures announced today, we are striking the right balance for Canada and ensuring the integrity of our immigration system while setting students up for the success they hope for.” – Marc Miller, Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship.

Additionally, at the end of the news report, there are further clarifications on these newly imposed measures, such as the emphasis on seeking students with in-demand skills to pursue permanent residence, as well as requiring post-secondary learning institutions to confirm every

letter of acceptance submitted by international students directly with the IRCC. Lastly, the cost of living requirement has almost been doubled to “better reflect the true cost of living in Canada and help prevent student vulnerability and exploitation”.

In addition to the imposition of the international student hikes, Canada has also begun to crack down on the number of student visa authorizations issued per year. According to the article by Randy Thanthong-Knight for Bloomberg News, [*Student visa crackdown begins slowing Canada population gains*](#), in an attempt to reduce the rapid pace of population growth across the country, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau’s government aims to reduce international student permits by 35% from last year. Thus far, the number of people who hold study permits dropped by 24,594 in the first quarter of the year according to Statistics Canada.

The premise behind the reduced emissions of student visas for international students once again relates to the idea pushed by the Canadian government that their lack of public and social infrastructure is a result of temporary residents overflowing the housing market as well as public services. In an article by immigration reported Nicholas Keung for the Toronto Star titled [*With dipping study permit approval rates for international students, Canada may not meet its reduced target*](#), it is stated that Canada’s new processing of study permits has led to a dramatic drop in applications, due to the federal government’s goal of reducing the amount of permits issued by 28%, which has led to a 40% refusal rate on all applications. Additionally, the processing of study permits had to be passed after Immigration Minister Marc Miller updated the requirements into adding a provincial attestation letter in the application, something which the provinces were not prepared to undertake. These new regulations and slowing down of the process have led to two-thirds of international student source countries experiencing a lower approval rate in the first quarter of the year.

This has particularly affected international students from India, where this year has marked a historically low number of study permits processed (just over 4,000). According to a report provided by ApplyBoard, 90% of study permits processed for Indian applicants in 2023 were for now capped study programs such as undergraduate university degrees. This in addition to the high refusal rate, might be related to the students submitting their applications without the provincial attestation letters, as well as the newly hiked proof-of-finances requirement which has doubled to \$20,000 since January. Additionally, the processing time for study permits has increased from 8 to 15 weeks, which has pushed many international students to defer for a semester and cancel postpone their moving plans.

Lastly, as of November 2024 all students applying for a PGWP (Post Graduation work Permit), must provide results to language tests evaluating their reading, writing, listening and speaking in French or English.

Hikes as a Political Matter

Historically, international students have been seen as mediums of obtaining revenue for universities. Due to the de-regularization of international student tuitions, universities have been able to charge arbitrary amounts of money to students outside of Canada which sometimes fluctuate among different disciplines and programs. The crackdown in immigration across the country has been particularly exacerbated in Quebec. With the government viewing multiculturalism as a threat to independence and nationalist sentiments, and international students being used as scapegoats to justify the current housing crisis, we are living in a climate where racism, xenophobia, and classism are overtly displayed through a veil of concern for the quality of life of citizens and permanent residents.

This leads to the creation of the dichotomy of the “bad” vs the “good” immigrant: the bad immigrant seeks asylum, the good immigrant seeks education. This is demonstrated through Déry’s arguments in relation to higher education students leaving the province and the attempt to deter the numbers of asylum seekers who attempt to settle in the province. Yet, the idea of the “good” immigrant is inevitably tied to a degree of economic stability that allows international students to continuously bring money into Canada while having virtually nowhere near the amount of rights and privileges as citizens do.

Additionally, Déry’s argument is further contradicted by the government’s crackdown on avenues through which international students can settle in Quebec after graduating if they come from anglophone universities. For instance, the Quebec Graduate Stream, which was one of the main ways for international students to achieve permanent residence after graduation has undergone one major shift to be enforced from November 23rd of the present year, which states that in order to be eligible for the program the applicant must have completed 75% of their university education in French. This automatically disqualifies the great majority of Concordia and McGill students. Hence, further complicating the immigration process for international students, who often leave the province because provinces like Ontario and Nova Scotia have much simpler and more straightforward processes to achieve permanent residence. How then, are international students expected to stay in a province that clearly only wants them for the economic funds they can bring into it? While being consistently discouraged from seeking permanent residence or citizenship.

This traces back to the convoluted history of deregulated tuition for international students across Canada. International students are perceived as the kind of desired immigrant for Canada; educated, economically supported, and able to fulfill the process of immigration both financially and legally, they have become targeted by institutions and universities that know international students are willing (and more likely capable) of paying exaggerated tuition fees in the exchange of a better quality of life, higher quality education, or simply being able to remove themselves from countries in situations of extreme violence or political prosecution.

According to *A Question of self interest: A brief history of 50 years of international student policy in Canada* by Dale M. McCartney, the shift into marketizing universities and differential tuition between out of province and in province students in Quebec was a consequence of an

attempt at nationalist unity. The fees collected from the differential rate between in province and out of province students are redistributed towards the government's annual university budget.

In 2019 the Quebec government entirely deregulated international student tuition with exception of Belgian and French students. Essentially, universities were allowed to treat their international students as consumers who were used as tools to increase profit and fulfill the funding lacks caused by the loss of funding coming from the government. Hence, international students cease to be seen as students, and are only seen as means to make profit: since the degree of government funding allocated to universities is dependent on their enrollment numbers. Thus, contradicting Marc Miller's argument that stricter immigration measures are put in place to "protect" international students from institutions that seek to profit from them economically at any cost. The imposition of the hikes will only exacerbate how institutions take advantage of international students who are desperate to immigrate and have the economic position to pay for outrageous tuition prices.

Conclusion

The recent imposition of tuition hikes towards out-of-province and international students as well as the developments in immigration laws are clearly xenophobic and anti-immigration measures, that position students as clients and consumers of education rather than students. The guise of the protection of the French language is merely an excuse employed by the CAQ to further push their anti-multiculturalism agenda and aggressive policies against asylum seekers and immigrants. The higher education system in Quebec, thus, only seeks international students for their assets and what kind of economic fulfillment they can bring to the province during their temporary stay, while making it extremely difficult and time consuming to obtain any kind of legal permanence in the province, not even considering the lengthy and complex steps towards permanent residence. Additionally, Déry's justification for the hikes (anglophone students leaving the province after graduating) simply falls through when regarded in the context of Marc Miller's shift to immigration policies over the past year. The cap on student visas, changes to the Quebec graduate stream, imposition of visas for Mexican nationals, and cap on asylum seekers showcases that the current government is fiercely against immigration: whether these immigrants are the kind that Quebec used to seek (educated and skilled) or not.

Additionally, the pressure on anglophone institutions as an anti-immigrant measure can be clearly seen by the exempting of French and Belgian nationals from the tuition hikes. The current provincial and federal government seeks to fulfill their cap of international students with French-speaking international students who make up a minority of students at French institutions. Thus, the tuition hikes and the recent changes to immigration laws are not isolated events: but instead, a chain of measures to reduce immigration, fight against multiculturalism, and preserve Quebec's racist and xenophobic nationalist ideals.