

International Students: Stories and Strategies for Academic Success in Postsecondary Education

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS: STORIES AND STRATEGIES FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS IN POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

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WELCOME

Dear student,

Congratulations on your acceptance to a post-secondary institution in Ontario! As you might recall from gathering your documents and submitting your application package months ago, your school holds high expectations for admission into their academic programs. This means you are ready to meet the opportunities and expectations of pursuing a **post-secondary** degree or diploma.

In addition to being ready to meet your institution's expectations, you are also ready to begin making unique contributions to your academic community here. When you and international students from across the globe choose to study in Ontario, you bring not only **discipline-specific skills** with you, but countless languages, cultural knowledges, and life experiences that will enrich the diversity of the classrooms and learning spaces that you engage in.

In the year 2020, it is estimated by the Canadian Bureau for International Education that 530, 540 international students¹ were enrolled in educational institutions across Canada. And many of these students express that they intend to stay in the country after graduating from their programs to build work experience and perhaps even establish a home.

When asked about why they chose Canada as their destination for postsecondary studies, international students often highlight its highly regarded educational system; multicultural and non-discriminatory society; and reputation as a safe country².

Whatever your reasons are, feel reassured that you are joined on this journey by many of your peers who will share similar goals and questions. In fact, the province of Ontario is home to the greatest number of international students in Canada. As such, you will likely find many communities to connect with, whether related to your nationality or to the many other identities you have as a unique person and student.

Cities across Ontario often have specific neighbourhoods that reflect diasporas of communities that have

1. Canadian Bureau for International Education. (2021). *530, 540 international students in Canada at all levels of study in 2020*. Retrieved from www.cbie.ca/infographic

2. Canadian Bureau for International Education, 2021.

emigrated to Canada over many years. For example, you might learn that your city or town has a Chinatown, Greektown, Little India, Little Portugal, or similar area.

You will also likely find that your educational institution hosts student clubs and associations based on shared cultural identities where you can meet peers with similar national, spiritual, and/or linguistic backgrounds.

This is a big step for you, full of challenges and opportunities ahead. Through the generous support of the Government of Ontario's e-Campus initiative, we have created this book for you as a small resource along the way and we hope you find it helpful.

Sincerely,

The team behind *International Students: Stories and Strategies for Academic Success in Postsecondary Education*,
Academic Success, Division of Student Life,
University of Toronto

This project is made possible with funding by the Government of Ontario and through eCampusOntario's support of the Virtual Learning Strategy. [To learn more about the Virtual Learning Strategy visit https://vls.ecampusontario.ca.](https://vls.ecampusontario.ca)

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1.

INTRODUCTION

How to use this book

Before diving in, it might be helpful to review the following section which helps explain the organization of this book and how best to use it.

Who is this book for?

Making the transition into and through post-secondary education can be challenging for all students in one way or another. For international students or someone supporting the educational experience of international students, the challenges and opportunities in this transition are even more complex. **This book is for you.**

What is this book about?

We wrote this to help guide you and those who support you in these challenging transitions to post-secondary education. There are many aspects to these transitions, but **our focus here is primarily on the challenges related to learning and studying in what, for many of you, may be unfamiliar academic traditions.** We believe that challenge is an inevitable and good part of a deep educational experience for all students, and this guide is here to help you develop the academic resourcefulness necessary to effectively meet those challenges.

There are two aspects to this idea of academic resourcefulness – the development of appropriate academic, learning, and study skills, and the ability to find and make use of relevant resources of support and community. The goal is to help you become full-of-resources that will serve you well when you encounter the inevitable challenges in your academic transitions. And, finally, we also acknowledge that some

challenges exist as harmful and unnecessary features of the systems of education in which we find ourselves. We also want to help you better recognize these features and productively advocate for yourselves and for what you need to prosper.

This book is but a small contribution to those goals and is grounded on two basic premises:

- a) International students face a set of uniquely complex challenges in their transitions into, through, and out of post-secondary education.
- b) The need to support these students in connecting to community and culturally responsive resources is ever more critical to their academic success and overall well-being.

The cultivation of academic resourcefulness can be demonstrably helpful in this regard, acting to moderate some of the negative outcomes associated with academic adversity. This book is designed to support this goal and we sincerely hope it can be of some value to students finding their way.

How did we develop and organize the book?

We have imagined six “phases” to the transition into post-secondary education for international students:

1. Anticipating
2. Arriving
3. Orienting
4. Adjusting
5. Engaging
6. Reflecting

We understand, of course, that actual real-life transitions are much more complex than this neat scheme would suggest, and each person will experience their transition in their own unique ways, naturally. But we think there is enough of a basic truth to these phases that they will resonate generally for many students.

So, the chapters in this book correspond to those phases, and in each chapter we offer a mix of two things:

1. specific reflections from international students themselves about their own experiences, and
2. general insights and suggestions from the authors on ways to manage the academic experience.

How have we included the voices of students?

A group of international students were filmed during an online session, guided through reflective drawing exercises. They were asked to make drawings that somehow captured their transition experiences as international students, and then to interpret those drawings through discussion. Each chapter will begin with a video montage of some of these discussions that relate to the theme of the chapter. We hope you enjoy hearing from Heejin, Stephanie, Joe, Ishita, and Sherrie.

Also included in each chapter are audio clips from a conversation between two more students, Michelle and Vurjeet. Michelle, a first-year international student responds to questions about the chapter themes from Vurjeet, a domestic student with sometimes similar, sometimes contrasting experiences to Michelle's.

These are the voices of just a few students at the University of Toronto, so they will not capture the dizzying variety of experiences for all international students in Ontario. But, again, there is enough basic truth, generosity, and honesty from these students that most students will find something to connect with.

The text portions of the book attempt to generalize and normalize these student insights, offer suggested approaches and strategies for effectively engaging in academic life, and connect students to useful resources that help. **It is important to note here that this booklet is aimed at all international students in Ontario, so our guidance and links to resources are general in nature. It is especially important for you to engage in the communities, resources, and supports that are available at your specific institution.**

Meet our storytellers

Click through the image cards to learn a bit about the storytellers you will hear in the videos and audio clips throughout the book. Or, if you've downloaded and printed the PDF of the book, find "Meet our storytellers" in Appendix A.



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/academicresilience/?p=25#h5p-3>

How can you use this book?

Who are the authors?

We are Yaseen Ali, Rahul Bhat, Wenzhe (Sherrie) Xu, John Hannah, and Tesni Ellis – a small group of learning specialists and educators working at the University of Toronto. We have a range of experiences and areas of expertise and a shared interest in supporting student success in all its varieties. You can learn more about us in the [Credits chapter](#) at the end of the book.

Well, first of all, you can use this in any way that you find helpful. But we have some suggestions.

The book is organized in a kind of linear way, moving through what we see as the various phases of transition. This makes for perhaps the most obvious way to engage with it. **You might take a good look through the whole book first, to get a sense of the thing as a whole. And then you might focus on the chapter that most resonates with your current context, whatever that might be.** You might review more thoroughly the “Anticipating” chapter in the weeks before you actually begin school when those messages are most relevant to you, and then, move onto the “Arrival” chapter when that phase begins for you. And so on.

But it’s important to also think of the book as a companion you can come back to again and again as things come up for you. While it is organized in this neat linear way, your experience may not be so tidy. So, think of it as a resource that you can use throughout your time as a student. Watch or listen to the videos when that seems helpful. Look at some of the resources and checklists when quick, timely advice is needed. Read the deeper text sections

when you want to engage further. Take notes, discuss with friends, ask questions. And know this is only one resource among many that you can use.

Take a moment to reflect

Now that you've met the student storytellers, is there anything that you have in common with them (e.g. cultural identities, life experiences, or areas of interest)?

The chapters of this resource are designed to consider the stages of an international student's journey: Anticipating, Arriving, Orienting, Adjusting, Engaging and Reflecting. What other experiences might you include in this list? Consider writing them down and adding them to your list of goals and tasks as you begin preparing for your departure!

[The next chapter: Anticipating](#)

In the following chapter, we encounter our first theme: [click here to flip to the next chapter, Anticipating.](#)

2.

ANTICIPATING

Listen to Michelle’s “Anticipating” story: Can you relate?



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/academicresilience/?p=77#audio-77-1>

In this audio clip, Vurjeet asks Michelle about what it was like at the very beginning, before arriving in Ontario as an international student. Listen and/or read their conversation below.

Vurjeet: “Okay! Hey guys, my name is Vurjeet Madan.”

Michelle: “My name is Michelle Yan.”

Vurjeet: “Right, and so we’re gonna start off with the “Arriving” chapter. So Michelle, what was it like when you first came to start school in Toronto?”

Michelle: “I was extremely excited, like, minus a part where, when I was... I don’t know, I felt really sad for leaving my family. You know, we cried a lot, especially leading up to my flight, my sister’s just crying every single night. But I was still excited! Like, I think there was a lot of uncertainty because I am an international student. So, I had to do all my planning outside of Toronto. And because of COVID, there are so many things that I didn’t know, I just don’t know where to start, or I don’t know when to stop. So – is this enough? Like, am I doing it right? Or what should I do more? Like, is there something I’m missing? I was so afraid of being homeless, because I didn’t end up getting into residence, so I had to search for my own house, I had to look into it. But if I’m describing my feeling then, before coming to Toronto, I think it’s mostly really excited. Just excited!”

Vurjeet: “Excited, okay, yeah!”

Can you relate?

As you count down the days to starting your academic journey in Ontario, you might be wondering about what you can do before leaving your current place of residence. This section will focus on the tasks and research that you can prioritize prior to your departure to make the transition to your new location and learning institution a lot smoother.

In this chapter you will find:

- What to know about the **study permit** application process
- Information about housing, health insurance, and immunization requirements
- A downloadable pre-arrival checklist about what to bring with you

A word of caution as you do your research and information-gathering: It is an unfortunate reality that international students can be targeted by third-party organizations, tutoring companies, or agents that claim to represent Canadian institutions, but do not have such connections. Be especially wary of any service that requires you to pay additional fees to access support or ask you to share personal information that your institution should already have access to (e.g. your student number).

Please also keep in mind your college or university will likely have specialized teams that can support you with finding academic resources and offering the best advice.

Check if your institution has an international student services office and connect with them early on! Signing up for their email listservs or following verified social media accounts is another great and efficient way to stay updated.

Also get into the habit of fact-checking what you hear or read from others (e.g. Facebook groups or Reddit threads) by carefully cross-referencing this with what is written on official websites and in communications that are directly from your institution. For instance, if you are receiving advice from fellow student peers or a student organization, make sure they are affiliated with your college or university.

Finally, if you decide to make use of academic services (such as academic tutoring), start with your institution’s offerings or suggestions first instead of paying out-of-pocket for a third-party, for-profit service.

Anticipating: Reminders and advice

Click each prompt below to expand it and find helpful reminders and advice regarding study permits, health, and housing. [Or, go to Appendix A to read in full paragraph format.](#)

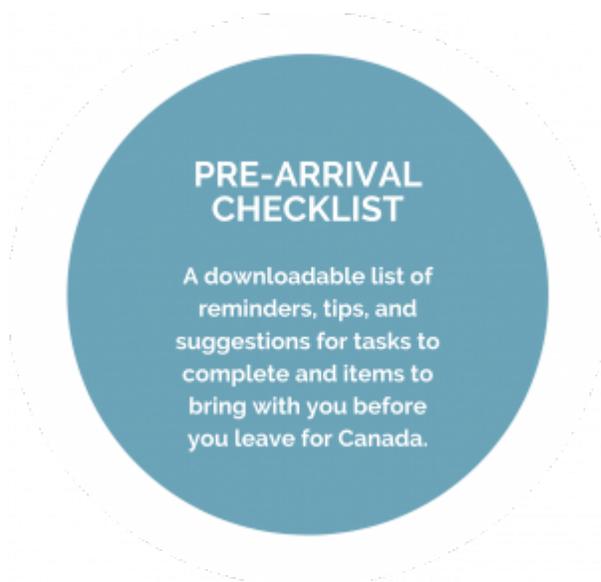


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<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/academicresilience/?p=77#h5p-1>

Pre-Arrival Checklist

This pre-arrival checklist features reminders, tips, and suggestions for tasks to complete and items to bring with you before you leave for Canada. Not everything will apply to all international students, but we think these are some important general items to consider.



Download your own copy of the PDF **Pre-Arrival Checklist** to fill in and refer to as you plan for your departure:

[“PDF Pre-Arrival Checklist” available at
https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/app/uploads/
sites/1993/2022/01/PRE-ARRIVAL-CHECKLIST-
FILLABLE.pdf](https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/app/uploads/sites/1993/2022/01/PRE-ARRIVAL-CHECKLIST-FILLABLE.pdf)

Or, you can find the Pre-Arrival Checklist in our [“Resources” chapter](#) at the end of the book.

Take a moment to reflect and give it a try

Give it a try! Take a look at one of the storytellers' "getting here" journey maps – what do you find interesting or surprising about what they included? You'll find their maps throughout the remaining chapters. **If you were to design a map about your own academic and personal development to this point, what milestones would you represent?**

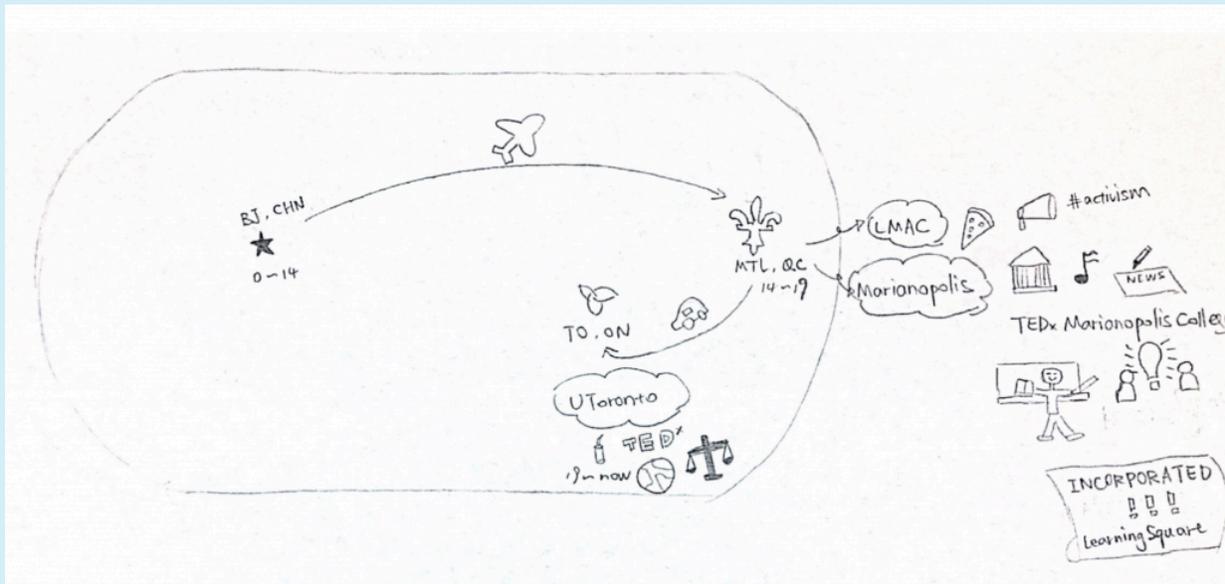


Image 1.1: Stephanie's international learning story begins when she travelled from China to Quebec at the age of 14; she completed secondary school and CEGEP in Montreal before moving to Toronto to pursue an undergraduate degree in arts and sciences. When Stephanie first arrived in Montreal she had to learn to communicate and study in French, which was challenging at first but also helped her expand her perspectives and develop her passions, including student activism and advocacy. Stephanie describes developing a more complex identity and notion of "home" thanks to her international experiences.

The next chapter: Arriving

After "Anticipating" comes "Arriving" – or, in other words, you're on your way! In the next chapter our

storytellers share their “getting here” stories and we explore some of the features of “culture change” you may experience when you first arrive. [Click here to turn to the next chapter: Arriving.](#)

3.

ARRIVING

Congratulations, you've landed in your city! This chapter will focus on your first days getting set up, and what to expect in terms of cultural transitions. First, in the video below we introduce our storytellers Heejin, Joe, Ishita, and Stephanie as they share their “arriving” stories. Please note: If you're in a location where you can't view our videos, or prefer to find the content in an alternative format, [all chapter video transcripts can be found here in Appendix B.](#)



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/academicresilience/?p=27#oembed-1>

Arriving at the Airport

If you are entering Canada by air, you might want to get a sense of how far the airport will be from your place of accommodation. Most online mapping platforms will allow you to estimate this distance and to compare different **modes of transportation** (e.g. public buses, underground subways, or trains; taxis or cabs; or ride sharing services such as Uber or Lyft).

If you are travelling by public transportation to your residence, remember to have a modest amount of Canadian cash (dollar bills or coins), just in case you are unable to purchase tickets or passes by credit card. Also note that some buses or trains might not accept cash when you board – in this case, look for automated teller machines at stations or stops where you can buy a ticket or pass beforehand.

In late summer and early fall, some colleges and universities might have a presence at the airport in the form of a **welcome booth**. The staff at these booths can offer you information to help you navigate the airport, transportation system, and the city more broadly. And if you ever find yourself lost, look for an information booth (often marked with the symbol “i”) which are mostly found in high-traffic areas or in the arrivals terminal after you leave the customs and luggage areas.

You might also see SIM or prepaid phone cards available for purchase at stores at the airport from a limited number of phone service providers. However, we recommend that you wait before signing up for a plan with monthly (or recurring) fees because airports often have free Wi-Fi that you can use to quickly connect with friends and family. You can always set up a **phone plan** after reviewing the options from different service providers and making an informed (and unrushed) decision that's best for your needs and budget.

Listen to Michelle's "Arriving" story and her advice for planning your arrival



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/academicresilience/?p=27#audio-27-1>

In the audio clip above, Michelle offers some advice about timing your arrival in Canada, based on her own experience. Listen and/or read the conversation below:

Michelle: So it was pretty smooth except for the **jet lag** part – because I remember the second day, I was just so out. I was just not Michelle. I was not Michelle because I was just, it was just so painful to not sleep, but then you kind of need sleep, but then you're not doing it because you need to make that adjustment quickly!

Vurjeet: Especially with like, I don't know if you came before school, but if you were coming like kind of close to when school was starting that would be even harder with jet lag and having to deal with the timezone difference and stuff.

Michelle: Yeah, I think I mean, for future reference, if I have to give advice to incoming freshmen or first years from, like, outside of Ontario or outside of Canada, it's definitely to plan, you know, a few days before school starts. Because I came like a day and a half before school officially started. That was, I guess it was really hectic. So if you're planning to come to Canada, it's better to have like four or five days just so that you can adjust yourself.

Vurjeet: Oh totally. I mean, even as a domestic student coming from Saskatchewan, which is only two provinces over, I've like been – one thing that I've learned – I'm in third year now – but one thing that I learned from first year was I need buffer periods. And that's not even, that's with like a one, two hour timezone difference you know? So I can't even imagine what it's like for international students, you know, having to make that transition already is difficult enough. Having to make

that transition along with the environmental changes and the time changes. Also, cultural, cultural changes. It must have been a lot!

Getting set up: Bank accounts, additional documentation, and phone plans

Banking in Canada

If you haven't already, one task you'll want to cross off your to-do list soon is setting up a bank account with a Canadian banking institution. This will allow you to make several important transactions; for example, the ability to pay your college or university tuition fees, or to provide cheques to your landlord for first and last months' rent for your accommodation lease. You also must have a bank account to receive wages from your employer if you take on a part-time job during your studies.

As an international student, you may be eligible for certain incentives from your bank – ask about these options so that you receive benefits or reduced charges. To figure out the best banking plan or institution for you, check out this resource from the Canadian Bankers Association that provides advice specifically for newcomers to Canada: <https://cba.ca/newcomers-to-canada>

You will also want to consider getting a Social Insurance Number (SIN), which is a 9-digit number that you require in order to work in Canada or to have access to government programs and benefits. You will also need a SIN if you want to file an income tax return in Canada. You can apply for a SIN online, by mail, or in-person at a Service Canada office. Learn more details here: <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/services/sin/apply.html>

Planning to work during your studies? Know your rights

If you are an international student with full-time registration status and a valid study permit, you may be eligible to work both on-campus and off-campus with certain conditions. Learn

more about the full eligibility requirements here: <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/study-canada/work.html>

If you are unsure about your eligibility to work, check with the staff at your learning institution – there will be international student or immigration advisors who can help you with your questions.

International students may choose to have a part-time job during their studies for a variety of reasons – to earn extra income for covering cost-of-living expenses; to participate in a required internship as part of their academic program; or to make friends and build their networks.

Whatever your reasons may be, it's important to know about your **rights as an employee**:

- [Learn about workplace rights in Ontario here at https://www.labour.gov.on.ca/english/atwork/workplacerrights_fs.php](https://www.labour.gov.on.ca/english/atwork/workplacerrights_fs.php)
- [Find information about working in Ontario in additional languages such as French, Arabic, Chinese, Tami, and more at https://www.labour.gov.on.ca/english/multi/index.php](https://www.labour.gov.on.ca/english/multi/index.php)
- Are you under the age of 25? [Check out the Government of Ontario's page for workers under the age of 25, which has videos, tips, and other resources: https://www.labour.gov.on.ca/english/atwork/youngworkers.php](https://www.labour.gov.on.ca/english/atwork/youngworkers.php)

If you are concerned about the working conditions at your job, make sure to speak with a trusted mentor, friend, or advisor who can direct you to the appropriate on-campus office (e.g. student union or international office) to discuss your concerns and options.

Phone plans

Another priority for many international students is setting up a phone plan so that they can make and receive calls, browse online content, and stream music or videos. Here are some tips for finding a budget-friendly phone plan:

- Bring an **unlocked phone** with you; this will lower the cost of your overall plan as you will not be paying for a brand-new device within your monthly fees
- “Shop around” and compare plans offered by different phone providers before making your final decision; if you find cheaper options for comparable plans, ask providers if they will price-match
- Get recommendations from your friends about their phone plans and if they are satisfied with their providers’ signal strength, streaming quality, and customer service

- Also note that if you are living on (or spending a lot of time at) your campus, Wi-Fi will likely be widely available, so you might not require robust data capacity

[Learn more about cell phone services in Canada at https://crtc.gc.ca/eng/phone/mobile/](https://crtc.gc.ca/eng/phone/mobile/)

Driving in Ontario

Finally, if you currently drive a vehicle and plan to drive while living in Ontario, you may be eligible to trade your current license for an Ontario driver's license. [Check in with your local Service Ontario office for more details at https://www.ontario.ca/locations/serviceontario](https://www.ontario.ca/locations/serviceontario)

If you are a new driver, you will have to participate in Ontario's graduated licensing program; [learn more about Ontario's graduated licensing program at https://www.ontario.ca/page/drivers-licence](https://www.ontario.ca/page/drivers-licence)

Getting your bearings

Your first few days will likely feel like a blur of memories and experiences.

You might experience some pressure to get many things done, but also be patient with yourself as you're adjusting to new time zones, travel routes, and temperatures. If you're traveling from a far distance, you might want to factor in jet lag and catch up on sleep whenever possible. Also set aside some time for relaxing or even engaging in some tourist attractions or activities to get a better sense of your new location.

As an international student, you will also have to figure out unfamiliar systems and establish new routines to help your first few weeks and months go as smoothly as possible. Here are some additional tasks and activities to ease that transition:

“The way I approached it was... I literally made a list of things that I had to do, like: I have to go to the grocery store and...look up common words – like, how do you say cabbage in French? How do you say tomato in French?” – Stephanie

- **Visit a few grocery stores** near you and take note of their prices, hours, and products
- If you will be **commuting to your campus**, time how long it takes so you can factor this into your time management and scheduling
- If you haven't set up your home internet yet, many coffee stops and restaurants in your area might offer **free Wi-Fi**
- If you are considering purchasing an internet plan for your home, [learn more about internet services in](#)

Canada at <https://crtc.gc.ca/eng/internet/>

- **Change your weather app settings!** For Canadian weather forecasts, temperatures are measured and explained in degrees Celsius.
- Weather tip: Take particular note of the wording **“Feels like” in the weather forecast**, especially during the winter months. This temperature refers to the sudden drop in outdoor temperature when it becomes windy.
- Not sure how to budget for your new expenses and purchases (e.g. clothing, textbooks, rent, groceries, entertainment)? **Use a Financial Calculator** to create a sustainable plan – [check out U of T’s Financial Planning Calculator as an example at https://planningcalc.utoronto.ca/financialPlanner/#/](https://planningcalc.utoronto.ca/financialPlanner/#/)
- And, this is a good time to preview some of your academic requirements, your courses, readings, etc. Check out your course schedule, if you have one, and maybe try to locate and visit the relevant classrooms, preview any course outlines and syllabi, visit the campus bookstore and library. These are good ways to start getting into the mindset of school, an important part of academic resourcefulness.

“Getting here” maps from our storytellers

During our storytelling workshop, we asked Heejin, Joe, Ishita, and Stephanie about their “getting here” story. They each drew a map to represent this journey and its significance. You may have noticed their maps in the “Arriving” video above, and you’ll see them again more closely in the chapters that follow.

What would your “getting here” map look like? Consider picking up a pencil and paper and drawing your own: what places, people, choices, and significant moments would you include in your map to represent your journey, so far, as an international student?



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/academicresilience/?p=27#h5p-4>

Is it culture shock – or culture change?

You might have heard of the term “culture shock” (a model of cultural transition developed by sociologist Sverre Lysgaard in 1955¹) that is used to describe how newcomers adjust to their new homes. Regardless of whether the time period is temporary (e.g. an exchange student going abroad for a semester) or permanent (e.g. an entire family relocating for work opportunities), this model proposes there are four distinct stages that occur in sequence.

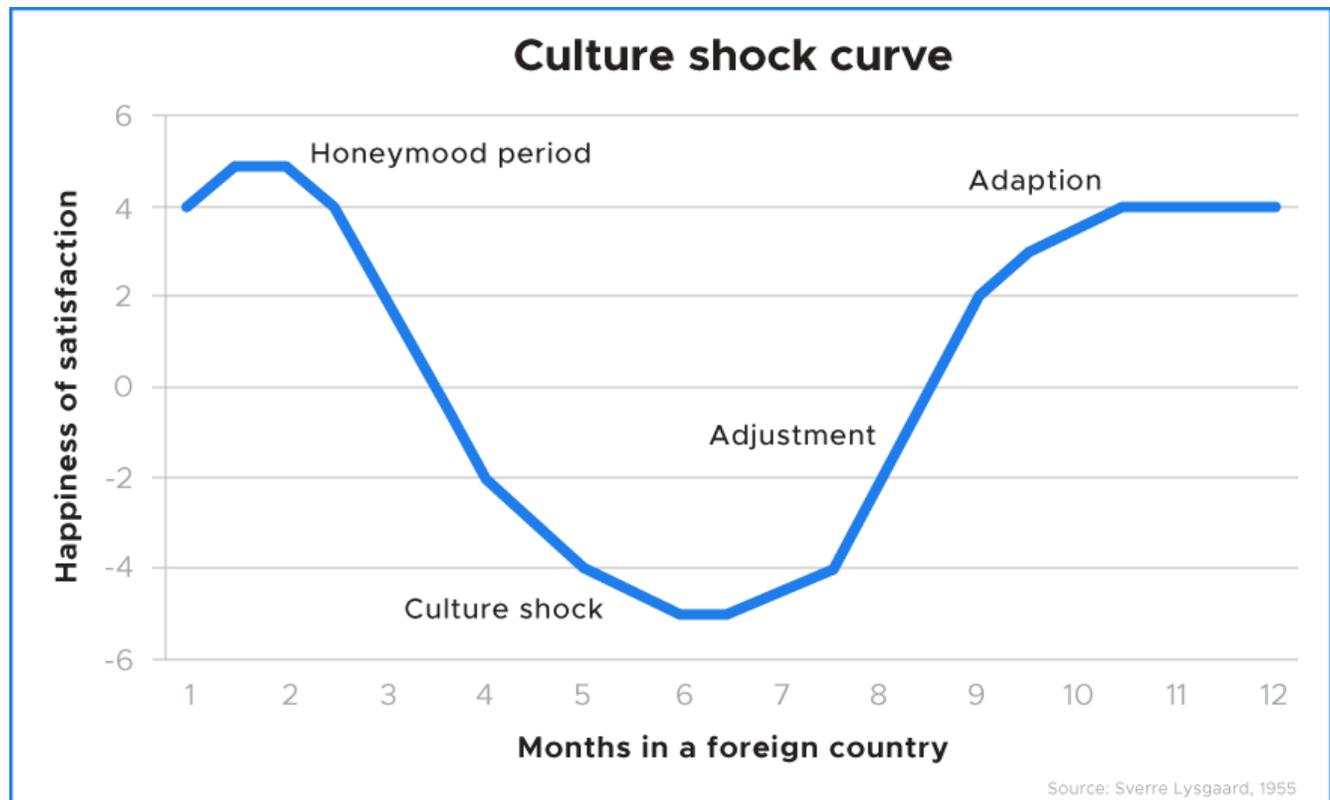


Image 2.1: Graph of the culture shock model provided by Participate Learning and originally sourced from Sverre Lysgaard, 1955.

Let’s apply this model of culture shock to the example of an international student from Senegal – named Fatima – who has recently resettled in Ottawa, Ontario. First is an initial **honeymoon period**, where Fatima has positive and fun interactions with the language(s), activities, and food in her surroundings. Then there is a **crisis** (or “shock”) period that follows, characterized by feelings of homesickness, frustration, and regret. After this, a phase of **adjustment** follows, where Fatima becomes more confident in understanding the cultural

1. Lysgaard, Sverre. 1955. “Adjustment in a Foreign Society: Norwegian Fulbright Grantees Visiting the United States.” *International Social Science Bulletin* 7:45–51.

norms of her learning environments. Finally, Fatima reaches a stage of **acceptance** (also called “adaptation”), where after a few months, the prior challenges have lessened.

It’s possible that you have experienced the above stages before or expect that your first semester in Canada will look similar. However, there are some **limitations to this model** worth noting; first, it assumes that all newcomers go through all the same phases, and it only describes these stages in terms of a person’s emotional reactions (not including shifts in their identity or skills that they are gaining).

“The U.S. is closer to Canada than other countries, so I imagine it was even more difficult for other people to move to Canada during this time. But even at this point, like the U.S. being close to Canada, through all this paperwork it made me feel like I was moving across half the world. So symbolically it felt like a very big move. But functionally, it wasn’t. That’s what I was trying to convince myself, while it was happening, and eventually I made the decision that, yes, I want to go to Canada. I’ve had so much fun on my past travels that I think I want to step outside my comfort zone and end up going somewhere new.” – Joe

Models such as these can also be too simple or predictive – for example, you might find your first few months to have both “ups” and “downs” at the same time. It’s important, then, to think about **your own personal transitions, needs, and strategies** as you adjust to the cultural differences, both in your life and at school.

The 5 Rs of Culture Change

We recommend familiarizing yourself with the 5 Rs of Culture Change, which is a **fluid and non-linear approach** to thinking about how your first few months in Canada could go. This model is by Kate Berardo², who talks about five different dimensions of cultural adjustment. Some of these shifts might be more obvious to you than others (e.g. learning the layout and street names of your city), but you might find that it will take additional time, effort, and energy to find your rhythm in others.

2. Berardo, K. (2012). “Framework: The 5Rs of Culture Change,” in K. Berardo and D. K. Deardorff (Eds.) *Building cultural competence: innovative activities and models*, (pp. 193-199). Stylus.

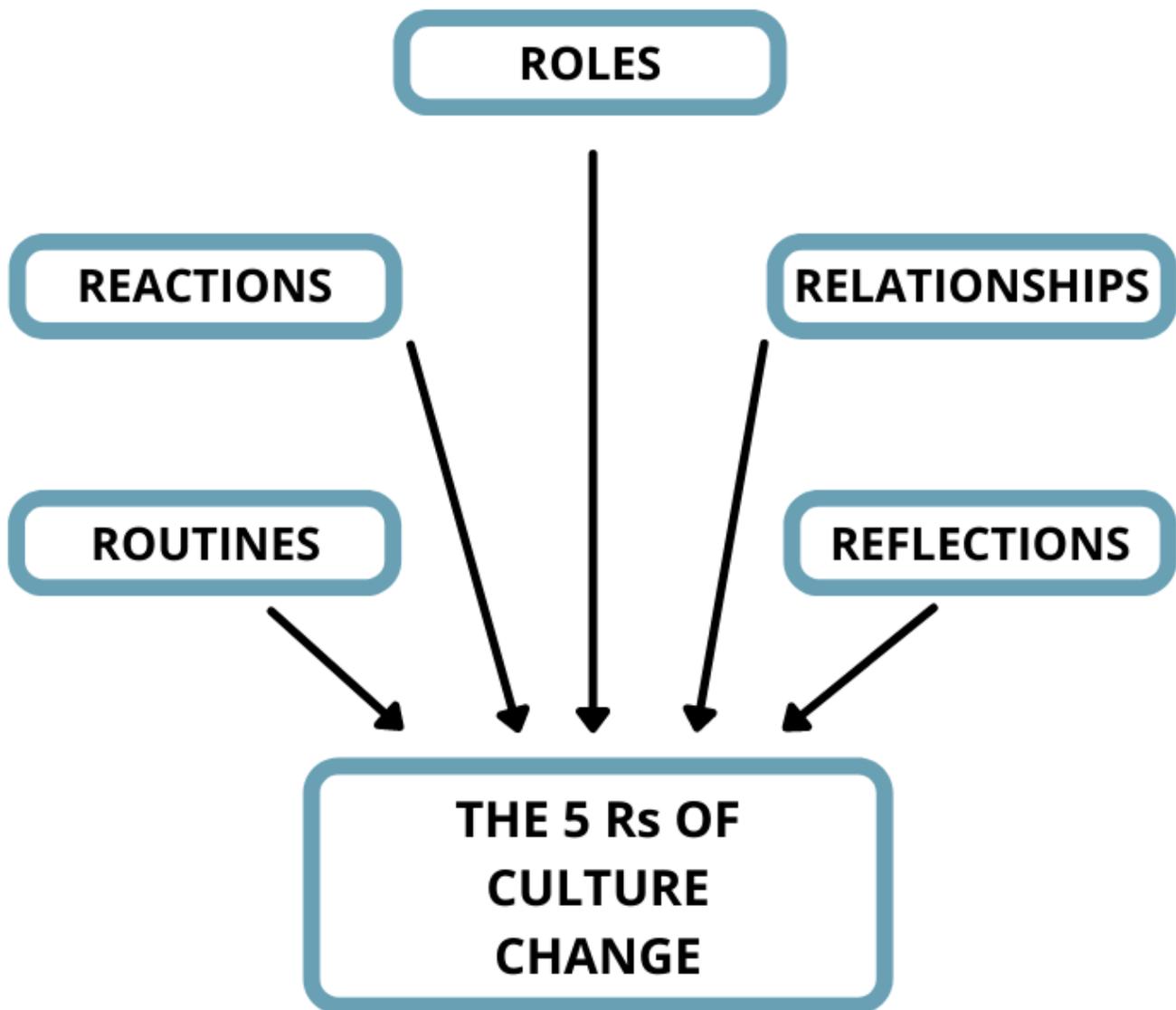


Image 2.2: Graphic displaying the 5 Rs of Culture Change

Let's once again use Fatima as an example, applying this model to her first few months living in Ottawa. [Find a text-only version of the "5 Rs of Culture Change" example in Appendix A.](#)



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/academicresilience/?p=27#h5p-13>

You might agree that Fatima’s experiences did not simply change positively over time (as suggested in the “culture shock” model), but were more **complex and required on-going reflections and adjustments**. Some of her uncertainties are still unresolved or remain ambiguous.

“[My parents] left after like two or three days, and all of a sudden, I was on my own again and I think it definitely took a few weeks for me to get used to this life. In terms of having all this independence, responsibilities to take care of myself, have free time while also doing research, classes, and teaching responsibilities.”

– Joe

As you learn more about the obvious and subtle cultural differences of your new environment, we encourage you to **be patient and self-compassionate with your progress**. If you find that your transition isn’t as smooth as you’d expected, talk to a trusted friend about it, or book an appointment with a student advisor. **Attend orientation events** if you’re able to and consider enrolling in a **study group** that is organized by your course or department. We will talk about more of these strategies and resources in the [“Adjusting” chapter](#).

Take a moment to reflect

- Previously, Joe talked about feeling like a “stranger” (or “visitor”) instead of a resident of Toronto. What language feels right for you as someone new to your Ontarian city? Does the category of **“international student”** feel like an identity, a community, or a legal status to you?
- Ishita talked about the concerns she had about making new friends but also was worried about her family back home. How will you establish **new relationships** and still maintain your existing connections?
- In a prior video, Stephanie shared that her feelings about identity have grown much more complex since moving to Canada. For example, she sees herself as more than just an

“international student”. How do you expect **your roles** to change as a student navigating a new educational environment? Which of your current roles might shift depending on your new experiences and routines?

[The next chapter: Orienting](#)

In the next chapter, “Orienting”, we’ll learn about strategies to get to know your new campus and community. [Click here to turn to the next chapter “Orienting”.](#)

ORIENTING



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/academicresilience/?p=29#oembed-1>

Can you relate?

In this chapter's videos, Ishita, Stephanie, and Joe all highlight that making friends early on and building a community were a priority for them during their first few months in Canada. Whether it's regularly connecting with an upper-year mentor for their advice or just knowing you're not the only international student facing a challenge, there are many benefits to cultivating these relationships. Creating this **support network** early on is not only valuable in preparing you for the social, cultural, and academic transitions ahead, but could result in lifelong friendships outside of the classroom as well.

"I often find myself feeling lost for a moment [so] I like to go for walks a lot. So even though I'm downtown, I've identified the main natural spaces nearby... I've identified these main green spaces nearby where I can go to clear my head. I also find myself calling either my friends back home

To begin, we recommend participating in orientation events, student associations, and related activities to meet other first-year students. Many international students and alumni share with us that the connections they made during orientation events ended up being bonds that lasted throughout their school years and beyond.

In this chapter, we will cover:

- Getting to know your campus

- Connecting with helpful people
- Attending orientation events
- Building a community

In addition – [you can find a Glossary of Terms in our Resources chapter, which includes some terms you may encounter in your first weeks studying in Ontario.](#)

***from university or my parents.
I remind myself that studying
isn't everything. I'm allowed to
take breathers every so often.”***
– Joe

Getting to know your campus

Your institution will likely provide you with a **student identification (I.D.) card** that can contain a student number, your photograph, and other key data (e.g. a login name). This card will allow you to access both physical spaces on campus (such as the library and gym) and online accounts (such as your **learning management system** and setting up your Wi-Fi). Make sure to activate this card as soon as possible, as it will likely be your entryway to all these resources and more. Check your institutional email account or paper documents that your school has sent you for instructions on how to get your card and set up any online accounts.

Before your first day, we also recommend using a **campus map** to figure out where your classes will be held, the location of your residence (if you're residing on campus), and other important spaces you'd like to visit. Sometimes your timetable will use short forms and codes to indicate the names and rooms of buildings, so check the school's official campus map for a legend (or key). And if your school campus covers a long distance, you might also want to use an online mapping platform to estimate travel time between your classes.

Tip! Keep up to date with emails from your school

It may sound obvious but get into the habit of reading or scanning all the emails sent by your institution via your official student account, especially as the semester starts up. There might be key updates or changes that your school wants to communicate to all students urgently and email is often the quickest – and the most secure – method of getting this information to you.

Reminder: Don't forget to pay your first installment of tuition fees! Check your school's **academic calendar**

to learn of deadlines to make any required payments. There might be penalties for missing this deadline (e.g. losing access to campus services and resources), so enter these dates into your calendar if you can.

Listen to Michelle describe orienting herself to something Canadians talk about a lot – the weather



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/academicresilience/?p=29#audio-29-1>

In the audio clip above, Michelle and Vurjeet talk about Michelle’s first Canadian Fall season, and how she built new habits all because of the new (unpredictable) climate she was experiencing. Listen and/or read the conversation below:

Vurjeet: Okay, so, I guess our next question is, after arriving, how did you orient, or in other words, align into your new lifestyle in Toronto, and Ontario as a whole?

Michelle: Yeah, I was really confused about the weather! And I know that... I don’t know, like closer to November, there was just one day that’s really cold, like the temperature just dropped. And then people were saying, “Oh, it’s finally Fall”, it’s, you know, “The leaves are going to change colours.” And I was really excited because you don’t really see those, especially in Southeast Asia, you don’t really see the change of colours of the leaves. So I was really excited. And they did change, especially around campus, to yellow and orange. I was really excited, really happy.

Vurjeet: Yeah, beautiful!

Michelle: Really beautiful, really happy. So weather was something that I was constantly thinking about in the morning, like, the first thing I do right now is check the weather. Like – is it gonna rain? Is it gonna snow? Especially because now it’s winter, right? But even, even in the beginning, I was constantly thinking about how the weather is going to be today. Because it’s so unpredictable. You can be hot in the morning and really cold at night. So I was like, oh, okay.

Vurjeet: It seems like you kind of had to align, align with the environment change, like literally explicitly – like, the weather change!

Michelle: Yeah, I I had to like change. I had to change a lot of my habits when I realized, “Oh, the

weather here is pretty unpredictable.” Like I need to think about what I need to wear in the morning. I have to check the weather. So that’s something I like the habit of checking the weather app has been, I don’t know aligned, accustomed into my daily life.

Vurjeet: Right, I like that!

Connecting with helpful people

As a student, you will likely be sent information from your **Registrar’s Office** (which could also be called Office of the Registrar or Student Registration Office) regarding your course enrolment, fee payments, academic policies, graduation and convocation dates, and other important information regarding your studies. This office will offer many other services to students such as academic advising, financial aid and advice, and other guidance. If you ever have any urgent questions – or are facing any barriers regarding your experience as a student – reach out to the staff at this office to book an appointment or to access related services.

During your first few weeks, you will likely be very busy managing your courses, attending orientation events, and participating in social events. As well, you might want to **connect with the staff or peer mentors** who work at libraries, academic skills centres, student life offices, and student organizations (e.g. unions or clubs). Many of these offices will offer individual appointments or group information sessions to help you get organized and prepared for the upcoming semester. Sign up for and attend a few workshops – you might learn about helpful tips or strategies to make your first few weeks go more smoothly.

And if you’re ever unsure about who to contact or where to start, review the emails you’ve received directly from your institution, especially your letter of offer. There will likely be a “Contact Us” or “Questions?” section with e-mail, phone, and/or website information that indicates which office is best suited to support your initial questions (or to refer you to the right place).



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/academicresilience/?p=29#oembed-2>

Attending orientation activities

Orientation refers to the activities and events that take place at colleges and universities at the beginning of each academic year to support first-year students in their adjustments. These events can be academic, social, or a mix of the two – the intention is to create a welcoming and informative experience for incoming students to learn more about their chosen school of study for the next few years.

At some schools, orientation might take place over a compressed and intensive period (e.g. a few days or a short week); at other bigger institutions, these events might take place over the months of August and September. And you might even discover that there are events specifically held for international students such as yourself! And you will find that some sessions are offered online whereas others are designed for an in-person experience.

Orientation activities and events can be organized by staff and student staff at the institution, but also can be offered independently by student-led groups and organizations. There might also be orientation events specific to students living in residence or studying within a specific academic program.

We encourage you to participate in these events in whatever way you can. While you likely won't want to or be able to attend all of them, having a variety of different orientation experiences will help you learn about the different services, communities, and organizations that exist on your campus. There might also be fun perks to attending orientation, like receiving gift bags or a free lunch! And although orientation events primarily assist students in navigating their academic journeys, they also provide space to meet other students also starting their programs. If, for whatever reason, an event feels inaccessible to you, let the organizers know. They will have made every effort to host fully accessible events, but they may have overlooked something and would welcome your feedback.

For some international students, engaging in orientation activities can feel intimidating. Perhaps you feel shy because you're not familiar with the pop culture references made by students in your classes. Maybe you're worried about your confidence in communicating as someone who uses English as an additional language. Or it could be that being in large group settings isn't your favourite way to meet new people.

These are all valid concerns, but just remember that there will be many other international students attending these events who are new to the city like you, most of them speaking a first or dominant language that is not English. Also keep in mind that there is no such thing as a perfect or good English, as there are countless varieties, dialects, and accents that are all valid ways to communicate! And if you find it helpful, plan to arrive at events with a trusted friend, classmate, or roommate so you always have someone to chat with.

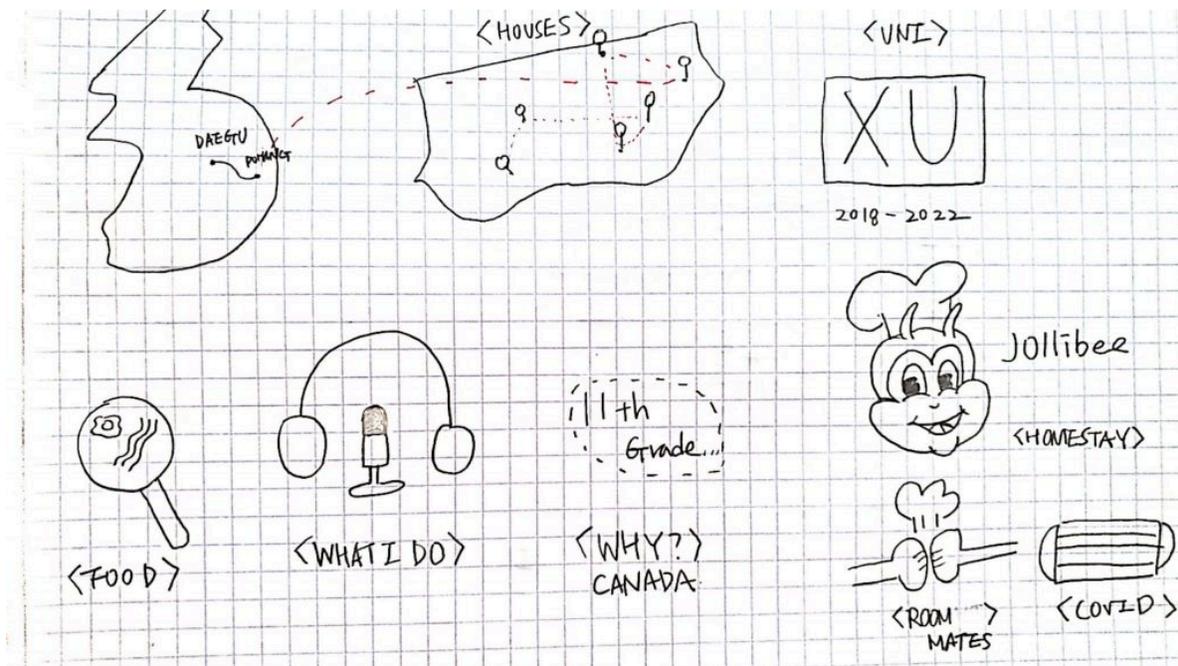


Image 3.1: Heejin's map tells her story of transition, challenge, and expanding interests. Heejin spent her first year in Canada living in a Filipino homestay, after which she moved around a lot in her new city. During COVID lockdowns Heejin encountered challenges with roommates which reminded her of the precarious nature of her international status, causing her to be uncertain about her future after university. Initially interested in pursuing Journalism, today as a Media Production student Heejin is focusing on her audio production skills.

Building a community

The term “international student” will likely have different meanings or associations for you and your peers. In terms of a person’s legal status, it refers to a student who has obtained a study permit to pursue post-secondary education in Canada. But would you say that it can describe a type or sense of community as well?

International students studying in Canada originate from numerous nations around the world, speak hundreds of various languages, have vastly different life experiences, and hold knowledge in countless subject areas. So perhaps it would be a simplistic overgeneralization to suggest that these students are all part of the same group.

However, on your specific campus, you will probably encounter student groups, and advisory committees who define themselves as an “international student community”. Some unions might formally represent an international student “voice” by having a formal membership and advocating for their members’ needs. Other organizations could decide that organizing fun and social gatherings is a great way to lessen feelings of homesickness and isolation. It could be said, then, that while international students are diverse in their identities, their observations and reflections about migrating to Canada might overlap and serve as a shared commonality for community-building.

In the second video included in this chapter, Joe feels that “international student” can be understood as a community because there are unique experiences, challenges, or needs that are specific to this status. For example, international students have different responsibilities than their domestic peers in terms of maintaining their immigration status (e.g. renewing their study permit). You might find that fellow international students can relate to your observations and frustrations because they are going through similar cycles of cultural change and transition.

That said, you might also want to explore different aspects of your identity and other interests you have beyond the “international” category. We also suggest learning about the various student associations on campus (e.g. a photography club or bird-watching group), but also engaging with communities off-campus. If you’re a movie lover, consider volunteering at the local film festival to meet other **cinephiles**. Or if you want to develop your professional skills outside of the classroom, you could research internships or co-op opportunities that you might be eligible for over the summer months.

Finally, remember that community can be formed with fellow classmates around your shared academic interests. In fact, studying with others in some sort of shared way is a highly effective way to learn and engage deeply in your studies. Look for study groups, or form your own, seek out other classmates who like to discuss the subject matter, and find opportunities to discuss academic work with students from other disciplines. You can learn a lot that way and remind yourself that there are other perspectives and ways of learning that exist in these disciplines. Academic study is the primary reason you are here and finding ways to engage with others in discussion and intellectual inquiry is the greatest tradition of higher education.

In whatever way that you decide to find community and make new friends, we encourage you to experiment and step outside of your comfort zone. And if you’re ever unsure about the multiple possibilities of how to do this, ask the upper-year students about their experiences and recommendations. Whether they’re an international student or not, they’ll likely have great tips and wisdom to share!

Take a moment to reflect

- Previously, Joe talked about feeling like a “stranger” (or “visitor”) instead of a resident of Toronto. What language feels right for you as someone new to your Ontario city? Does the category of “international student” feel like an identity, a community, or a legal status to you?
- Think about the student clubs or groups that you participated in during your high school or previous schooling. Which ones did you enjoy the most and why? What types of communities would you like to participate in at your new institution?

[The next chapter: Adjusting](#)

In the next chapter, we discuss “adjusting” to learning at colleges and universities in Ontario. [Click here to turn to the next chapter: Adjusting.](#)

5.

ADJUSTING



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/academicresilience/?p=31#oembed-1>

Can you relate?

As Heejin says, there is so much for you to be proud of in this journey: you have moved to a new country, you are building meaningful connections with new people, and you are immersing yourself in new ways of learning.

You likely have many questions, and you may be experiencing some unease as you begin your studies. In this chapter, learn how you can adjust to post-secondary learning as an international student by:

- Understanding learning at colleges and universities
- Building a routine for life and learning
- Developing your academic resourcefulness
- Accessing appropriate resources of support

Understanding learning at colleges and universities

As an international student in Canada, you are arriving with many learning strengths. These strengths will help you adjust to new ways of learning and help you manage some common challenging experiences:

- You will be learning more advanced content
- You will be learning in a new culture with different expectations
- You may not know the available resources of support

As you tackle these challenges, we encourage you to stay curious, practice self-compassion, and ask for help from those around you.

***"I did one term online...and it was a different experience because I've never done education through online platforms, so it was a really new experience."*– Ishita**



Image 4.1: Joe's getting here map includes symbols that represent his home life, his desire to find nature wherever he can, the big choices that led him to new places and perspectives, and his journey crossing borders to arrive at graduate school in Canada. Joe began his international exploration early, enjoying educational trips abroad during secondary school and his undergraduate studies. These early experiences expanded his worldview and fueled his desire to pursue a graduate degree internationally.

Level up your learning: Bloom's Taxonomy

Learning at colleges and universities can be different from your previous experiences. You will be asked to level up your learning and engage in more advanced ways of thinking. One way to demonstrate this difference is Bloom's Taxonomy, which represents different levels of thinking.¹ It is a great way for you to take control of your own learning as you adjust to your studies.

Bloom's is represented as a hierarchy, from simpler thinking tasks to more complex thinking tasks. But it's also helpful to think of this as a thinking process – where each more advanced thinking task incorporates the previous step. Click each + sign on the image below to learn more about each stage in the process. You may also [find Bloom's Taxonomy explained in text-only in the Appendix](#).



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/academicresilience/?p=31#h5p-16>

You might be used to thinking about learning as remembering or understanding a concept. But at colleges and universities, you will be asked to apply what you learn in class in new situations and use that information to solve new problems. Bloom's is helpful because it shows us that **learning is active and depends on different thinking tasks**.^{2,3}

A snapshot of learning at universities and colleges

In the table below, compare and contrast some elements of learning at universities and colleges in Ontario

-
1. Armstrong, P. (2010). Bloom's Taxonomy. Vanderbilt University Center for Teaching. Retrieved August 12, 2021 from <https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/blooms-taxonomy/>
 2. McGuire, S. Y. (2018). *Teach yourself how to learn: Strategies you can use to ace any course at any level*. Stylus.
 3. Armstrong, 2010.

Table 4.1: Snapshot of learning at universities and colleges in Ontario

Universities	Colleges
Focus on research-based learning, designed to prepare you for expertise in your discipline.	Focus on specialized practical learning, intended to prepare you for a profession or trade.
Provide you with a body of knowledge in your field and encourage you to be critical, flexible, and creative in your thinking.	Provide you with the skills, knowledge, and practical experience to enter the workforce or to prepare for further post-secondary education.
Ask you to not just explain the ideas or skills you learn, but to solve problems and critique and formulate new ideas.	Ask you to not just recognize the ideas and skills you learn, but to think critically about these ideas as you apply them in practical ways.

Pause and reflect: Consider the levels presented in this model. In your previous schooling, which level do you think you were operating at? What level of Bloom's do you think you need to reach in order to do well in the courses you are currently taking at your college or university?⁴

You are in charge of your own learning

“It definitely took a few weeks for me to get used to this life, in terms of having all this independence. I have responsibilities to take care of myself, have free time, do research, classes, and teaching responsibilities.” – Joe

In colleges and universities, you are in charge of your own learning. Some of the differences in how you manage your time and learning in college/university compared to secondary school are represented in the table below:

4. McGuire, 2018.

Table 4.2: Differences between structure and learning differences between high school and college/university

Structure and Learning in High School	Structure and Learning in Colleges and Universities
<p>You attend on average 6 hours a day, 5 days a week in class.</p>	<p>You might have as few as 12 hours a week in class and will have to learn independently by reviewing course materials.</p>
<p>You might get reminders and help from teachers in planning your studying and preparing your assignments.</p>	<p>You are expected to develop your own study schedule and keep track of assignment due dates.</p>
<p>You might have limited choice as to the subjects and disciplines you study.</p>	<p>You can choose from a wide variety of courses within your subject area and other fields.</p>
<p>Your class schedule is decided for you.</p>	<p>You can often choose your own class schedule.</p>
<p>You might have more one-to-one time with your teacher to discuss your learning.</p>	<p>You have to seek out your own support from the resources available to you.</p>

In nearly all post-secondary programs, you are expected to do most of your work outside of class time. The **study cycle** is a great way to think about how you might engage with your courses. Click the + icons on the cycle image below to learn about each step. [You can also find the study cycle explained in text-only in Appendix A.](#)



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/academicresilience/?p=31#h5p-15>

Students sometimes describe their first year at a college or university like a “train that keeps moving.” You have to keep track of your regular course work, like weekly readings and reviewing your notes, while also preparing for assignments and tests. The scope and scale of post-secondary learning means you can’t leave work to the last minute.⁵

So, how can you manage?

Pause, reflect, and seek support: Remember you are always learning – you have to pause and reflect on what you’ve achieved and explore the resources available to you. Remember, strong students seek support!

Tend to your whole self: Remember that while your studies are important, you are more than just a student! You have other needs and desires – so think about how to find balance by exploring your non-academic interests, taking care of your physical health through sleep, nutrition, and exercise, take care of your spiritual and emotional needs by connecting with friends or a faith community.

Create a system and manage your energy: With so much work, you might feel overwhelmed. It’s important to write things down and use a tool like a schedule or a calendar to identify your tasks and the time you have available. Explore the academic skills resources at your university or college – most will have time management workshops and handouts to help you build a routine.

“Find a community you can relate to”



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/academicresilience/?p=31#audio-31-1>

In the above audio clip, Michelle says: “Find a community that you can relate to, like a community that you don’t have to make many cultural changes to – because for me, it’s my Malaysian Singaporean Students Association. And the reason why I said that you have to find a community that you don’t have to adjust too much for is because there are things that you’re going to miss back home, and then there are some things that you just can’t change, no matter how hard you’re trying. So it’s good to have a community that can support you unconditionally.”

Building a routine for life and learning

As you adjust, it’s important to build a realistic routine for your life and learning. This can help you prioritize tasks and can help you stay organized so you can learn more effectively.

Time management versus energy management

Students are always looking to develop their time management skills. But you cannot really manage time; you can only try to manage yourself over time. This means you should consider which tasks deplete your energy and which activities give you energy as you develop a routine. Your routine must be dynamic and flexible to account for the different learning tasks and life needs you have – which often change week-to-week.⁶

6. Dawson, P. & Guare, R. (2016). *The Smart But Scattered Guide to Success: How to Use Your Brain’s Executive Skills to Keep Up, Stay Calm, and Get Organized at Work and at Home*. Guilford Publications.

Three steps to build a routine

Step 1: Create a big picture plan

Map out your work. Your semester likely runs for 3 or 4 months at your college or university. Use a **monthly calendar** and map out all your work, your due dates, and any important life events.

Identify the crunch periods in the semester when you have multiple assignments due. Ask yourself: what can I work on ahead of time to prepare for these busy times?

Step 2: Create a schedule template

Students often have difficulty sticking to a schedule, usually because it is inflexible. Instead of creating a rigid schedule, create a **schedule template** that can help you make decisions as to what tasks you have to complete in a given week.

Use a digital calendar or [download the University of Toronto Weekly Schedule Template \(PDF\)](#) to create your own.

Tip! It's more than just studying, studying, studying

Remember, you are not a computer! (And even computers need to recharge.) You have needs other than just studying. Make time in your schedule for socializing, movement, rest, and fun.



*One or more
interactive elements*

Start your schedule by mapping out non-negotiables:

- Sleep, eating (and meal prep, if you are not in a residence), exercise
- Chatting with friends and family at home (be aware of time differences)
- Attending classes, online lectures, tutorials, and practicums

Now, add study time.

- Your study blocks should account for your energy peaks and lows. Ask yourself: when do I have the most energy? When do I have the least energy?
- Add blocks of time to preview, review, and prepare for your assignments.
- As you adjust to the first few weeks of classes, try to track yourself and see how long the work takes for each course. You'll then be able to create a more realistic schedule template.

Step 3: Separate planning your work from doing your work.

Think of yourself as your own administrative assistant and carve out some time each week to plan your studying.

- Choose a time once a week to plan your work
- Check in at the start of the day
- Check in at the end of the day

[Explore more strategies to manage your time and set goals at the University of Toronto's Academic Success website](#), or search for your college or university's academic support unit website for resources.

Develop your academic resourcefulness

This new journey is going to be full of opportunities and excitement as you learn more about yourself and your discipline. But it will also be full of new challenges. It can be easy to feel defeated in the face of new challenges. Instead, think about how you can develop your academic resourcefulness.

What does it mean to be resourceful? Academic resourcefulness is your ability as a student to find ways to manage academic challenges. It is a skill you can develop and will be helpful as you adjust to college or university learning.

Why do you need academic resourcefulness? Because post-secondary learning is difficult! Learning at colleges and universities is designed to expand your knowledge and skills and is, therefore, designed to challenge you as you grow and learn.

has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here:
<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/academicresilience/?p=31#audio-31-2>

In the audio clip above, Michelle says “I feel like as an international student, I mean, there is the financial perspective, like financial pressure that you bring with you. But I think some people, because of the financial pressure, they are tunneled into this perspective of trying to get good grades only. And I think adjustment to a new country, or to university itself, it becomes more than just studying and studying and studying.”

Academic resourcefulness asks you to:⁷

- Understand yourself and your needs
- Devise a plan to tackle an academic challenge
- Successfully navigate and access available resources of support
- Acknowledge the emotional experience of academic challenges
- Learn and grow from your experiences

7. Kennett, D. J., Reed, M. J., & Stuart, A. S. (2013). The impact of reasons for attending university on academic resourcefulness and adjustment. *Active Learning in Higher Education, 14*(2), 123-133.

You can develop your
academic resourcefulness



Image 4.2: Know yourself and access resources

Challenges are inevitable – and important

As mentioned above, as you adjust to learning you are going to face challenges. You might find it challenging to keep up with work, you might do poorly on an assignment or test, or you might take some time to meet new expectations.

“You can mess up your

When faced with challenges, keep some things in mind:

midterm. Guess what? Canadians mess up their midterms all the time. They fail, too, you know?" – Heejin

- **Academic challenges are hard:** Acknowledge the emotional impact of academic challenges
- **Academic challenges will happen:** Recognize that challenges are a part of life and learning
- **Academic challenges are important:** Understand that challenges tell us there is room to grow

Reflect on your strengths. Think back to a time when you overcame an academic challenge. What strengths or skills did you use? What support did you access? What can you learn from this experience that will help you in this new learning journey?

When faced with challenges, use your available resources to help you through tough times. These are internal resources – like our strengths and our positive attitude – or our external resources – like our friends, instructors, or other supports.

Embrace a “Growth Mindset”

Another way to manage academic challenges is to embrace a growth mindset. Scientists used to believe that our brains stopped growing after childhood. But we now know that the brain continues to grow – it is plastic (hence the term neuroplasticity). The brain changes all the time and throughout our lives. Our brains are built to learn and change.

[To learn more about neuroplasticity, check out the video by Sentis Brain Animation at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ELpfYCZa87g>](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ELpfYCZa87g)

Growth mindset allows us to embrace this fact: that we can learn from our effort and that our intelligence isn't fixed but can develop. This is important to remember when you experience new challenges in your learning.⁸

How can you practice a growth mindset? Embrace the power of “yet” – just because you haven't learned something or are not good at something right away, doesn't mean you won't

8. Dweck, C. S. (2008). *Mindset: The new psychology of success*. Random House Digital, Inc

get there. When you face an obstacle add the word “yet” – e.g., if you haven’t learned new theories or skills in your classes think to yourself that you haven’t learned them yet.⁹

But remember, it’s not magic. The idea of growth mindset, like many things, can be misunderstood. Just remember, belief about your ability to learn new, challenging things is a good thing. But it does not mean that anybody can achieve anything just by having the right attitude. There is no substitute for hard work and perseverance. Yet, we have to be realistic about what is possible for us based on our prior knowledge and the resources we have available to us. We’re just human.

Watch and reflect

Watch the following TEDtalk by Dr. Carol Dweck who discusses “Growth Mindset”.



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/academicresilience/?p=31#oembed-2>

Reflect on how you can cultivate an attitude of curiosity and enthusiasm for learning:

- Was there anything in the video that surprised you? Was there anything you reacted to?
- What have you told yourself about your successes in the past? What have you told yourself about your academic challenges or failures?
- Think about a challenge you are currently experiencing – it could be the challenges you face adjusting to your university or college as an international student. How can you reframe that challenge using a growth mindset?

Accessing appropriate resources of support

What can get in the way when asking for help? As a new international student, you may feel like you want

9. Dweck, C. S., and Yeager, D. S. (2019). Mindsets: A view from two eras. *Perspectives on Psychological science*, 14(3), 481-496.

to solve an academic challenge by yourself and may experience shame or guilt when asking for support. **But it's important to remember:**

- Someone else has very likely faced the exact same challenge as you – you are not alone!
- It is the job of staff and faculty members at your institution to offer support and answer questions. They want you to reach out!
- The earlier you reach out, the earlier you can address your academic challenges and explore supports
- As mentioned earlier in this chapter, successful students ask for help!

Let's discuss a few resources of support and which are appropriate and which to be wary of.

University and College support services

Your university or college will have academic, **co-curricular**, and wellness services and offices that you can access. These are usually covered in the fees you pay as part of your tuition. You will likely find:

- Academic skills centres
- Accessibility or accommodation offices for students living with a disability and/or a health condition that impacts learning
- Aid centres for Math or other subjects
- Health and wellness centres
- Housing and residence support services
- International student and immigration services
- Libraries and research support
- Sports and recreation facilities and activities
- University- or college-approved peer tutoring programs
- Writing centres

As discussed in our [Orienting chapter](#), a great place to begin is by connecting with the international student support office dedicated to helping international students.

When your health is impacting your learning

What do you notice about yourself when you feel unwell?

- Is your sleep impacted?
- What is your appetite like?
- Do you feel tired or unmotivated?

Our health is key to our learning. It is important to recognize when you are feeling unwell and to connect with supports at your college or university. These supports might include a friendly mentor or staff person, a doctor or nurse, or a counsellor.

If your health is continually impacting your learning, you may be eligible for special consideration for your courses. Seek support from the accessibility or academic accommodations office at your university or college.

Communicating with instructors and teaching assistants

Your professors, instructors, and teaching assistants are great resources to ask for help when you need it. In some cultures, it might be inappropriate or rude to ask for further clarification or to ask for help from a professor or instructor. But talking to your professor, instructor, or teaching assistant can help you build your academic skills:

- Most professors, instructors, and teaching assistants will have dedicated office hours – this is usually the best time to talk to them.
- You can get clarification on an idea or concept taught in class. Start by attempting your homework and reviewing assigned readings. Then take any questions you have to your instructor during their scheduled office hours.

Find a delicate balance between informality and formality with your professors, instructors, and teaching assistants. Our advice is to lead with formality and take cues from them. Address professors and instructors as “professor” and teaching assistants either with an honorific “Mr., Ms.” or by their first name.

Be wary of non-sanctioned tutoring and academic support services

As a new student, you want to do well. There are many off-campus tutoring and academic support services for students that advertise that they can help you achieve academic success. **We advise you to be cautious of these services and first try to access the available services at your college or university.** You can ask a staff member or an instructor to provide guidance on appropriate services and avoid services that provide answers or help you complete your academic work. The table below shares some advice about which tutoring practices to avoid.¹⁰

10. University of Toronto Mississauga. (2022). Tutoring: Issues to Consider. *The University of Toronto Mississauga Academic Integrity*. Retrieved 12 January 2022 from <https://www.utm.utoronto.ca/academic-integrity/students/tutoring-issues-consider>.

Table 4.3: Acceptable tutoring practices vs. Tutoring practices to avoid

Acceptable tutoring practices	Tutoring practices to avoid
Studying with a peer in your class or a group.	Sharing answers online or solving homework problems, answering questions, or writing assignments that are assessed individually.
Getting support from tutors not affiliated with your college or university so you can better understand ideas in your courses.	Having tutors complete all or part of your essay, homework, or problem set.
Getting tutoring support from someone who speaks your first language.	Using a translation service or software to translate an assessed assignment into English.

Academic integrity

Academic integrity is an essential part of university and college learning. Your institution will have a policy that outlines how it expects students to complete coursework, highlighting the importance of honesty, fairness, and responsibility.

The concepts of academic integrity or plagiarism – or taking someone else’s work and passing them off as your own – are often new to students as they adjust to university and college learning.

Here are some tips for supporting your own academic integrity:¹¹

- Do not share answers on assessments, tests, and marked assignments
- Do not present the ideas of others as your own
- Do not reuse course work you have previously submitted
- Give credit to the sources you use in your assignments
- Learn from your instructors or teaching assistants about how to cite properly
- Follow rules for your tests and exams and use only approved aids
- Know the rules in your course about group work

Listen to Michelle’s advice about getting involved



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/academicresilience/?p=31#audio-31-3>

In the audio clip above, Michelle tells Vurjeet about why she thinks it is important as an international student to get involved as part of the adjustment experience. Listen and/or read the conversation below:

Vurjeet: Okay, let’s go forward with adjusting. So, um, how did you learn to settle and adjust into your new life?

11. University of Toronto Mississauga, 2022

Michelle: Of course, I thought about this a lot, like getting involved. I would say, getting involved more. And, some people have a more shy personality, and it will be hard to, you know, put yourself out there. But the truth is, if you're an international student, and you're coming to a new place, just think – it's good to have a mindset that, oh, I'm starting a new, like, I can build new habits I can –

Vurjeet: Fresh start!

Michelle: You can you can have a fresh start. You can put yourself out there, you can try different things, try different – not only try different restaurants and try different places, but try different activities, try things that you've never tried before. Meet people that you've never, you know, like, meet new people. And I think those are really important. It's not the – it's, there's no like, big, umbrella that you know, can describe what you should do, but it's just doing those little things will help you to make your adjustment easier.

Take a moment to reflect and take some “Adjusting” steps

What stood out to you in this chapter, and what will you take forward with you?

Why not put this book down now and take a few minutes to find two relevant support resources on your campus that you think might be helpful to you. Find their websites or, better yet, go directly to their offices and learn where they are on campus.

[The next chapter: Engaging](#)

Next, we discuss the various ways you can deepen your international experience through meaningful engagement with your learning and communities. [Click here to turn to the next chapter, Engaging.](#)

6.

ENGAGING



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Can you relate?

While getting good grades is important, there are other ways to think about academic success besides your grade point average.

You might think about academic success as the acquisition of knowledge and skills in your discipline or it could be satisfaction with your tests and assignments. You may also find academic success in the connections you make between your interests and your schoolwork or by forming meaningful relationships with your instructors and with other students.¹²

To achieve academic success, it is important to become an **engaged learner** – to be active and motivated in your learning. In this chapter, you can explore becoming an engaged learner by:

- Paying attention to dimensions of academic success

1. Goegan, L. D., and Daniels, L. M. (2019). Academic success for students in postsecondary education: The role of student characteristics and experiences. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*, 23(3), 659-685.

2. Kuh, G. D. (2008). Why integration and engagement are essential to effective educational practice in the twenty-first century. *Peer Review*, 10(4), 27-29.

- Building motivation to learn effectively
- Gaining confidence as a multilingual student

Dimensions of academic success

What is learning?

In the last chapter, we explored what learning is like in colleges and universities. We used **Bloom's Taxonomy** to think about more advanced thinking tasks. To explore becoming an engaged learner, let's start with an exploration of learning more generally.

Learning is an active process that results in a change in our knowledge, skills, or behaviour. This process takes place when we perceive, read, experience, or hear a new piece of information, which integrates with or changes what we already know. Learning is what happens in the space between what you know and what you don't know.³

Metacognition

Many students believe that in order to do well in their studies they have to work harder. Effort is of course essential to academic success. However, because learning happens at the edge of what you know, approaching academic work the same way you always have might not help you achieve success. Learning about **metacognition** and implementing effective strategies can help you do well.

Metacognition is our ability to examine our own thoughts and feelings. It is the ability to:

- Think about your own thinking
- Become self-aware as a problem-solver
- Monitor, plan, and control your thinking

3. Ambrose, S. A. et al. (2010). *How learning works: Seven research-based principles for smart teaching*. John Wiley & Sons.

Metacognition can help you accurately judge how deeply you have learned something – to figure out whether you are understanding the material or just memorizing it.⁴

Schedule time throughout the semester to reflect on your learning and ask yourself:⁵

- What was the easiest concept or idea I learned this week? Why?
- What was the most challenging concept or idea I learned this week? Why?
- What strategies worked well as I prepared for my last test or exam?
- What strategies didn't work as well as I prepared for my last test or exam?



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Four dimensions of academic success

Consider four key dimensions of academic success. Building your proficiency in each of these areas can help you become an **engaged learner**:

1. Effective study and learning practices
2. Time management, routine, and habits
3. Mindset and self-awareness
4. Connecting with community

1: Effective study practices

Students usually believe that spending many hours studying is the best way to do well. However, research suggests that highly successful students don't necessarily spend more time studying but instead engage in

4. McGuire, 2018.

5. Price-Mitchell, M. (2015, April 7). "Metacognition: Nurturing Self-Awareness in the Classroom." *Edutopia*. Retrieved December 9, 2021, from <https://www.edutopia.org/blog/8-pathways-metacognition-in-classroom-marilyn-price-mitchell>

effective study practices. In the table below is a comparison between some common and effective study practices:⁶

6. Smith, M. & Weinstein, Y. (2021). Six Strategies for Effective Learning. *The Learning Scientists*. Retrieved Jan 18, 2021, from <https://www.learningscientists.org/blog/2016/8/18-1>

Table 5.1: Common versus effective study practices

Common study practices	Effective study practices
<p>Cramming: Many students mass all their studying in a short amount of time – e.g., cramming their review of course material right before a test or exam.</p>	<p>Spaced practice: The science of learning tells us that spacing our studying practice over longer periods of time throughout the semester helps us learn better. You can do this by reviewing any new information you learn a few days after you learn it and then about a week or so after that.</p>
<p>Passive reading: Many students read their textbooks and lecture notes passively – taking occasional notes or highlighting important passages.</p>	<p>Active retrieval: We learn best when we retrieve information from our memory. You can engage in active retrieval by putting away class materials, writing or sketching everything you know, and then checking your notes for accuracy.</p>
<p>Restudying: Many students restudy or look over material from their courses when preparing for tests and exams.</p>	<p>Self-testing: Using past tests or chapter questions and testing yourself helps us learn better. We can find out where there are gaps in our knowledge and where we have strengths.</p>

2. Time management, routine, and habits

We explore building an effective routine and [the Study Cycle in the “Adjusting” chapter](#). It’s important to spend time planning your work. Here are some questions you can ask yourself:

- Do I use a tool – a calendar, a to-do list, or an app – to identify how much time I have available each week to do my work?
- Do I have enough time for my learning?
- Is my routine working for me to balance my academic and personal needs?

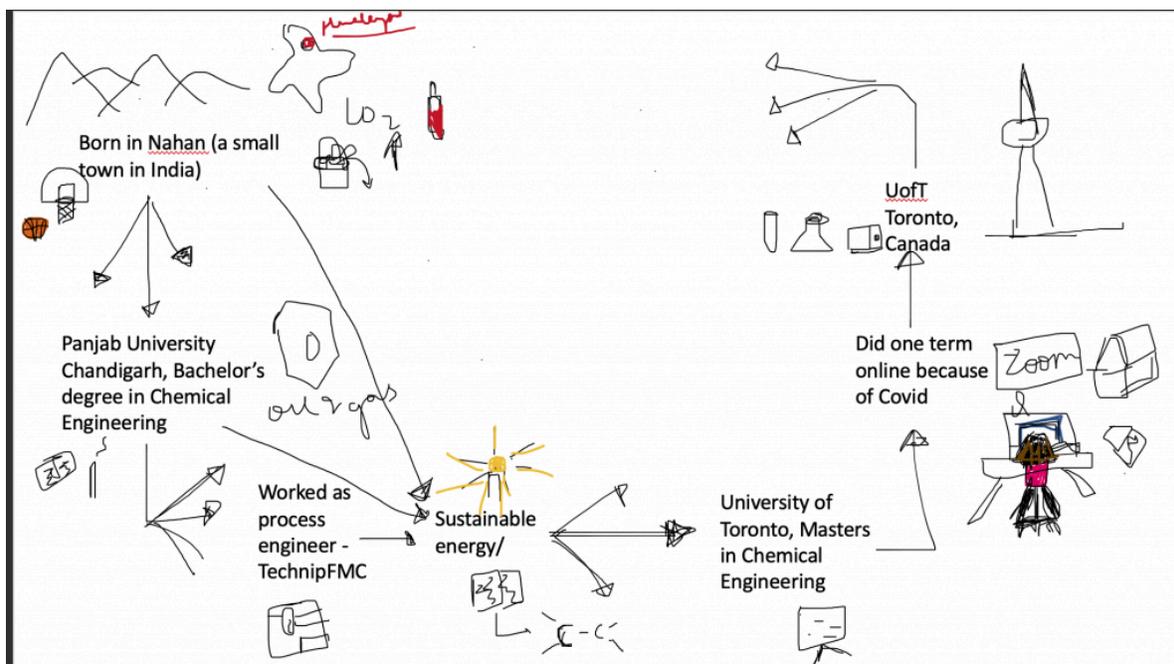


Image 5.1: Growing up in a small town in India influenced Ishita's desire to study sustainable energy solutions, as she witnessed the changes and challenges brought on by climate change; after working in the industry, Ishita decided to pursue graduate study. She arrived in Canada at just the right time, between pandemic-related border lockdowns and restrictions, even though it meant she was worried about her family back home in India. Ishita says making friends and connections is challenging during remote learning, so she values the resources provided by the university to support her transition.

3. Mindset and self-awareness

“I was calling Good2Talk, which is a mental health hotline, one day, and then I was talking to her about my international experience in Canada and I told her I moved here basically like when I was 16 and then she said, “You know, some people don’t even know how to do laundry or they don’t know how to cook eggs and then you moved to another country, you should take more credit for that.” I feel like everyone should remember that – that we are allowed to take more credit and be proud of ourselves.” – Heejin

Every now and then, pay attention to your own attitude about things. It’s important to focus on your tasks and the work you need to do, but it’s also important to attend to your overall perspective about being a student, your confidence, purpose, support network, etc. Ask yourself things like:

- Do I believe in my ability to be successful?
- Can I surround myself with support – like friends, family, mentors – to encourage me when things might be difficult?
- Am I kind to myself when I experience difficulty?

Pause and reflect with a Self-compassion exercise: How would you treat a friend? (by Dr. Kristin Neff)⁷

When experiencing academic difficulty, reflect on the following questions:

1. Think about the times when a close friend has felt bad about themselves and struggled in some way. How would you respond to your friend in this situation? Write down what you would typically do and say and note the tone in which you typically talk to your friends when

7. Neff, K. (2021). Exercise 1: How would you treat a friend? *Self-Compassion Practices*. Retrieved December 9, 2021, from <https://self-compassion.org/exercise-1-treat-friend/>

they are struggling.

2. Now think about the times when you feel bad about yourself or are struggling. How do you typically respond to yourself in these situations? Write down what you typically do and what you say and note the tone in which you talk to yourself.
3. Did you notice a difference? If so, ask yourself why you treat yourself and others so differently?
4. Write down how you think things might change if you responded to yourself in the same way you typically respond to a close friend when you are experiencing difficulty.

4. Connecting with community

In this e-book we have talked a lot about the importance of community and connecting with helpful people. It's important to make meaningful connections with our peers, instructors, and helpful staff to support our learning. Here are some questions you can ask yourself:

- How can I find ways to study with my classmates?
- When and where can I connect with my instructors and teaching assistants?
- How can I connect to a peer mentor, or a learning skills professional on campus?
- What group-based programming exists at the library, the writing centre, etc.?
- How can I connect what I'm learning at school to my own home community?

For more on getting involved in community, [review the Orienting chapter.](#)

Michelle describes work-study campus jobs as especially fulfilling engagement opportunities



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/academicresilience/?p=33#audio-33-1>

In the audio clip above, Michelle and Vurjeet talk about why work-study opportunities – jobs on campus – can be great ways to engage. Listen and/or read the conversation below:

Vurjeet: So our next chapter that we're kind of touching on, Michelle, is talking about how you engaged with your new life in Toronto. So that goes beyond just adjusting. But after settling, um, how did you engage in your student life at your university and in Toronto? And were there any opportunities that you went for here?

Michelle: Yeah, I think the opportunities – you can find opportunities everywhere around Canada, outside of campus. But I think in the beginning, it's really important. So even orienting or when you're trying to adjust, it's important that you seek these opportunities and know what you can engage in later, even if you don't engage in the beginning. So I am still engaging in school because I am still, I'm still studying. But I think one of the biggest or two of the biggest things that helped me to stay focused on my current international life in Canada is one) my student club with my own Malaysian Singaporean community and second) is my **work study**. So I personally seek out work study,

Vurjeet: Yeah!

Michelle: Because, yes, you had, like, if you had a chance, I think everyone should at least engage in one work study term, just so that you get the sense of working, plus studying at the same time. But work study has personally been really fulfilling for me, because I think, I, this is my first time that I get to study, engage academically and engage something non-academically while learning new things and meeting new people. So that, yeah, and that's a way to stay engaged.



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/academicresilience/?p=33#oembed-3>

Building Motivation to Learn Effectively

We hope that you enjoy your coursework at your college or university, but there might be times you feel unmotivated to do it.

So how can you build your motivation to learn?

Motivation is the driving force that initiates, directs, and maintains our behaviour. You can find the

motivation to engage in learning from within – e.g., by satisfying your curiosity, interests, or passions – and you can find motivation to engage in learning from external incentives – e.g., praise from your instructors, meeting your family’s expectations, or with your grades.

If you find your motivation waning, it is important to remember that motivation is both **personal and dynamic**:

- What motivates someone else might not work for you
- What motivates you to complete one task might not work for another
- You don’t have to wait for motivation to strike – it can be activated

You can think about your motivation as being comprised of a lot of factors. It’s a little like a **recipe** with different ingredients – and there isn’t just one way to cook it. Here are **three factors or ingredients** that you can use to support and build your motivation: Interest and purpose; belief in yourself; support and accountability.

Interest and purpose

If a task piques your curiosity or challenges you in a good or productive way, it can give you the internal drive to do it. You can build your interest and purpose in your coursework by:

- Observing others who gain satisfaction in the topic. You can do this by joining a study group or speaking with your instructors and teaching assistants about the content.
- Recognizing the value of the hard work you are engaged in and connecting it with your goals.

Belief in yourself

Your confidence in your capacity to do academic work – or your self-efficacy – can help you stay motivated when things are difficult. You can build your belief in yourself by:

- Recognizing your strengths and applying them to challenging situations.
- Going to an expert – like your instructor, teaching assistant, or an **Aid Centre** – and building your skills.

Support and accountability

You can't always rely on your internal drive to do work – you will need other people and support to help you stay motivated. You can build support and accountability by:

- Working with an Aid Centre, Writing Centre, or your teaching assistants to set milestones or submit drafts when completing an assignment.
- Joining a study group and making use of your environment to support your effort.

Reflect: Think about your life right now. What ingredients can you add to your motivational recipe?

Gaining confidence as a multilingual student

Most Ontario colleges and universities have programs, resources, and supports for students who use English as an Additional Language (EAL). You can gain confidence in using English at a university level by exploring:

Tip! Remember that writing in an academic register is challenging for all students, even for those who use English as their first language. Don't be hard on yourself as you adjust to the expectations of your course instructors and of the academic disciplines you're engaging with! One great way to familiarize yourself with the writing styles of your subject areas is to review models and exemplars

- **Writing and Communication Centres** – teaching-based centres designed to assist students with writing, reading, speaking, and listening skills. Writing Centres can help you develop your writing skills through workshops, resources, or individual consultation with Writing Instructors.
- **Communication or Conversation Cafes** – informal and welcoming discussion groups for students who are at various levels of English-speaking ability. You can gain courage to speak in your classes and learn how to communicate more effectively with your peers and instructors.

Connect early with your campus's international student support services and ask about the English-Language resources available.

Ask your course instructor if they can provide you with writing samples of – or excerpts from – well-written papers by students

from their previous classes. You can also request assessment rubrics and scales to have a sense of what your instructors and teaching assistants will be looking for while grading and giving feedback on your written work.

(ie examples of past student work)
for guidance and inspiration.

Michelle’s story of culture shock: Getting used to “small talk”



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/academicresilience/?p=33#audio-33-2>

In this audio clip, Michelle tells Vurjeet about how engaging in conversations with strangers in “small talk” is an example of culture shock she continues to navigate. Listen and/or read the conversation below:

Michelle: There is something that came to my mind directly, because I think it is also a cultural difference – is that people in Canada – not in Canada, I think people in more European countries or American countries – are more likely to have “small talk”.

Vurjeet: [laughs] Really?

Michelle: Yeah, you don’t do that in Asia. You don’t, you don’t go say “How are you?” to people on the street.

Vurjeet: Oh!

Michelle: So I think something that I have had to learn is responding to “small talks”. Well, at first, I remember being so uncomfortable, because I don’t know how much I should tell you or how much I should say? Because like in Asia, or in my, in the places I grew up, if some random people come and say, “How are you?” to you, people are gonna be so weirded out! And people seem so you know, so um, they seem so used to like the fact that people ask about each other. So that’s something I learned over time. But it’s interesting to see how I replicate the same way, same behaviours as well, right now. Yes.

Vurjeet: So interesting! I, yeah, I mean, like when I visited India, and I didn’t grow up there, but I, I know not to, like, have small talk there. But I think it just clicked and I never realized that the other

way around. Like when people come move here as students, and they're having to figure out how to like, make small talk on their own and it must be a culture shock. That's really interesting.



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/academicresilience/?p=33#oembed-4>

Translanguaging: The Strengths of Multilingual Students

As an international student, you might use a first or dominant language that differs from English – and perhaps more than one. The students we meet with often express concern around conversing with (or being understood by) their instructors and classmates while using an additional language, especially during their first few months of adjustment. It is understandable to feel some nervousness about communicating in both academic and informal English during your studies.

We encourage you to consider your multilingual identity as a key strength in your academic and personal journey. To study at an Ontario post-secondary institution in English or French, remind yourself that you have met or exceeded the competitive and high language proficiency requirements for study!

When you arrive in Ontario, although you will notice the two official languages (English and French) widely represented, it is likely that you will observe – or hear – Mandarin, Cantonese, Spanish, Italian, Punjabi, Hindi, Arabic, Tagalog, Urdu, Portuguese, and many other languages in action as well.⁸

In fact, in Ontario many residents use English as an additional language (EAL) like you; for example, they might work or study in English and then use a different language while communicating with friends and family members.

This practice of “switching” between languages for different audiences is very common and can be referred

8. Statistics Canada. (2016). Census Profile, 2016 Census. Ontario [Province] and Canada [Country]. <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/details/page.cfm?Lang=E&Geo1=PR&Code1=35&Geo2=PR&Code2=01&Data=Count&SearchText=Ontario&SearchType=Begins&SearchPR=01&B1=Language&TABID=1>

to as **translanguaging**.⁹ Although some English language schools historically have discouraged EAL students from drawing upon their other languages, translanguaging can be an effective tool for academic learning and does not indicate a “weakness” in their language abilities.¹⁰

Here are some examples of how you might use translanguaging in your studies:

- If you cannot think of a word in English while explaining an idea or concept, using a synonym from another language you speak can be an effective way to integrate your language strengths and maintain your confidence.
- When you encounter an unfamiliar term on a test, think about parts of the word that might appear in your language as well (e.g. the prefix, root, or suffix). As English borrows vocabulary from many other languages, you might find your guess is correct!
- Prior to reading a dense academic article, brainstorm everything you know about the topic in your first language. Do a “knowledge dump” on a separate piece of paper with key words or facts to prepare for the content of the text.
- Keeping a vocabulary journal of new words you’re learning in English is a helpful strategy to retain them. To reinforce this terminology, try writing a definition in your first language so that you have another way to recall the word in both your speaking and writing.

There are also many examples of languages that integrate or mix English to create new hybrids, such as Hinglish, Spanglish, Singlish, and others. These are not examples of “broken English”, but valid and widely-used languages that are useful resources for EAL students to draw upon or be inspired by.

Michelle talks about how to heal homesickness



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/academicresilience/?p=33#audio-33-3>

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9. Cummins, J. (2021). Translanguaging: A critical analysis of theoretical claims. In P. Juvonen & M. Källkvist (Eds.) *Pedagogical Translanguaging: Theoretical, Methodological and Empirical Perspectives* (pp. 7–36). Multilingual Matters.
10. Freeman, Y. & Freeman, D. (2017, October 3). What is translanguaging in the classroom? *HMH*. <https://www.hmhco.com/blog/translanguaging-making-strategic-use-of-emergent-bilinguals-complete-linguistic-repertoires>

In this clip, Michelle talks to Vurjeet about how international students experience homesickness and how to work through it. Listen and/or read the conversation below:

Vurjeet: You were talking about family?

Michelle: Yes, I think it's gonna, it is going to be a hard transition for a lot of people that are coming without their families, and if you're traveling for the first time alone across countries, that is going to be extremely, extremely difficult. And I think homesickness is really real. And if you're, if you come to a point where you get, you got [homesick] at one time, and you don't have immediate family around you, I think that's going to hit you really hard. And I've talked to a lot of friends about this as well, about how to keep connected to their, stay connected with their family, and everyone has different ways. But when someone is homesick it's really, really, it's very obvious when someone really misses their family.

Vurjeet: Yeah.

Michelle: So that's the challenging part. Well, you know, if you stay engaged in school, you know, you keep yourself busy – also acknowledge your emotions!

Vurjeet: Of course, yeah!

Michelle: But if you have, like enough things to do, you know, there's so many things to do in Ontario, you go travel and have solo trips. I personally had solo trips myself, once only, but it was, it was such a healing moment. You need to find, I think, during difficult moments if you're missing your family or during any other difficult moments, it's important to find a way to heal yourself. So like, do healing activities. What makes you – what heals you? You know? What makes you comfortable? I think that is really important. And advice I would give is that – to people who are, you know, facing challenges because you're an international student, I would say that, you know, the current you is not going to be the forever you.

Vurjeet: Of course, that's a good one!

Michelle: Yeah, it's okay. You know, like, if you're struggling and everyone around you seems to be so happy. I'm telling you – that's not true at all.

Vurjeet: Yeah, yeah.

Michelle: But yeah, I think there is – I'm not going to say there's not going to be any difficult transitions or challenges. There are going to be challenges. But you have to find ways to overcome those challenges yourself and only trial – you have to do trials and errors to see what actually makes you feel better, and, like, those kind of mindset is really important.

Vurjeet: Right? It's like a journey, you figure it out on the way. And I really like that point of like, knowing that you're not gonna be the same you as you always are. And you're saying that as a first

year you know, you still have your, like, the rest of your college career, like, it's literally just begun. So that's a really good point.

Reflect and give it a try

It is difficult to be an engaged learner all the time. Sometimes you will find yourself feeling un-motivated, bored, frustrated, demoralized, disengaged. This is normal for ALL students. The key is to move through that and find ways to re-engage, whatever that might mean. So, since you're reading this now, why not close the screen, and do one of the suggestions below, right now:

- Make an appointment with a Learning Strategist on campus to talk about motivation
- Connect with a student group, or your departmental student union
- Find out if there are any study groups available that you could join

[The next chapter: Reflecting](#)

In our final chapter, we encourage you to reflect on what you've learned so far and what you're looking towards moving forward. [Click here to turn to the Reflecting chapter.](#)

7.

REFLECTING



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/academicresilience/?p=35#oembed-1>

Can you relate?

Reflection. That's a popular word with educators. But what do we mean when we say that?

For the purposes of this book, we highlight two things:

- Reflection is a way to make meaning from experience (processing)
- Reflection is a way to improve your thinking and learning skills (metacognition)

Reflection as processing

You will have many deep experiences as an international student. Those experiences will come, and they will go. Of course, you can simply let them go and turn your attention to the next thing. That's normal and human and often necessary. But you can also find ways, during, or with some distance from your experiences, to occasionally turn your thoughts back upon them, to savour them, make sense of them. It's more than just remembering; it's remembering with intention, a process that involves inquiring about what those past and ongoing experiences mean for you. It involves asking questions like: How did that experience shape who I am?

What did I learn from that experience? What wisdom did I gain from that experience that I can now apply to new experiences? What kinds of impact did that experience have on my life?

And, taken one step further, an act of reflection like this can also involve making things – creating **artifacts** as expressions of that reflection. This takes the reflective act and makes it an artistic one, which, as any artist will tell you, can be profound. Writing, or journaling, is perhaps the most common form here, but any kind of creation will do. Acts of creation in the reflective process can focus the mind’s attention as it remembers an experience and makes meaning from it by giving it form. The students you met in the video clips throughout this e-book, are doing exactly that – reflecting upon their experiences as international students and making things to express that.

“I think one thing that I have really been able to gain from this international experience is the fact that, ironically, it was only until I left my own country that I started to love it, that I started to, you know... to acknowledge my identity and to embrace my identity.” – Stephanie

Listen to Michelle reflect on her experience so far



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/academicresilience/?p=35#audio-35-1>

In the audio clip above, listen to Michelle reflect on the way she makes the most of the financial and emotional investment of being an international student. Listen and/or read the conversation below:

Vurjeet: Okay, and I guess our last chapter, Michelle, is reflecting. So now, you’ve reached a point where you’ve arrived, you’ve adjusted, you’ve done all those things. You’ve learned how to engage with the university, and you clearly have done an amazing job. But in hindsight, what are your thoughts on your experience as an international student? And is there anything that you wish you had known?

Michelle: I feel like in particularly Ontario, or Toronto itself, I think something that continuously bothers me is the financial aspect. And I know that for a lot of international students, if you’re, if you’re here, because you have a scholarship, or because you’re having financial aid, your financial pressure is going to be so much higher than people who are able, people who have families are able to financially support them. So... I don’t know, like, personally, because of the financial pressure, I

constantly try to make the time here worthwhile. I don't want to do – and this is what my parents told me – my time here is not just about studying. Your university experience is not supposed to be only academically. In order to truly make your financial investment worthwhile, you have to engage yourself in different activities, you know? I hope you – I hope the moment you walk out of university, you are a different person than you are right now. That's what I hope. I'm not going to be the same person as I am right now. And... but yeah.

Vurjeet: I love that. I think that's such a good reflection. And that's a broad one too. The idea that, you know, especially something – because international student fees are so much higher for a lot of students at different universities, there tends to be a lot of pressure, I've heard, you know, like a lot of pressure. I mean, like, think like domestic students struggle with it already, so I can't even imagine what it is for international students! But knowing that, to grow from your experience, and to learn and mature is so much more than just the academic aspect of your student life. In fact, it seems, you said it perfectly, you know, like the financial aspect and the academic aspect is just one, one little element. And there's so many other elements that you get to flourish and grow and you're going to thrive and become the best version of you, and you're going to constantly be learning how to be the best version of you. It seems. Yeah. That is a beautiful reflection. Okay, I think that is it.

Reflection as metacognition

Metacognition is just a fancy way of saying...thinking about one's thinking... and this is a very effective form of learning. The Adjusting and Engaging chapters in this e-book are very much about metacognition. Strong students will do two things as they adjust and engage in their learning: 1. experiment with new approaches to studying and learning (think); 2. reflect on their experience with those new approaches to see if/how/when they work (think about thinking). Thinking back upon your learning – not just the content of your courses, but your experiences learning it, the approaches you took to learn it, the challenges you faced in learning it etc. – is a very effective way to strengthen your critical thinking skills and deepen your approach to study and learning – characteristics of lifelong learners.

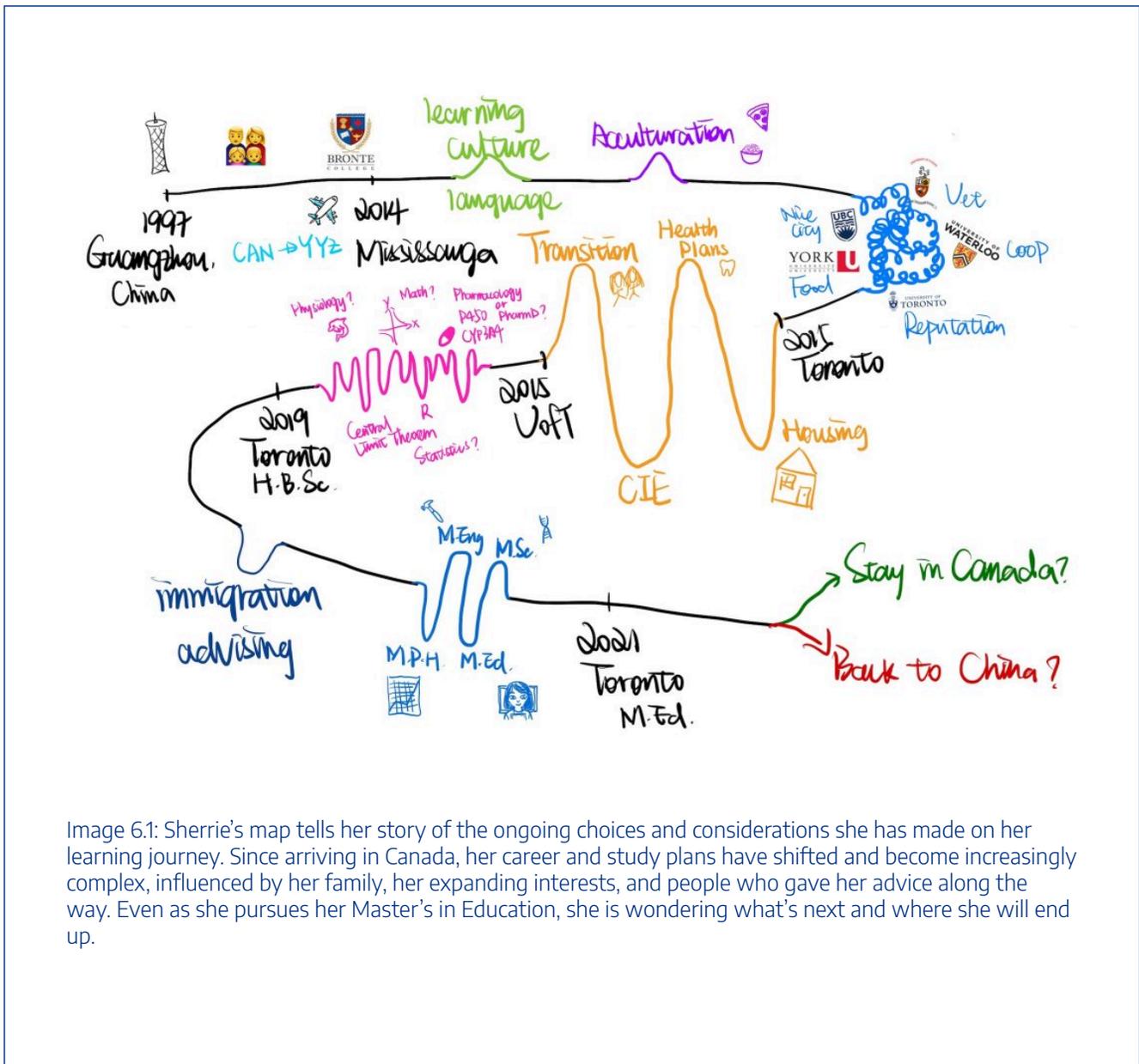


Image 6.1: Sherrie's map tells her story of the ongoing choices and considerations she has made on her learning journey. Since arriving in Canada, her career and study plans have shifted and become increasingly complex, influenced by her family, her expanding interests, and people who gave her advice along the way. Even as she pursues her Master's in Education, she is wondering what's next and where she will end up.

Ways to reflect

For any of you interested in engaging in good reflective process, here are some suggestions:

Reflect on things as you do them

This is a kind of reflection in action or having a conversation

"All these places I've been are small homes now, and it makes me really feel like the world is more interconnected than just the place where I grew up and

I feel like travel really does that to you.” – Joe

with the situation (See Donald Schon¹ if you’re interested in a much deeper dive into these ideas). Simply, try to be aware of your experience as a student as its happening and see if it leads to insight, a new perspective, or a way to solve a problem. Being a student is like having a profession and it’s a thing you can get better at through this process.

Reflect on things after you do them

Make time to just think, to remember with intention. It’s amazing how little time we tend to devote to this most important activity of learning. And you can do it anywhere, on your walk, in the car, public transit, while cooking, doing your laundry. Think back on your student experiences with the intention of learning something from those experiences than you can bring to the new ones.

“My coping strategy is just give it a try – you will know what you like, or what you won’t like in your journey.” – Sherrie, one of our storytellers and co-facilitators

Talk about things

With friends, family, peers, teachers. Talking is a superb form of reflection and learning. By articulating your thoughts out loud, you deepen your understanding, generate new insights, get feedback, and reveal where your gaps are. It can be a powerful way to gain insight and deepen your understanding of a topic – **hallmarks** of good learning. Teaching, or pretending to teach to others – sometimes called the protégé effect – can be one of the most effective forms of learning.

“It makes me think of my family and that there are some people who are thinking about me, makes me happy.” – Ishita

Join things

Seek out those opportunities which will very likely be available to you from your campus programs and peer communities – learning programs, mentorship opportunities, student groups, etc. This form of student engagement can foster all kinds of social and intellectual connections and opportunities for reflection. Don’t feel pressure to join things out of a sense of

1. Schon, D. (1992). The Theory of Inquiry: Dewey’s Legacy to Education. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 22(2), pp. 119-139.

obligation – there is plenty to keep you busy in your classes and personal life. But be aware of what’s available – you might find something that really enriches your experience.

Make things

Write journals, paint pictures, draw doodles, play music – also excellent forms of reflection. You don’t have to be “an artist” to do this. It’s the process of making that matters, not the thing that is made. And, in the end, you will have a rich record of your student experiences to look back upon someday.

“The frame of reference through which one peers at the world shapes what one learns from that world.”²

“When I first came here as a newcomer, my friends, they were all very supportive very friendly, very welcoming whenever like I had issues I could actually talk to them in full confidence, and tell them like, “I have issues with my immigration stuff, I have issues with my family.” I can tell them all this, but they can’t really offer much constructive advice on like “Oh, this is what you should do”, because as much as they’re good intentioned, they haven’t had that experience to speak to you or give you useful advice on “This is what you should do.” So I think that’s one of the reasons why it’s important to have a [international student] community.... Just knowing that they’re there, they’re out there, they’re going through the same thing as I do – that’s already enough.” – Stephanie

Give it a try

It can be hard to incorporate reflective practice into one’s life. Life goes fast and days are busy. Who has time to reflect? You might ask. So, don’t think of it as yet another burden a thing on your to-do list. Just find some easy ways to build some reflection into daily life – while you’re doing other things.

For example: choose a chapter from this book, any chapter. Next time you’re on the bus, or waiting

2. Eisner, E. & Barone, T. (2012). Arts based research. SAGE Publications.

for your laundry, or on hold at the bank, take a piece of paper and a pen, and draw a quick doodle that captures the most relevant part of that chapter for you. It doesn't matter what it looks like – only you will see it. And you can toss it in the trash can after if you want.

Concluding advice

So, now what? Hopefully, by now, you have come to see this e-book, not as a “read-once-only” document, but as a resource that you can come back to again and again. It's not a single-use recipe for success, but a guidebook that you can interact with as various things become relevant for you. It is full of useful information that can help you make informed choices along the way, manage some of the challenges of becoming an engaged student in a new place, and benefit from the experiences of other students who are undergoing similar things. It doesn't include everything, of course, but it's a start.

So, our last piece of advice is to find some way to keep this e-book handy for yourself, make it useful in an ongoing way as you have your various experiences as an international student. And, in some way that works for you, find opportunities to reflect on those experiences to deepen what you learn from them. If nothing else, watch the videos and listen to the audio of your fellow students here again and again. They are unscripted, honest reflections, full of raw insight and wisdom. They are your peers, they know something of what you're going through, and they genuinely hope their thoughts will be helpful to you. Let them be an inspiration to you and remind you that there will be a lot of joy among the challenges and that the life experience you bring to your campus will make it a much more interesting and enriching place.



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/academicresilience/?p=35#oembed-2>

ACCESSIBILITY STATEMENT

E-Campus Ontario Open Education believes that education must be available to everyone. This means supporting the creation of free, open, and accessible educational resources. We are actively committed to increasing the accessibility and usability of the textbooks we produce.

The web version of this resource has been designed to meet [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.0](#), level AA. It includes:

- Easy navigation. This text has a linked table of contents and uses headings in each chapter to make navigation easy.
- Accessible images. All images in this text that convey information have alternative text. Images that are decorative have empty alternative text.
- Accessible links. All links use descriptive link text.

Known Accessibility Issues and Areas for Improvement

While the guide itself meets accessibility guidelines, it links to a number of external resources that may not. This includes websites, PDFs, and videos that only have automatically generated captions. In addition, we have used HP5 interactivity in some chapters – content from all HP5 activities is available in text-only formats in [Appendix A](#).

Let Us Know if You are Having Problems Accessing This Book

We are always looking for ways to make our textbooks more accessible. If you have problems accessing this textbook, please contact us to let us know so we can fix the issue.

Please include the following information:

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- The location of the problem by providing a web address or page description.
- A description of the problem
- The computer, software, browser, and any assistive technology you are using that can help us diagnose

and solve your issue (e.g., Windows 10, Google Chrome (Version 65.0.3325.181), NVDA screen reader)

Contact us at: john.hannah@utoronto.ca

APPENDIX A

Appendix A: Interactive Content in Text-Only

We made this book using Pressbooks, an open publishing platform that offers unique interactive opportunities for readers to engage with our text. However, when our book is downloaded in PDF format, some of that interactive content does not transfer over. Find the following text-only versions of this content:

- [Anticipating: Reminders and advice \(from “Anticipating” chapter\)](#)
 - Colleges and universities – what’s the difference?
 - Understanding your letter of acceptance
 - Don’t forget to apply for your study permit
 - Planning your housing search
 - Learn more about your health insurance
 - Have you met the immunization requirements to enter Canada?
 - [The 5 Rs of Culture Change: Fatima’s Experience \(from “Arriving” chapter\)](#)
 - [Bloom’s Taxonomy \(from “Adjusting” chapter\)](#)
 - [Study cycle \(from “Adjusting” chapter\)](#)
 - [Meet our storytellers \(from “Welcome and Introduction” chapter\)](#)
-

Anticipating: Reminders and advice (from “Anticipating” chapter)

Colleges and universities – what’s the difference?

In Ontario, international students can study at post-secondary institutions that are called either colleges or universities. Colleges can offer certificate programs, diplomas, apprenticeships, and degrees. At universities, you will find undergraduate and graduate degree programs, as well as other types of professional programs.

Academic programs will vary in terms of length and require different types of prerequisites (in other words, the pre-work or qualifications you need to be eligible for that program).

[Learn more about Ontario's post-secondary institutions at https://www.ontario.ca/page/go-college-or-university-ontario/](https://www.ontario.ca/page/go-college-or-university-ontario/)

Understanding your letter of acceptance

Before arriving in Ontario, you will receive many messages from your learning institution, one of the most important being your letter of acceptance (it can also be called a letter of offer). This document is important for you as an international student because it will contain key information about the following:

- The name of the faculty, department, and/or academic program that you have been accepted into
- The length of your program (e.g. a start and end date)
- Important deadlines to note in your calendar (for example, by which date to accept the offer or when to pay your first installment of tuition fees)
- Institutional resources to help you understand the study permit application process (such as individual advising or information sessions)
- Other support offered by the institution specifically for international students
- Any additional documents or information that the institution requires from you in order to make you a full offer

Note: If your offer letter does not include all of the above details, you will probably receive more information from the institution after you accept your offer.

Tip! Often, colleges and universities will only communicate with enrolled students using an official institutional email account. This means that the personal email account you used to apply might not have the most up-to-date information regarding your program and studies. Look out for instructions on how to set up your official institutional email and check your new inbox frequently after that.

Don't forget to apply for your study permit

In most cases, you must apply for a study permit before you arrive in Canada. For some students who have already departed their country of residence, they can apply for a study permit from within Canada. And in some cases, you can apply for a study permit when you arrive in Canada at the port of entry. [Make sure you understand which option is available to you by learning more at https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/study-canada/study-permit/apply.html](https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/study-canada/study-permit/apply.html)

Need extra help? Connect with your institution's international student office for additional resources and advice on how to successfully apply for your study permit.

Are you planning to come with family members such as a partner/spouse and children? They may be eligible for a study or work permit, or a visitor visa. You must submit their applications online when you apply for your study permit.

Tip! All of Ontario's postsecondary institutions have a Designated Learning Institute (DLI) Number that you will need to apply for your study permit. [Find your school's DLI at https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/study-canada/study-permit/prepare/designated-learning-institutions-list.html](https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/study-canada/study-permit/prepare/designated-learning-institutions-list.html)

Planning your housing search

After you accept your offer of admission, you will likely receive information about housing (also called accommodation) options from your college or university. Some campuses will have residences that you can stay at which might offer amenities such as a meal plan, internet access, or other incentives. Check the residence's specifications carefully to make sure it will be a good fit for your needs.

If you decide to live off-campus, you will likely need to think about the following: creating a realistic monthly budget; your willingness to live with other roommates; the location's proximity to campus or public transportation; and other similar considerations. Also remember that the monthly rent you see advertised might not include other important fees such as heating, internet, or renter's insurance. Always ask the landlord or building's management office if you are unsure!

Note: You might find that browsing online listings on classified advertising websites or on social media might be a convenient way to look for a potential place to live in your new Ontario city or town. Unfortunately, international students can often be targeted by scammers who post fake online listings or request money transfers before a lease has been signed. If possible, always visit the location first before you make a final decision; if you are unable to do so, ask a trusted friend to check out the space. Also be cautious if the landlord or building management wants you to pay additional fees and deposits that appear excessive or unexpected.

Tip! Consider booking temporary accommodation when you first arrive; this will allow you to browse more long-term options in-person and consider variables that matter to you (e.g. routes to campus or proximity to grocery stores).

Need extra guidance? Connect with your institution's housing or student life office for additional resources and advice on how to successfully find a place to live.

[Learn more about your rights as a renter in Ontario at https://www.ontario.ca/page/renting-ontario-your-rights](https://www.ontario.ca/page/renting-ontario-your-rights)

Learn more about your health insurance

As an international student in Ontario, you will be enrolled in a primary health insurance plan. This insurance plan helps to cover the cost of hospital and medical services you may need to maintain your health (e.g. visiting a doctor's office or needing to go to an emergency room).

Universities generally offer health insurance through the University Health Insurance Plan (UHIP), whereas colleges and other private institutions may present options from other providers. The cost for this plan will be added to your fees and is considered mandatory for all international students in most cases.

You might also find that you will be automatically enrolled – or given the option to participate – in supplementary health insurance plans. These supplementary plans might cover full or partial expenses such as prescription drugs, vision and dental care, travel health coverage, and other health needs.

Note: If you are arriving in Canada before the start of the academic term, make sure that you secure private travel insurance because most plans connected to your student status will only begin on September 1st of that year.

Have you met the immunization requirements to enter Canada?

Remember that to enter Canada as an international student, you must have a valid study permit (or letter of introduction that shows you have been approved for a study permit) and be attending a designated learning institution (DLI) with a COVID-19 readiness plan approved by Ontario. [Learn more here about immunization requirements to enter Canada at <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/news/2021/07/international-students-and-travel-to-canada.html>](https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/news/2021/07/international-students-and-travel-to-canada.html)

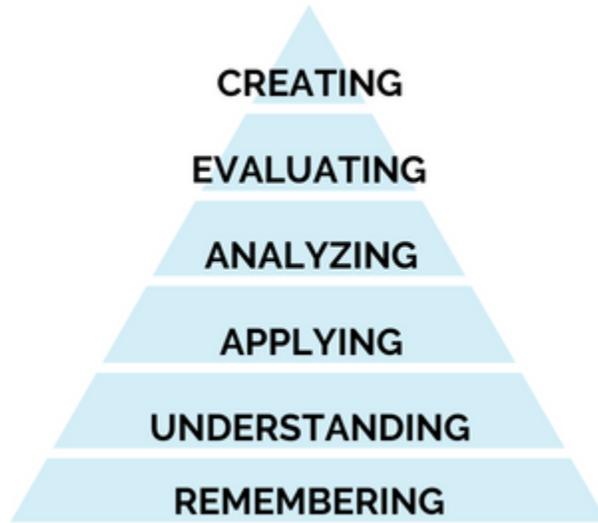
[Learn more about other required and recommended immunizations for entry into Canada <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/healthy-living/canadian-immunization-guide-part-3-vaccination-specific-populations/page-10-immunization-persons-new-canada.html>](https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/healthy-living/canadian-immunization-guide-part-3-vaccination-specific-populations/page-10-immunization-persons-new-canada.html)

Need extra help? Connect with your institution's international student office for advice.

The 5 Rs of Culture Change: Fatima's Experience (from "Arriving" chapter)

- **Routines** – Fatima finds that she must carefully plan out her mornings in a way that she didn't have to before, since her high school was within walking distance of her house. At first, it's stressful to figure out which public bus offers the quickest ride to campus, but after a few weeks of experimenting with different routes, she can now relax on the bus listening to audio books in French. During warmer months, Fatima even wakes up earlier so that she can walk to campus and enjoy some reflective time before a busy day of classes and studying.
 - **Reactions** – Initially, Fatima finds it strange that classmates acknowledge her by saying "Hi, how are you?" but then immediately walk away. She feels embarrassed trying to answer, wondering if she had done something earlier to offend them. Eventually, she learns that this expression is more of a greeting than a question when in a hurry (similar to saying a quick "hello") and begins to use this saying as well. She still sometimes feels self-conscious and unsure about how to engage in small talk, especially with classmates who are more acquaintances than friends.
 - **Roles** – To earn some spending money, Fatima decides to take on a work-study job, which would be her first formal work experience. But she is soon overwhelmed by all the paperwork and training required to fulfil these responsibilities. She's unsure if she can succeed in this position and initially thinks of resigning, but asks a fellow student colleague for advice about how they juggle life as a student and employee. She also finds it helpful to regularly chat with an advisor in student services about creating a calendar to prioritize and manage her stress related to these demanding roles.
 - **Relationships** – Given how busy her schedule is, Fatima is not sure how to make friends without sacrificing time for reviewing her notes and working on assignments. She gets a tip from a peer that joining a study group might be a useful way to both socialize and keep on top of her workload. Over the semester, Fatima becomes closer to one of the students in her group – they both make a weekly goal to leave Sundays nights free for TV-watching as a reward for meeting goals. Fatima still feels guilty about not working harder, but knows that it's also important to nurture this friendship.
 - **Reflections** – Fatima never used to journal but learned about the value of noting down experiences, thoughts, and insights from a workshop she attended. As her family members are in a time zone five hours ahead of Canada, she finds it calming to spend time writing in a diary whenever she feels homesick. She soon finds that it's also a useful way for her to manage her stress and decides to incorporate free-style writing as a strategy to brainstorm for her essays as well.
-

Bloom's Taxonomy (from "Adjusting" chapter)



At the **Remembering** level, you can recognize and recall information usually through a process of memorization.

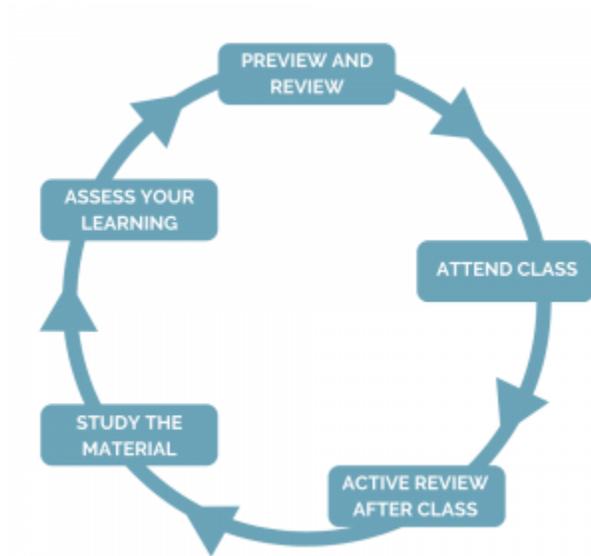
At **Understanding**, you can summarize and explain information using examples.

At **Applying**, you can use information to solve new problems.

At **Analyzing**, you can check the validity of an idea.

And at **Creating**, you can come up with your own ideas based on your previous learning.

Study Cycle (from "Adjusting" chapter)



Study cycle image: A circle with arrows moving around clockwise is labelled with the “Study Cycle” elements. Starting from the top and moving clockwise: Preview and Review; Attend class; Active review after class; Study the material; Assess your learning.

The Study Cycle includes:

- Preview and review before class: Read assigned chapters, review lecture slides and objectives, form questions about the material. Review material from a previous week.
 - Attend class: Take meaningful notes that record and relate information.
 - Review after class: Identify gaps and recall information.
 - Study the material: Use active review to retrieve information.
 - Assess your learning: Practice and self-test.
-

Meet our storytellers (from “Welcome and Introduction” chapter)



Meet Ishita Aggarwal: Ishita is studying a Master’s of Chemical Engineering and Applied Chemistry and is originally from India. Ishita was accepted to several graduate programs around the world before initially deciding to move to Canada to study. She completed one term online from home, managing a 10.5 hour time-difference, before leaving home and moving to Toronto.



Meet Heejin Kim: Heejin is studying a Bachelor’s of Media Production and is originally from South Korea. Heejin is the producer of the “A SLCE of Life” podcast “Letters from an International Student” available to listen at: <https://open.spotify.com/show/2DSNM199CeRDSTvx6OnpDM?si=cd096fba6a744de0>



Sherrie is studying a Master's of Education and is originally from China. Sherrie's personal experiences as an international undergraduate student influenced her choice to pursue a Master's of Education to conduct research that considers international students' experiences. Sherrie co-facilitated our storytelling workshop with Joe, Stephanie, Ishita, and Heejin and is a contributor to this Book as part of her work-study job with the Academic Success unit at her university.



Joe is studying a PhD in Environmental Science and is originally from the United States. Joe seeks opportunities to connect to the natural environment wherever he is; even in a large city, he finds solace in the parks, ravines, and forests available to explore.



Meet Zhenling (Stephanie) Wang: Stephanie is studying a Bachelor's in Arts and Science and is originally from China. Stephanie's involvement in student activism and organizing paired with her international experience has fuelled her desire to study international relations, law, and politics.



Meet Vurjeet Madan: Vurjeet is a domestic student, and she interviewed Michelle about her stories. Vurjeet is originally from Saskatchewan. Vurjeet is double-majoring in Industrial Relations & Human Resources and Political Science and is a first-generation student whose parents are originally from India.



Michelle is a first-year Life Sciences student originally from Malaysia. Fun Fact: Michelle enjoys having meals at different restaurants with her friends, exploring nature parks, and watching Korean variety shows (her all-time favourite is Running Man).

APPENDIX B

Appendix B: Video Transcripts

Chapter Video Playlist

[View all chapter videos in a Youtube playlist at the following link \[youtube.com/watch?v=Qa6Ni0HTWfk&list=PLBp9C2GmJqe_vOOEKYz_KvkDQ7ZFgzyU8&ab_channel=AcademicSuccess\]\(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qa6Ni0HTWfk&list=PLBp9C2GmJqe_vOOEKYz_KvkDQ7ZFgzyU8&ab_channel=AcademicSuccess\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qa6Ni0HTWfk&list=PLBp9C2GmJqe_vOOEKYz_KvkDQ7ZFgzyU8&ab_channel=AcademicSuccess)



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/academicresilience/?p=482#oembed-1>

Video Transcripts

In place of viewing our chapter videos, find the transcripts below.

Video: ARRIVING

Ishita Aggarwal: Can you see it? So my sister made this and she gave it to me at the airport before I was gonna travel to Toronto, so yeah, it's kind of like, she hand embroidered it and hand painted it. So it says "You Go Girl". It reminds me of my family. And that there are some people who are thinking about me, so it makes me happy, yeah.

[Opening credit: ARRIVING]

Tesni: I'd love to know about this idea of being a stranger.

Joe: I added that. So I felt a little bit like, a stranger or also just like a visitor, I did not feel like a resident – like I was moving in as a resident, but I definitely couldn't come to terms with that term immediately, so I definitely

felt like I am somebody in a different land. And at first, I knew that there was going to have to be a transitional time when I would get used to be able to, or allow myself to be called someone who, who lives in Toronto now, I didn't feel like saying that at first.

Ishita: I was fortunate enough to come at the right time, right moment. But it was a very worrisome period for me because I had my friends and relatives who were back in India, so I was always constantly worried about them, so the first, first few weeks of me in Canada, were, along with the adjustment, adjusting to the new climate, new changes, new, making new friends, I was also worried about my parents back home, and my sister, who was there, she also got COVID, so it was, it was it was kind of like, a new experience in itself.

Heejin: When I first came to Canada, I was staying in a homestay family for a year, I would say. So I still do visit them, especially since I don't have any relatives or family here, I'm here all alone, so sometimes the holidays I just go there to visit and then they're always like, welcome to have me.

Stephanie: When I introduced myself to someone I would say, "My name is Stephanie, I'm an International Student, I'm from China". But then afterwards my identity became more complex and I feel like this layer of identity, it never, it never disappeared, but it started to fade away, like, I started to see the world through the lens of more complex identities, not just through the lens of an international student.

Video: ORIENTING

Ishita: So I think Orientation or some activities that you get, like, you meet people first time, who are just like you, from, even if, even if they are domestic students, so they are just starting off, right, so it's a good place to start to meet people and make friends who would be there, along with the whole journey, so that I would be really interested to have an Orientation or something like that.

Stephanie: That presence of a community, the fact that, like acknowledging that I'm not going through this alone, that in itself is very powerful in, you know, reassuring me whatever I'm experiencing is normal, I'm not just you know, like, I'm not, I'm not the abnormal one going through some, like, traumatic experience that nobody else will understand.

Ishita: But, like, having someone you can rely on, like, you can take advice from and – because there are so many services given by university to help students, they have different programs but Orientation's a good place where you can tell students about it, like "We have these many options, you can go and look into them if you want resources, you, this is the right place where you can find resources". So that would be a nice way to start off I guess.

Stephanie: Like, even down to the smallest details of life are completely different and it's really from these details of life that I realized that like "oh my God my life has completely changed."

Video: RELATING

Joe: I also just wanted to jump on the idea of like international students as a unique sort of community. Because, if anything like, as you orient or adjust to this new, to a new system it's, it's, I don't always feel comfortable with asking someone who lives here at the moment to say, to ask sort of like an admin question or like an immigration question – because I can only find so much information online. And if I asked them that's not something that they would be concerned with or something that they might not even know about. And just by relating about that, I feel like it's mutual in terms of challenges, or just doing what you have to do to get it done like it's not as easy as just submitting homework and doing research and making connections, it's a, it's a, it's, there's another level, on top of that, in terms of maintaining the ability to be able to do that at this university and by relating – by having that community it feels like a support network in which we're all just trying to do our best to stay where we are, and, while also managing multiple levels of, of education. So yeah I feel like it is a certain type of community.

Video: ADJUSTING

Heejin: I have already used this phrase for my podcast but I'm going to say it again, because it's really like, um, something that really changed my perspective on things: so I was calling Good2Talk, which is a mental health hotline, one day, and then I was talking to her about my international experience in Canada and I told her I moved here basically like when I was 16 and then she said, “You know, some people don't even know how to do laundry or they don't know how to cook eggs and then you moved to another country, you should take more credit for that.” And then – I feel like everyone should remember that, um, that we are allowed to take more credit and be proud of ourselves.

Joe: But there were definitely some, some small things that, yeah, I guess, I had to, had to adjust to. But for the most part of it, I fell into a routine after about a month or so, and now I consider myself very much in, in a certain way of things, and I feel like that was achieved by just engaging with the school, engaging with people and also getting, taking, taking my, my own time to get used to my surroundings and navigating like, administrative, administrative things like “What do I have to do to be settled in Canada, I can't just work all the time, I also have to make sure I have a bank account, make sure I have a work permit.” Like all that stuff I consider to be above the stuff that I do for education, because it's more, more important to my being in Canada.

Stephanie: For me having moved here, obviously it was, I think I really resonated with, like, the whole like idea of routine that Joe established before. Of you know, like now, I live in a completely new different place, I live in this new house and this new city and, like every day when I go out when I go to school, I see, like every single day I discover, like, things that I've never seen like the day before.

Video: SHIFTING

Heejin Kim: You can mess up your midterm, but, you know, guess what? Canadians miss their midterm, Canadians mess up their midterm all the time, they fail too, you know. So, I feel like we really have to think about, like, try not to think of Canadians as this, like, superior, or like, or not in this superior way, in a way that we are always going to be not as good as them, no matter what we try to do, you know?

Joe: And I think it definitely took a few, a few weeks for me to get used to this life. In terms of having all this independence in terms of, I have responsibilities to take care of myself, have free time, while also doing research, classes, and, teaching responsibilities. So there was a lot, I think, and I adjusted by reaching out to my flatmates, reaching out to them, engaging, stepping outside of my comfort zone again, to engage in some social stuff here.

Stephanie: Whereas for me, I have a certain amount of skills and a certain amount of knowledge and a certain amount of expectation for how the world around me used to work, used to look like – and now this huge transition this huge, like, you know shift in, you know, like my environment this shift has directly led to a shift in my perspective, and the shift in my – you know, like a lot of the way – I guess like, like the way I do things and the way I see things. So, like, the way I approached it was literally like establishing, like, I literally made a list of things that I had to do, like, I have to go to the grocery store. And, like, you know, like look up common words that you know, like, are needed, like, how do you say like cabbage in French, how do you say tomato in French, like, I thought it was very interesting because I was approaching, I was learning about a lot of things that a child would learn about when they're first introduced to the world, yet I was adopting the methodology of an adult.

Video: BELONGING

Stephanie: I've moved past the phase of feeling like a stranger, I've moved past that phase of feeling like a newcomer, and now I feel like a member of the group. I feel like I belong here, I feel like maybe this is not where I call home, but I feel comfortable here, and I know that I'm a part of this, I'm not just an external, like, outside observer looking at every, everything going on, now I'm truly a part of this.

Video: CONNECTING

Stephanie: I also just wanted to say that, like I don't – like my family actually lives here now with me, my mom and my sister are here, but like they're all like international status so like, if ever you need a friend to talk to or hang out with I'm here, we should totally connect afterwards. Because I, I also, I think we share a lot of passions; I was also very interested in journalism as well, but I was, I didn't have the audacity to take journalism, because I feel like I wouldn't be like you know the best at it so.

Heejin: That was me honestly, I was like after I started writing an essay and I just realized it's like, even though I have good content it's really hard to deliver my thoughts in a different language which a lot of professors seem to forget about, you know, like you, are – if you would ask them to speak any other language as fluently as we are then they couldn't you know so, so maybe they should consider our situation! Anyways [laughs].

Video: LEARNING

Joe: Yeah I think um I, I didn't know as much about, or one aspect was, was, uh, Canadians' history with Indigenous people, and how that's a history that I didn't know about as much in the States, but, there's a sense here that I learned over time that everybody is a guest on ancestral land that belongs to some, somebody else. So at that time when I felt like I was visiting Toronto, I was a guest on “country” land which has colonial roots, but then beyond that I was also a guest on land that belongs to locals and people who, who've inhabited this land for generations. So at that time I definitely felt like there was a lot to take into account, as I moved into the city – multiple layers.

Heejin: Yeah that's what I've been really like trying to learn about and I've been listening to a lot of podcasts regarding that matter so I can more understand about Indigenous community.

Video: STORYTELLING

Heejin: That just really made me think like, wow, I was taking everything so for granted, when I was living back home and then now I'm in Canada I'm kind of forced to grow up on my own. So I'm trying to take care of myself. And what I do now is – I'm focusing on my audio skills, so I am mixing audio for my student film, my thesis film soon, but I am also doing podcasts. And I have adapted my international experiences to my podcast – so I was working as a research assistant last summer and I ended up making a podcast about international experiences in Canada and their writing assignments – like how writing assignments affect international students. And then – I think it was like a great achievement for me and, and then it gave me a lot more connections and I got introduced to this workshop because I made that podcast and I'm really proud of it, so everyone should give it a listen!

Video: AWAKENING

Stephanie: This notion, this idea of home and being you know, like, like – my international, I think, experience has really given me the feeling of being a global citizen, of being responsible, you know, for everything I do, of being responsible for caring for one another, people that live around us, the society that we live in, and I think that, that really has – like, my international experience has really contributed a lot of my enlightenment and my like awakening in this whole idea.

Heejin: I feel like it's really important for us to remember that, like COVID was a big thing and everyone got really hit by it and if you are different people from before and now, then it's okay. But it just kind of made me think about what's going to happen when I graduate from university I'm not gonna have any insurance, I'm not gonna have any, like, health benefits or anything so I guess that's like my biggest, like, anxiety after graduating because I'm gonna be losing all of my benefits – and I know a lot of international students continue to go to their grad school to, like, keep on having their benefits and, like, status-ship but I'm not really considering that so I'm not really sure what my future holds.

Sherrie: I don't know if you have the same feeling as I do, because I came here like seven or eight years ago and when I look back it's kind of one third of my life. That's hard to imagine, sometimes, because when I went through the journey I'm still thinking about "I'm Chinese, I came from Guangzhou, and then I am here as a foreigner." But when I look back, I spent here for one third of my life – that was, yeah.

Video: REFLECTING

Joe: I feel like it was so fundamental to me describing my world as not just the place where I grew up in, not just the neighborhood, and surrounding towns, it's more of, like, I am just a small dot on the airplanes that I travel in to get to these places. And it really made me think about, before, before I even went to college, I had this idea about "Okay, the world is so much bigger than, than I'm probably going to be exposed to, while I just stay here in New Jersey."

Stephanie: So I'm still deciding on, like, which program to enter into. Currently I'm thinking about political science, international relations, and public policy, because I feel like my international experience and this perspective – I feel like that really made me who I am today as, as a person, and also defined my passions and interests, interest in my, you know, the potential careers that I might be pursuing in the future.

Sherrie: So as an international student, one of the main concern of mine is I'm thinking about if I should go back home or if I want to stay in Canada and then that will actually have a very strong impact on my, maybe, academic path, choosing, or that kind of thing. And even, I haven't finished, like thinking on that, I have already graduated, like I graduated with physiology and statistics but I'm still thinking about, "Am I that kind of person?" So I'm still on my way, like, making decisions based on, I don't know, my future plans, yeah. I think that's one of the main difficulties that international students might face. But my coping strategy is just give it a try, you will know what you like, or what you won't like in your journey.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Here, find the following resources, including external site links and handouts:

- [Additional Resources](#)
 - [Pre-Arrival Checklist Text and PDF Download](#)
 - [Glossary of Terms](#)
-

Additional Resources

- [Questions and Answers by Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada at https://settlement.org/ontario/education/colleges-universities-and-institutes/information-for-foreign-students/](https://settlement.org/ontario/education/colleges-universities-and-institutes/information-for-foreign-students/)
 - [Applying to college as an international student by Ontario Colleges at https://www.ontariocolleges.ca/en/apply/international-applicants](https://www.ontariocolleges.ca/en/apply/international-applicants)
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Pre-Arrival Checklist

This pre-arrival checklist features reminders, tips, and suggestions for tasks to complete and items to bring with you before you leave for Canada. Not everything will apply to all international students, but we think these are we think these might be important to consider. What reminders will you add to your to-do list? [You can download a fillable PDF of the Pre-Arrival Checklist by clicking here.](#)

Have you...

- applied for your study permit through Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC)?
- found temporary or long-term accommodation (I.e. a place to stay)?
- checked if you have all your immunizations (e.g. vaccines, booster shots)?
- purchased private travel health insurance if are arriving in Canada before the fall semester begins?
- set up your official institutional e-mail account and checked it regularly for updates from your college or university?

- printed out or downloaded any official documentation that you've received from your institution and IRCC?
- completed any additional instructions or tasks assigned to you by your institution or IRCC?
- figured out what to expect once you land at the airport and mapped your route to your accommodation?
- have your passport and other forms of identification stored in a safe compartment in your carry-on luggage?

Consider bringing with you:

- Clothing that you can easily layer (e.g. long-sleeved t-shirts, sweaters or hoodies, light jackets)
- Essential medications and prescriptions
- Travel size products for your carry-on items (e.g. toothpaste and shampoo) as well as other toiletries you might need (e.g. nail clipper and brushes)
- Eyeglasses, contact lenses, travel-size lens solution, and/or spare pairs (strongly recommended if you need any kind of vision correction)
- Chargers, cables, power adapters, and/or universal travel power plug adapters
- An unlocked smart phone
- A SIM card tray removal needle for your smart phone
- A pen in your hand luggage in case you need to fill out paper documents during your voyage
- Hand sanitizer and cloth/medical facial masks
- A set of bedsheets and pillowcases
- Some cash in Canadian dollars and/or a major credit card (which are widely used and accepted in stores)

What you can leave behind:

- Buy your winter jacket and gear after you arrive in Ontario – these items will take up valuable space in your suitcase and if you arrive in late summer, wearing layers will keep you sufficiently warm
- Non-prescription vitamins and supplements, cosmetics, or skin care products (which you can easily buy “over-the-counter” at pharmacies/drugstores)
- High power electrical appliance (such as hairdryer and electric kettle), note there might be a voltage difference: the outlets and voltage in Canada is 110Vs
- Heavy alcohol disinfectant/sanitizers (heavy and might not be accepted by the custom due to high flammability)
- If you are considering buying a new laptop or electronic device for your studies, there are often “back-to-school” sales and some educational discounts you could be eligible for by showing proof of your student status

What to avoid bringing entirely:

- Note that some items are banned or restricted from entering Canada with you; check out these official government pages for more information: [Restricted and prohibited goods at https://www.cbsa-asfc.gc.ca/travel-voyage/rpg-mrp-eng.html](https://www.cbsa-asfc.gc.ca/travel-voyage/rpg-mrp-eng.html) and [What you can bring home to Canada at https://travel.gc.ca/returning/customs/what-you-can-bring-home-to-canada](https://travel.gc.ca/returning/customs/what-you-can-bring-home-to-canada)

Tip! Some airlines offer more generous baggage allowances for international students. You might have to apply for this benefit with some documents – check and confirm with your airline directly.

Glossary of Terms

Here are a few frequently used college and university terms that you might come across. Definitions of key terms in our chapters are also included.

Academic calendar

At the beginning of each academic year (usually in the fall), your faculty or department will publish an academic calendar. This resource will contain important information related to your academic studies including degree or certificate requirements, program requirements, important dates, institutional policies, and course offerings. The academic calendar is a comprehensive schedule of all important events in a given academic year. You will likely find your institution's academic calendar on their website.

Academic integrity

The principle that students should appropriately acknowledge any external sources of information in their verbal or written work and present their independent ideas on assignments, projects, and/or tests. Your course instructors will likely have guidelines and resources to help you understand your responsibilities in practicing academic integrity, so check out your course outline or ask if you're ever unsure about the expectations.

Aid Centre

Offices that provide support to students in the development of various academic skills – math, statistics, research, writing, etc.

Artifacts

Objects that you might create during your academic journey – e.g. personal diaries, pieces of art, class projects, blogs or vlogs, etc.

Bloom's Taxonomy

A hierarchical model representing the different levels of complexity of learning objectives. [See the “Adjusting” chapter for more about Bloom’s Taxonomy.](#)

Campus

The physical location of your college or university, including lecture halls and classrooms, libraries, administrative offices, residences, recreational facilities, outdoor amenities, and other spaces.

Co-Curricular

Activities and opportunities that are in addition to the normal course of academic study.

Course

Your institution will offer courses or classes, taught by a course instructor (sometimes also called a “professor”). The instructor will teach the course subject matter and evaluate their students’ understanding using assessment methods such as written assignments, presentations, and examinations. All your credit courses will have a value that counts towards meeting your degree or certificate requirements.

Course outline

Also called a syllabus, this is a formal document that your instructors will make available to you at the

beginning of each course. This document outlines the course objectives, assigned readings and tasks, a schedule of events, assignment deadlines, a grading scheme, and other important information. A syllabus is meant to help students clearly understand what is expected of them in the course and how to access related resources.

Department

This is an academic unit within your faculty or school that is dedicated to the study of a particular discipline (e.g. History, Chemistry, English, etc.).

Diasporas

Groups of people that emigrate to a different country and resettle there.

Discipline-Specific Skills

The knowledge and competencies that are related to a subject of study (e.g. chemistry or geography).

Engaged Learner

A person who is curious, active, persistent, diligent, and conscientious in their approach to study.

Funding

This refers to any or a combination of sources that a student uses to pay for their tuition fees and other costs related to their studies. These sources can include scholarships, funding packages (for graduate students), personal and family savings, governmental student loan programs, and bank loans. If you have questions about funding as an international student, please check with your institution directly.

Hallmarks

Distinctive features or examples of something.

Jet Lag

When your internal clock becomes misaligned with local time at your destination. It can interrupt your sleep patterns for a while, especially if you have traveled across time zones.

Metacognition

Thinking about one's own thinking as a form of learning.

Milestones

An important or significant moment in one's development.

Online Platforms

Digital interface(s) that facilitate interactions between instructors, students and learning content (e.g. Zoom; Moodle; Blackboard).

Post-Secondary

A term that refers to education that takes place after secondary school (e.g. pursuing a diploma or degree at a college or university).

Prerequisite

A course that is meant to be successfully completed by a student before they can register for another related or upper-level course that builds upon earlier material.

Profession

A vocation or career that involves specialized knowledge and extensive academic preparation.

Semester

Also often called a term, this is a segment of the academic year usually spanning about 12 weeks, but these can be shorter during the summer. Some of your courses might take place within one semester whereas others can be spread over two.

Sessional dates

This is the range of time that a faculty or department's academic activities take place within (not including scheduled breaks or other holidays). Each academic calendar will outline important sessional dates such as the start and end of classes; deadlines for dropping classes; and mid-term or final examination periods.

Students' Association

Sometime called Student Clubs, Groups, or Societies – these are groups of students who gather to promote or engage with a common interest.

Study Cycle

A five-step approach to effective classroom learning. [See “Adjusting” chapter for more about the study cycle.](#)

Study Permit

The document issued by the Canadian government to allow foreign nationals to study at designated learning institutions in Canada.

Support Network

A network of people in your life – friends, family, peers, advisors, instructors – you can rely on for various kinds of help and support. Having this is a characteristic of academically resourceful students.

Timetable

A schedule which displays course offerings for a given semester or academic year. After you enroll in courses,

you will likely be able to view or download a personalized timetable through your online learning management system.

Trade

A job that requires specialized skills and training.

Welcome Booth

A kiosk setup at the airport to welcome arriving international students. Your college or university may have a designated booth. Pearson International airport in Toronto also offers their [Airport Welcome Desk](#) so check for these places when you arrive.

Work Study

Paid on-campus jobs that provide meaningful experiential learning opportunities for students.

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CREDITS

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Student voices

We wish to express our deep gratitude to all the student storytellers for their contributions to this book: Heejin Kim, Joe Kawalec, Stephanie Wang, Ishita Aggarwal, Michelle Yan, and Vurjeet Madan.

Video credits

Produced by Tesni Ellis, Digital Media Developer, U of T Academic Success.

Videos featured in the series “International Students: Stories and Strategies for Academic Success in Postsecondary Education” (Arriving, Orienting, Relating, Adjusting, Shifting, Belonging, Connecting, Learning, Storytelling, Awakening, Reflecting) include footage from a storytelling workshop filmed using Zoom in November 2021.

Additional footage created by students Michelle Yan and Vurjeet Madan and used with permission from the University of Toronto Digital Media Bank by David Lee.

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We are a small group of learning specialists and educators working at the University of Toronto. We have a range of experiences and areas of expertise and a shared interest in supporting student success in all its varieties.

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Tesni Ellis: Digital Media Developer; PhD student in Education at York University. Tesni facilitates storytelling workshops using drawing and other creative methods to hear from students about their experiences.

And finally, we thank you, dear readers, for considering the stories and strategies presented here. Wherever you are in your academic journey as an international student in Canada, we wish you well.