Conestoga College Institute of Technology and Advanced Learning Community

Resource Guide for a Targeted Underserved Population

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Image Source: Conestoga College Student Engagement (2019)

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Introduction to Conestoga College of Technology and Advanced Learning and Geographical Profile

Conestoga College of Technology and Advanced Learning was established in 1967 as a public college located in Kitchener, Ontario (Conestoga College, nd-a). Over the years, it has expanded to serve over 45,000 registered students across multiple campuses and training centres in Kitchener, Waterloo, Cambridge, Guelph, Stratford, Ingersoll, Brantford, and Milton in 2023. Conestoga delivers more than 270 full-time, career-focused programs and has more degree offerings than any other college outside the GTA, including Ontario's only college-based, accredited engineering degrees (Conestoga College, nd-a). Conestoga is a polytechnical institution that provides higher education through technical, applied, hands-on learning, degrees, diplomas, certificates, and apprenticeship training.

In 2023, Conestoga ranked as one of the top 20 research colleges in Canada by engaging with 100 industry and community partners, starting 133 new projects, and hiring 211 students (Conestoga College Research, Innovation and Entrepreneurship, nd)
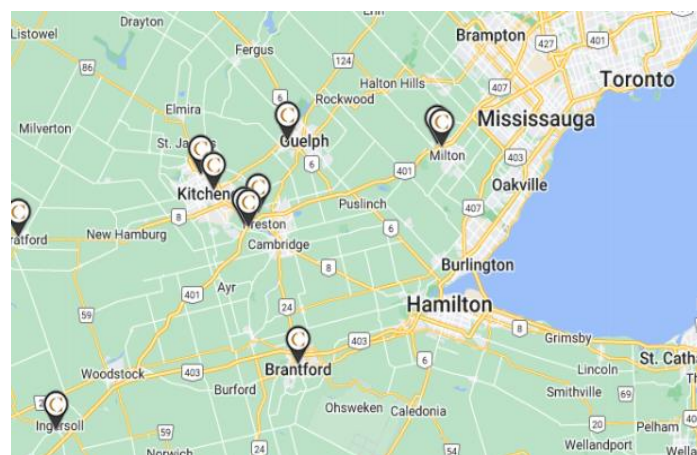
Figure 1: Conestoga Campus Locations

Image Source: https://www.conestogac.on.ca/about/campuses-and-locations

Conestoga College serves a broad geographic catchment area in southwestern Ontario. Initially, the college served local students, but now it attracts a diverse student body, including a substantial number of international students.

The college's mission is to "promote the prosperity and well-being of the communities we serve through the delivery of programming, workforce development and industry-focused research that meets local, regional, and international demands" (Conestoga College, 2021 p. 4, 2021). The college publishes an impact report to promote the economic contributions of graduates to the local economy (see Appendix 1: Conestoga Impact Statistics; Appendix 2: The Conestoga Effect). The key contributions highlighted by the report include:

1. Educational Excellence - offering diverse programs, including degrees, diplomas, certificates and graduate certificates, catering to various fields such as engineering, business, health sciences, and information technology.
2. Apprenticeship Training - a provincial apprenticeship training leader providing essential skills and hands-on experience to students in trades and technical fields.
3. Economic Impact - contributes significantly to the local economy by attracting international students, creating jobs, and fostering innovation and research.

Read more on The Conestoga Effect here.

Since 2019, Conestoga has invested $300 to $400 million in capital-intensive projects to support current and future students, employees, industry partners, and the community, including the expansion of the Waterloo campus for applied computer science, information technology, hospitality and culinary arts; expansion into Brantford and Milton; $120 million state-of-the-art skilled trades campus in Cambridge and

continued investment in health care and business programming at the Doon campus (Conestoga College, 2023)

Demographic Profile

In recent years, international enrolment has surged, with international students making up a significant portion of the student population. The college had 37,000 study permits approved and extended in 2023, the most in Canada and a thirty-one-per-cent increase from the previous year (Al Mallees, 2024). Its student population has more than doubled in four years, and international students now vastly outnumber domestic ones (Al Mallees, 2024). That number would put the number of international students at eighty percent of the total school population. For 2024, with the new student visa immigration cap in place, the number of international students will be cut in half (Al Mallees, 2024).

Read more here: *How Canada's new 2024 student visa rules will affect International students.*

While the college has not released a specific country of origin for international students, there was an increased concentration in origin countries of international students from seven countries (South Korea, China, Japan, the United States, France, Mexico and India), an increase from 59% in the 2000-to-2004 cohort to 67% in the 2015-to-2019 cohort (Crossman et al., 2022). From personal teaching experience at the college, India, Nigeria and the Philippines make up the general mix of classes I have taught in past terms.

This creates a unique challenge for the college in integrating students from diverse cultural backgrounds into the Canadian culture and Western approach to education. More than seventy-five percent of Conestoga international students come to Canada with a degree from a reputable International university (Conestoga College, The President's Message, 2024).

Figure 2: Top ten origin countries of study permit.

Top ten origin countries of study permit holders with a valid permit in Canada in 2022

Source
Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada
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Additional Information:
Canada; 2022
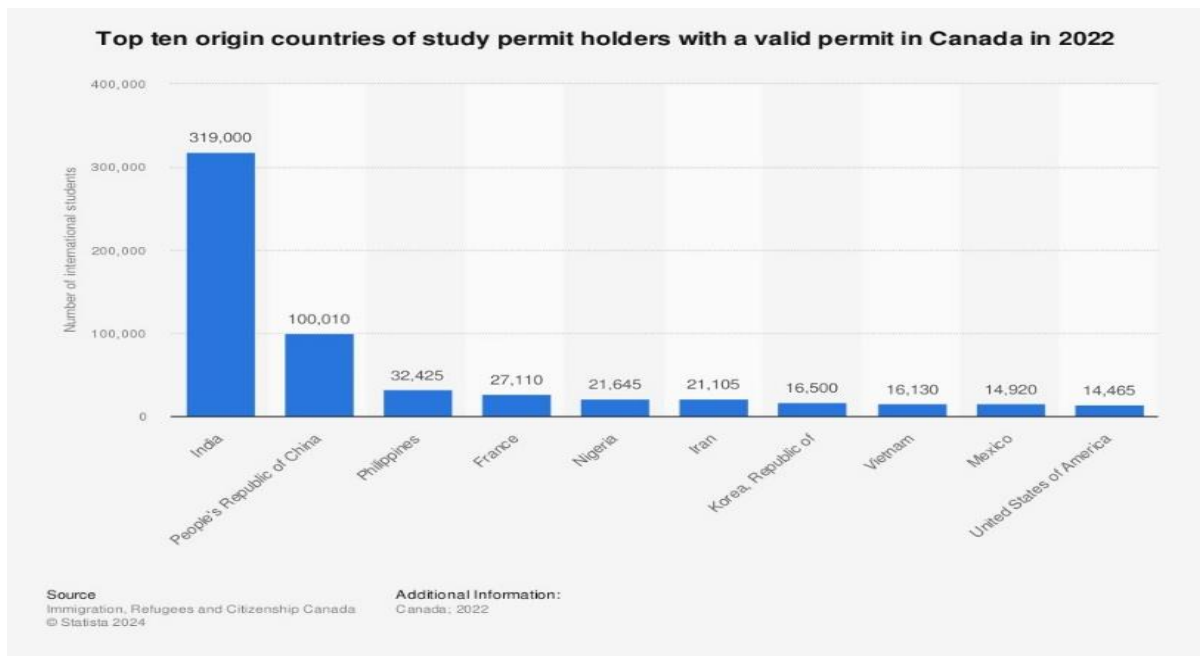
(Statista Research Department, 2023)

Canada's declining fertility rates have created a critical need for skilled and unskilled workers. Immigration, including the influx of international students, is vital in addressing these shortages and ensuring economic stability and growth. The 2021 Census showed that Canada's population grew 5.2% from 2016 to just under 37 million people in 2021. Immigration, not fertility, mostly drove Canada's population growth during that period (Statics Canada, 2022).

Figure 3: Fall 2023 Demographic Enrollment View
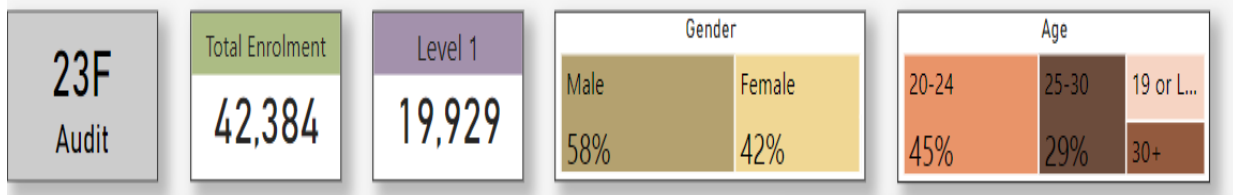
(Conestoga, Institutional Research, nd)**Figure 3: Fall 2023 Age Demographic**

Key demographic mix statistics show:

- 58% Male to 42% Female ratio

- 73% of students are between the ages of 20 – 30.

- Other genders self-identified represent .21% of the student population or 86 students.

- The estimated International student population is 80% or 37,000.

- 75% of International students have a degree.

Gender	Age	Count	Percentage
Male	20-24	11,772	27.77%
Female	20-24	7,195	16.98%
Male	25-30	7,179	16.94%
Female	25-30	5,100	12.03%
Male	19 or Less	3,639	8.59%
Female	30+	2,913	6.87%
Female	19 or Less	2,494	5.88%
Male	30+	2,006	4.73%
Another Gender Identity	20-24	21	0.05%
Undeclared	19 or Less	15	0.04%
Another Gender Identity	19 or Less	12	0.03%
Undeclared	20-24	11	0.03%
Another Gender Identity	25-30	9	0.02%
Undeclared	25-30	9	0.02%
Undeclared	30+	6	0.01%
Another Gender Identity	30+	3	0.01%
Total		**42,384**	**100.00%**

(Conestoga, Institutional Research, nd)

NOTE: As of 2024, the international student population is anticipated to be cut by more than fifty percent due to government caps on student visas.

Read more here: Canada to stabilize growth and decrease the number of new International student permits issued to approximately 360,000 for 2024

Challenges for International Student Population

While the influx of international students has been beneficial, it also presents challenges regarding integration and the support services necessary to adapt to the new cultural and academic environment (Howe et al., 2023). Deckers & Zinga's (2012) article focused on the educational attainment of newcomer youth, influenced by several factors relating to the education system, such as fear and social mobility. For Waterloo Region immigrants who arrived between 1980 and 2021:

- 44.7% were economic immigrants.

- 27.7% were refugees.

- their spouse/partner or family sponsored 26.7%. (Waterloo Region, nd).

New youth face challenges within the education system, including unfamiliar societal norms, an unfamiliar education system, discrimination, educator and grade expectations, living accommodations and food security (Deckers & Zings, 2012; Howe et al., 2023)). From a Canadian-Euro-White perspective, this can challenge what social and justice mean as two separate concepts: what it is and how we think we are being inclusive. Social justice in education can be closely linked to more global discussions of Justice, Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging (J-DEI-B), essential principles in creating inclusive environments where everyone feels valued and respected. Social justice creates a vision of culturally responsive schools to leave no child behind (Hytten & Bettez, 2011). It is often unclear what we mean when we discuss a vision of social justice or how this influences such issues as program development, curriculum, educational pedagogies, and vision, and this can change over time as society evolves (Hytten & Bettez, 2011).

The challenges and issues facing international students include a few high-level socially relevant areas:

1. Cultural Adjustment and social isolation: international students may have challenges in adapting to new social norms and acquiring services such as healthcare, combined with being away from family and friends, in many cases for the first time, which can lead to feelings of loneliness and isolation and building new social networks can be complex, which can include racism and discrimination issues (Jeduka, 2023; Howe et al., 2023).

2. Language and Communication Barriers: international students may struggle with English proficiency, affecting their academic performance and social interactions (Jeduka, 2023; Howe et al., 2023).

3. Financial Challenges (See Appendix 3: Estimated international Student Costs): From tuition fees for international students that are significantly higher than for domestic students to the cost of living in Canada can be high, leading to financial stress. (Jeduka, 2023; Howe et al., 2023).

4. Employment Challenges: Navigating the Canadian job market can be tough, and international students face restrictions on the number of hours they can work and may struggle to find jobs that align with their skills and career goals. (Jeduka, 2023).

5. Academic Pressure: The academic standards in Canada may differ from those in their home country, and international students may struggle to keep up with the workload or understand the expectations of their professors. This can be

further impacted by cultural shock, language barriers, financial stress and employment challenges (Jeduka, 2023; Howe et al., 2023).

One challenge that requires a fuller discussion is the housing issue. International students will have difficulty finding affordable and suitable accommodation either before arriving in Canada or after arriving. Currently, Conestoga College only has 900 residential units available for students, which is too low for the number of international students enrolled (McGinty, 2023). While there are vacancies, many international students say they cannot afford them, leaving a large and underserviced support area that the college needs to address (McGinty, 2023). As of the fall term, the city of Waterloo published a report that the city is short around 5,000 beds for university and college students; it is estimated that Waterloo has 39,865 beds in supply for up to 44,595 students in demand (Saeed, 2024).

A visual that helps summarize the challenges comes from the work of Hall (1976), where he emphasized the unconscious cultural beliefs and biases that may be hidden below the surface that are not captured in the key points covered above, highlighting the importance of understanding the contexts of cross-cultural communication and the complexity that may be involved. The visualization illustrates that culture has both visible and invisible components. This visualization helps us understand that much of what shapes cultural behaviour and interactions lies beneath the surface, requiring deeper exploration and awareness.

International students face numerous challenges when attending colleges in Canada, such as language barriers, cultural adjustment, financial constraints, housing issues, employment challenges, social isolation, discrimination, and academic pressure.

These challenges have significant implications for future professional practice for educators and other practitioners (Longmore et al.; G., 2017).

Figure 4: Culture as an Iceberg
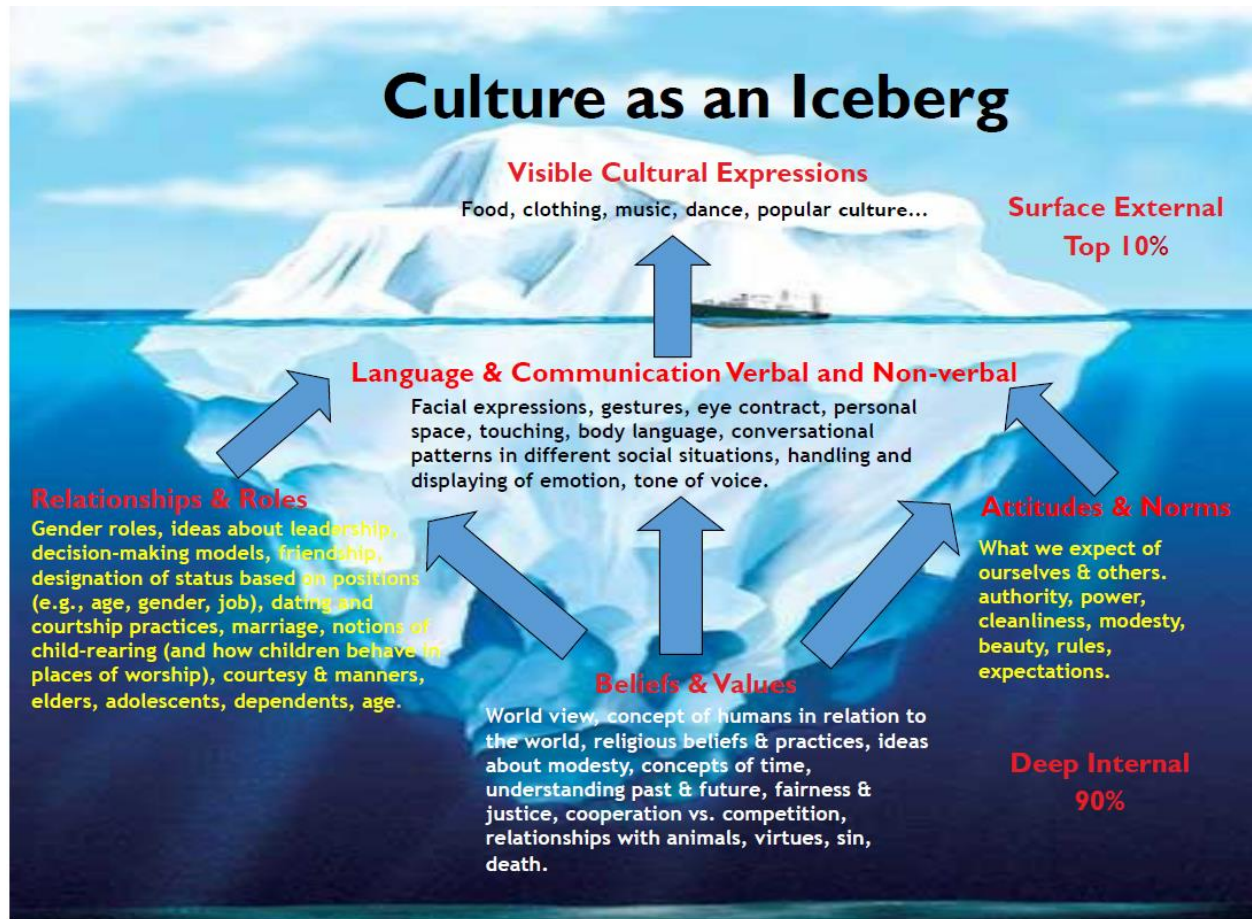
(Multicultural Council of Saskatchewan, 2017).

(Multicultural Council of Saskatchewan, 2017)

Resources to Support International Students

Despite international students' challenges, many colleges, including Conestoga College, offer support services such as language assistance, counselling, and career

services to help international students succeed. Also, there are local community resources to support this international student population and their families. International students in the Kitchener-Waterloo region can access various support services to help them adjust and succeed. Here are some essential resources:

Conestoga College Services (see Appendix 4: Conestoga College Student Support Services)

1. International Student Office offers support with visa and immigration issues, orientation programs, and cultural adjustment.

2. Academic and Learning Support includes tutoring, writing assistance, and workshops to help students succeed academically.

3. Health and Wellness Counseling Services provides mental health support, including individual counselling, group workshops and medical services

4. Career and Employment Services helps students with job search strategies, resume writing, and interview preparation.

5. Technology Services supports students with adapting to college technology and software.

6. Inclusive Community and Student Engagement includes cultural activities and events to engage students in the college community.

7. Campus Services include security, housing and bookstore support.

Specifically, regarding the housing issue, Conestoga has taken steps to improve the opportunities for secure housing. For example, housing is guaranteed to first-year students at the Brantford and Waterloo campuses (Conestoga College, About Conestoga News, nd-a).

Figure 5: Additional Housing Resources

Additional Housing Resources

Off-Campus Rentals	Temporary Housing	Homestay	Housing Search
Live off campus with roommates or on your own. The most common way to search for off-campus housing is through rental listing websites or networking with family, friends, and other Conestoga College students. Visit our International Housing site for resources to search for off-campus rentals. These resources are applicable to international and domestic students.	If you do not find a place to live before you arrive in Canada, your option is to book temporary accommodations until you secure longer-term housing. There are hotel and potential residence options for you to explore. Visit the Temporary housing - hotels and residence information for links!	Homestay is a program that matches international students with local host families to live with while studying at Conestoga. Conestoga College partners with Canada Homestay Network Inc. (CHN) to administer our Homestay program. For more information on the Homestay program, visit our International Housing page.	When searching for housing it is important to understand what is required of your search, and what will be required of you when you need to sign a lease. Visit our International Housing site (under off-campus rentals), for resources in understanding your Canadian housing search. This information is applicable to both International and Domestic Students.

More Ways to Connect

If you are an international student and have questions about housing, please email and International Transition Coordinator here: internationaltransition@conestogac.on.ca

If you are a domestic or International Student with questions about Conestoga's On Campus Residences email us here: info@conestogaresidence.ca

(Conestoga College, Student Success Portal, nd)

Figure 6: Conestoga Students Incorporated Housing Resources

Off Campus Housing

Places4students.com and CSI have partnered to help students find a place to live around Conestoga College communities.

Students can go to places4students.com and enter their choices of college and campus. From there, a list of available housing is displayed for you to browse through. Click on the appropriate button for your campus:

Brantford Campus	Cambridge Campus	Doon Campus	Guelph Campus	Ingersoll Campus	Waterloo Campus

(Conestoga Students Incorporated, nd).

Housing is one area where there is much room for improvement in supporting international students and where the college continues to invest heading into 2024 (Conestoga College, 2023).

Community Services

These resources can help diverse families navigate the challenges of transitioning to a new community, ensuring they have the support they need for a successful integration. There are community services to complement college support services, such as:

1. [YMCA of Three Rivers Immigrant & Employment Services](#) offers settlement services, employment support, and language training.
2. [Family and Children Services of the Waterloo Region of the Waterloo Region](#) is authorized under the Children, Youth and Family Services Act to respond to get the help they need to care safely for their children at home.
3. [Kitchener-Waterloo Multicultural Centre](#) provides settlement support, language classes, and cultural integration programs.
4. [Settlement and Educational Partnerships in Waterloo Region](#) (SEPWR) helps newcomer students and parents adjust to school and life in Canada.
5. [Healing of the Seven Generations](#) offers services for Indigenous peoples.
6. [Waterloo Region Community Legal Services](#) offers legal support for immigration issues, including temporary visas, permanent residency, and citizenship applications.
7. [Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB)](#) supports students and families new to Canada, including English as a Second Language (ESL) programs, newcomer orientation, and cultural liaison services2.
8. Arrive offers visa and immigration support for students.

Figure 7: Arrive New Student Visa Requirements [YouTube]

(Arrive, 2024)

Cultural Services

While there are many organizations and groups in the Waterloo Region supporting diverse cultures, listed here are some connections that reflect the general population of Conestoga College:

1. India Canada Association of Waterloo promotes India's rich and diverse cultural heritage "to foster collaboration among people of Indian origin and broader Canadian community."
2. Nigerians in the Region of Waterloo desire to create and build a strong, thriving community through the power of trust and unity through educational and networking programs, social events and community service.
3. The United Filipino Canada Society provides a way to celebrate the community through events and education.
4. African Canadian Association of Waterloo Region promotes awareness about Africa and Africans in the Waterloo Region by bringing African communities together through capacity building and self-empowerment to enhance the welfare of African descendants in the area.
5. White Owl Indigenous Community Resources provides Youth Group/Programming, Drumming, Counselling (Individual, Couple and Family), Naming Ceremonies, Traditional Healing Ceremonies, Cultural Training/Teachings, Outreach Support, and Community Feasts.
6. Guelph Community Health Centre offers the Indigenous Healing & Wellness Program, which includes holistic health services.

Ladson-Billings (2014) and McCarty & Lee (2014) noted difficulties in implementing culturally relevant and sustaining pedagogies, particularly in systems not designed to support these approaches. DiAngelo (2011) discussed the defensive reactions often encountered when discussing race and privilege, which can create

resistance and hinder progress toward more inclusive and equitable educational practices.

Cultural organizations in the Waterloo Region play a key role in addressing social justice issues, race, and discrimination by building inclusive communities and promoting equity. These organizations engage in initiatives, such as educational programs, community dialogues, and cultural events, to raise awareness and challenge social inequalities. They collaborate with local communities to create safe spaces for marginalized groups, advocate for policy changes, and provide resources and support. They help build a more just and inclusive society in the Waterloo Region through their efforts.

Implications for future professional practice as educators

Several key themes and challenges emerged from the readings by Deckers & Zinga (2012), DiAngelo (2011), Ladson-Billings (2014), McCarty & Lee (2014), Hytten & Bettez (2011), and Wang (2018). These articles emphasized the importance of culturally responsive and socially just educational practices while highlighting the challenges in achieving these goals.

Ladson-Billings (2014) and McCarty & Lee (2014) both advocated for cultural relevance and responsive sustaining and revitalizing pedagogies. Ladson-Billings (2014) discussed the evolution of culturally relevant pedagogy into a more inclusive approach, while McCarty and Lee (2014) emphasized the need for culturally revitalizing pedagogy. Deckers & Zinga (2012) highlighted the diverse experiences of newcomer

youth and the importance of understanding their cultural backgrounds to foster better school responsiveness and engagement. Implications for professional practice include:

1. Effective school leadership is crucial for creating a positive organizational culture. Kraft, Marinell, & Yee (2016) found an association between student achievement gains and one single feature of the school environment: school leadership style.

2. Ensuring a safe and supportive school environment is essential for students and teachers. This includes implementing policies addressing bullying, providing mental health support, and creating a safe school environment (Decker & Zinga, 2012).

3. The need to recognize the diverse reasons behind students' relocation (fear or social mobility). For example, those who moved for fear-based reasons might view their stay in Canada as temporary and less engaged in school and community activities (Decker & Zinga, 2012).

4. Schools can foster a sense of belonging by encouraging newcomer youth to participate in school and community activities. This can help them feel more connected and invested in their new environment. More specifically, if the activities are culturally sensitive and relevant, they might further build a sense of belonging.

By considering these implications, educators can better support newcomer youth in their academic and social integration, ultimately enhancing their overall school experience. Putting these into action might include:

1. Community Building and facilitating opportunities for international students to build social connections and integrate into the local community can help reduce feelings of isolation. This can be achieved through social events, mentorship programs, and cultural exchange activities.

2. Professional Development and regular training on cultural competence, inclusive teaching, and mental health awareness should be mandatory for educators and practitioners. This ensures that they are equipped to support the unique needs of international students.

3. Working collaboratively with other departments, such as student services, career centers, and mental health professionals, can create a more cohesive support network for international students[2].

4. Ensuring that all support resources are easily accessible and well-publicized can help international students know where to seek help when needed[4].

By addressing these implications and implementing these recommendations, educators and practitioners can create a more supportive and inclusive environment for international students, helping them to succeed academically and personally.

Conclusion

Approaching cultural diversity requires the broadest possible range of competencies because intercultural interactions have become a constant feature of our multicultural communities of modern life, even in the most traditional societies.

I would like to suggest one concept that could be used to bridge the knowledge-to-action gap. The Triple Helix Transformative Teaching and Learning Model in Business Education is the second model I connected with as part of my evolving teaching practices. The Triple Helix Transformative Teaching and Learning Model is a framework for business education based on the idea that the context and learning environment must work together to provide students with **Figure 8: Triple Helix Model** hands-on experience and real-world knowledge. This approach to business education aims to create a more dynamic and adaptive learning environment and better prepare students for the challenges of the 21st century. (Longmore et al., 2017).
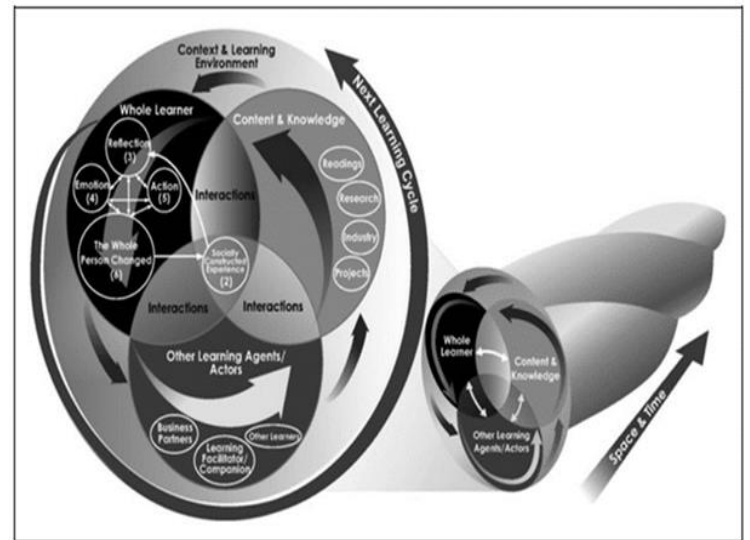
(Longmore et al., 2017).

The conceptual construct is three-dimensional and developed around three key spheres:

- The whole learner, including emotions, reflection, and action.

- The content and knowledge include readings, research, industry, and projects.

- Other Learning Actions include Business partners, learning facilitators, and other learnings.

The intersection of the three spheres provides a socially constructed experience for the learner. This model considers the dynamic nature of interpersonal (reflection) and intrapersonal (interaction) as part of a learning cycle (Longmore et al., 2017). This approach is about co-creating new knowledge and understanding, which informs the

planning and creation of assessments and lesson plans for a diverse student population (Longmore et al., 2017). Another way to state my view of this evolution in my teaching practices is moving from the deductive delivery of materials (traditional) to the idea of inductive learning (paradigm shift). As I consolidate my thoughts on concepts that might influence my teaching practices, much must be considered to continue evolving. It is not about "boiling the ocean." Instead, it is about identifying incremental improvements over time as part of continuous improvement in a dynamic educational setting. Indeed, learning is a lifelong journey.

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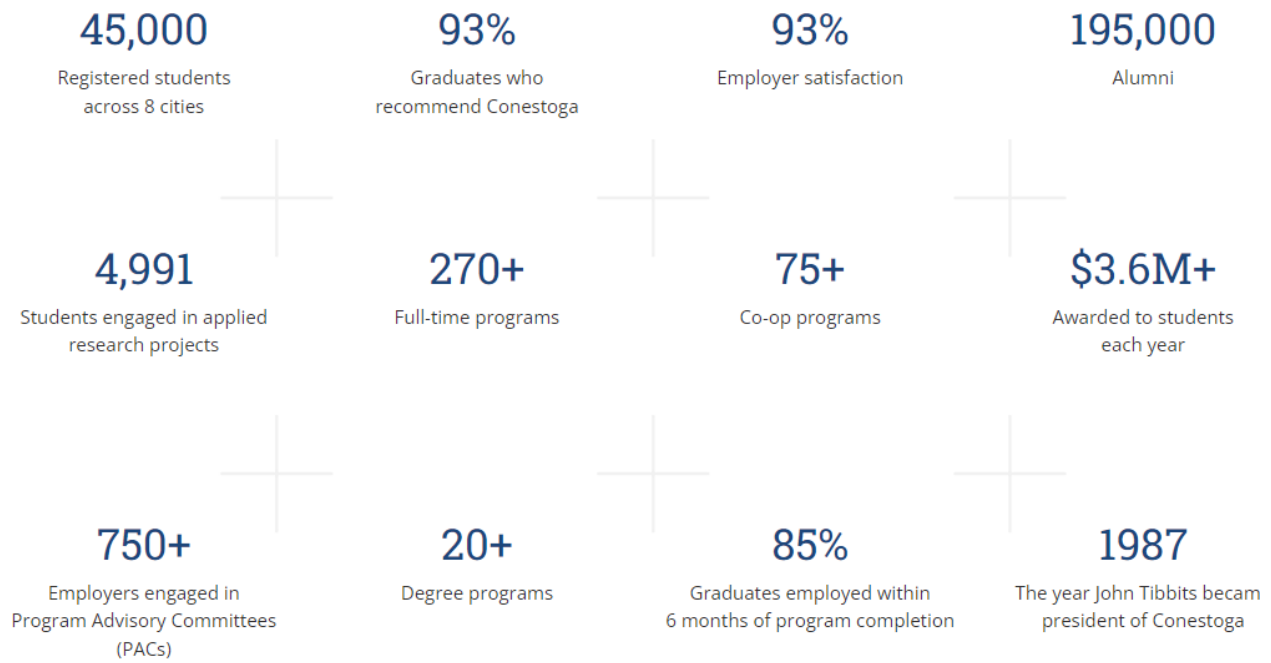Waterloo Region, (nd). Waterloo Region Community Profile. [Webpage]. Retrieved from https://wr-community-profile-rmw.hub.arcgis.com/pages/immigration

Appendices

Appendix 1: Conestoga Impact Statistics.

College stats

(as of February 2024)

45,000	**93%**	**93%**	**195,000**
Registered students across 8 cities	Graduates who recommend Conestoga	Employer satisfaction	Alumni
4,991	**270+**	**75+**	**$3.6M+**
Students engaged in applied research projects	Full-time programs	Co-op programs	Awarded to students each year
750+	**20+**	**85%**	**1987**
Employers engaged in Program Advisory Committees (PACs)	Degree programs	Graduates employed within 6 months of program completion	The year John Tibbits becam president of Conestoga

(Conestoga College, About, nd)

Appendix 2: The Conestoga Effect

Highlights

The annual employment income of local Conestoga graduates is at least

$4.1 billion

There are now 166,673 Conestoga graduates living in Ontario. They add more than $6.2 billion annually to the province's economy.

166,673 = **$6.2 billion to economy**

Conestoga has served more than half **the local adult population. 53.6%**

MORE THAN **5,200** CONESTOGA GRADUATES ARE LOCAL ENTREPRENEURS

Conestoga is the predominant source of newly skilled workers to address continuing workforce shortages

The employment rate of Conestoga's international graduates is almost exactly the same as Conestoga's domestic graduates.

EMPLOYMENT RATE

84.8% INTERNATIONAL GRADUATES

85.9% DOMESTIC GRADUATES

Today, no other local institution has matched the scale of Conestoga's contribution.

(Smith et al., 2023)

Appendix 3: Estimated International Student Costs

Item	Monthly cost (CAD)	Description
Housing	$850	Average monthly cost per person for a private room in an apartment or house with shared bathroom, living room, and kitchen facilities
	$1810	Average monthly cost for a 1-bedroom apartment with private bathroom, kitchen and living space
	$2250	Average monthly cost for a 2-bedroom apartment
	$2840	Average monthly cost for a 3-bedroom apartment or house
		Please note: Most landlords require you to pay your first and last month's rent upfront when you sign your lease.
		Examples of rental rates listed above reflect the average rates for rentals across our campus communities. Many factors determine rental rates such as location, amenities, quality and size of the unit, etc.
Utilities	varies	Costs for heating, air-conditioning, water, electricity, and Wi-Fi may not be included in your monthly rental rate. Before signing the lease agreement, ask your landlord what the average monthly cost is for any additional utilities.
Groceries	$450+	Grocery costs vary depending on where you shop, the types of food you buy, and how much you consume. Some examples of the current cost of food in Canada: • a meal at a fast-food restaurant: $12+ • a meal at a mid-range restaurant: $25+ • a regular cup of black coffee: $2+ • an 8 kg bag of rice: $20+
Transit	varies	For detailed information on student transit passes in your campus city, visit Public transit.
Phone/Internet	$50-100	Costs depend on your phone, how much data you add on, and what speed your Internet is. • Check if your phone will work in Canada. • Internet packages may be shared by all living in the same household. • Free Wi-Fi is available in many public spaces, including across the College.
Personal items	$200+	Cost of personal items is dependent upon individual spending habits and need. Expect to spend more on items like winter coats and warm clothing.
Academic materials	$500+ per term	Check your booklist here for pricing.

(Conestoga College, International, Cost of Living, nd)

Appendix 4: Conestoga College Student Support Services

Students: Have questions? We're here to help!

Student Success Advisors assist you in meeting your academic goals. Connect with us today.

STUDENT SUCCESS
Every Step

Ask For Help
- Student Success Advising
- CARE Team
- International Student Immigration Advising
- International Transition Support
- Student Rights & Responsibilities
- Not sure where to start? Click here

Technology
- Teach- Me-Tech
- Chat/Appointments
- Software Downloads
- Assistive Technology

Academics & Learning
- Accessible Learning
- Tutoring
- Math Services
- Writing Services
- Research Services
- Academic Integrity
- Learning & Study Skills

Career & Employment
- Career and Employment Advising
- Co-operative Education
- Work Integrated Learning- Field Placements
- MyCareer Job Board
- Entrepreneurship Collective

Health & Wellness
- Medical Clinic
- Counselling Services
- Peer Wellness Services
- Sexual & Gender-Based Violence
- Athletics & Recreation
- Wellness & Health Promotion
- Student Health Insurance Plan
- International Student Health Plan

Inclusive Community
- Student Engagement
- Events & Workshops
- Volunteer
- Co-curricular record
- Indigenous Services
- Student Government (CSI)
- Sports & Intramurals

Campus Services
- Housing
- OneCard
- Bookstore
- Student Portal

(Conestoga College, Student Success Portal, nd)