



First day of orientation, UBC's class of 2016

photo courtesy: Darin Dueck and UBC

Newcomers to Canada

by Patti Ryan

The upshot: More than virtually any other country, Canada offers newcomers an open-armed welcome. It also offers a high quality of life and the values that many are looking for such as freedom and democracy, respect for cultural differences and a commitment to social justice. The vast majority of immigrants come for the economic opportunities, Habacon says, but remain even when their experiences fall short of their expectations. "They stay for the happiness," he says.

This is all good news because Canada needs immigrants, and it needs them to succeed. Immigrants drive Canada's economy, both as consumers and in the workforce. In 2012, immigration was responsible for two-thirds of Canada's population growth. Without it, the number of Canadians age 20 to 44 would be dropping. This would be a problem since this age group buys houses, starts families, makes up a significant portion of the labour force and generates substantial tax revenues. There were 258,000 new permanent residents in 2012, plus another 214,000 temporary foreign workers and 105,000 international students. Those figures mean Canada receives more immigrants relative to its population than most other OECD countries.

Canada wants immigrants – and people from around the world want to live here. What do newcomers and Canada have to offer each other?

When people ask Alden E. Habacon why cultural diversity works in Canada in ways it doesn't elsewhere, he has a lot to say. But it all simmers down to: "Because it's always been here."

Habacon is a diversity and inclusion strategist and director of intercultural understanding strategy development at the University of British Columbia. He says that Canada has its roots in multiculturalism, when First Nations existed side by side on shared land with different languages, cultures and social structures. And, of course, the first European settlers were immigrants themselves. Multiculturalism, Habacon says, was a reality here from the earliest days.

"So in terms of a place that is intuitively conducive for people of different backgrounds to gather and live in one place, this is that place," Habacon says. "How could it not find a way to work?"

Debbie Douglas, executive director of the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants, has some reservations about how well Canada delivers on its promise of economic opportunity for newcomers. But she agrees it delivers on values.

"I think people also choose Canada because of the values we hold, values of gender equality, of democracy, of a sense of equity and equality – at least in policy if not always in practice – and good education. I think it says something when almost 85% of permanent residents apply for citizenship. There is a real sense of wanting to belong to this country."

Canada also offers a better chance of integration, Douglas says. "We have probably the most developed settlement and integration sector in the world. From coast to coast to coast, there are a myriad of services from employment support to language classes, general settlement adaptation supports and organizations working on issues of racism through public education and other interventions."



Alden Habacon, UBC

photo courtesy: Martin Dee

SPECIAL INTEREST FEATURE



Nearly two-thirds of new Canadians are economic-class immigrants. More than half are highly educated. Newcomers to Canada continue to arrive from every corner of the globe, but, according to Citizenship and Immigration Canada, in recent years the top source countries have been China, the Philippines and India. As for where they go, Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver still receive the lion's share of immigrants, but some of Canada's "second-tier" immigrant-receiving cities, like Ottawa, Calgary, Edmonton, Winnipeg and Saskatoon, are starting to catch up. As these cities' populations become more diverse, they will likely be better able to attract the kinds of talented people whose creativity can drive innovation and productivity.

In fact, the link between diversity and innovation is increasingly recognized.

In 2011, Forbes published a study called "Fostering Innovation Through a Diverse Workforce." It surveyed 321 executives at global enterprises with more than \$500 million USD in annual revenues and found that more and more businesses are viewing diversity as a "key driver of innovation" and a "critical component of being successful on a global scale."

Similarly, a recent Conference Board of Canada report found that, in a knowledge-based economy, immigrants can contribute to innovation due to their high levels of education, experience and knowledge of diverse languages, cultures and market opportunities.

Diana MacKay, director of education and immigration programs at the Conference Board, oversaw this report and believes

immigrants' potential in innovation is significant – and largely untapped as yet.

"Here you have an amazing cluster of people who are natural innovators," MacKay explains. "They are natural risk-takers, they are ready to go to someplace new, they see a future for themselves that's different from their past – they have all these characteristics that you want in an innovator."

What Canadian firms should therefore be doing, MacKay says, is asking them: "Using your networks, language skills and home-country knowledge, what markets could you help open for our exports? When you look at this problem we are facing in our company, how would you use your specific skills and talents to go about fixing it?"



If you are an internationally trained medical professional, you have significant training that is valuable to the Canadian health care system and to the health of Canadians. The CCNM bridge delivery for international medical professionals offers graduates of medical schools an opportunity to further their health care careers in Canada.

The Canadian College of Naturopathic Medicine now offers bridge delivery of its naturopathic medical program, developed specifically to allow international medical graduates to complete the program in two years.

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In fact, even refugees – often assumed to be a financial burden – are good for the economy, says Mackay, who hopes the Conference Board will do a study of the economics of refugees in Canada. "You will not find a more motivated group of people," she says. "There are amazing economic stories to be told about them, too."

Likewise, John Montalbano, chief executive officer of RBC Global Asset Management Inc., a division of the Royal Bank of Canada that manages nearly \$300 billion in assets globally, is convinced that a strong immigration policy and effective workplace diversity programs will become Canada's advantage in an increasingly globalized world.

"As we broaden and deepen trade relations into new territories, such as mainland China, eastern Europe and Latin America, we need Canadians steeped in such cultures to allow us to conduct trade negotiations with confidence," he says. And workforce diversity is critical for corporations that aim to compete globally, he adds.

“How business is conducted in Asia, South America and the Middle East is very different from how it’s conducted in New York or Toronto,” Montalbano points out. Canadian firms need to learn how to harness the diversity advantage in more purposeful ways. “The most successful global businesses are those that have already moved on to models best suited to attract and retain talent in the economies they wish to partner with.”

While the business case for diversity is compelling, just as interesting and no less essential is what Habacon terms the “social sustainability imperative.” While most cities aspire to be more environmentally sustainable, it’s all for naught if the people living in them are lonely, unhappy and isolated. Communities thrive and succeed where there is connection. And that can be difficult amid differences in values, language, culture and perspective. But

thanks to its deep roots in multiculturalism, Habacon says, Canada has the potential to model what’s required to be both diverse and socially sustainable.

“We’re engaging this question ahead of everyone else in the world,” Habacon says. “Canada is at the leading edge of figuring it out. We have the political and social willingness to do so. We have to start thinking about world peace because it’s happening right in our backyard, and that’s kind of exciting.”

Ultimately, he adds, Canada’s message to prospective immigrants might change from “Come to Canada for the economic opportunity” to “Come and be part of the global solution to social sustainability.”

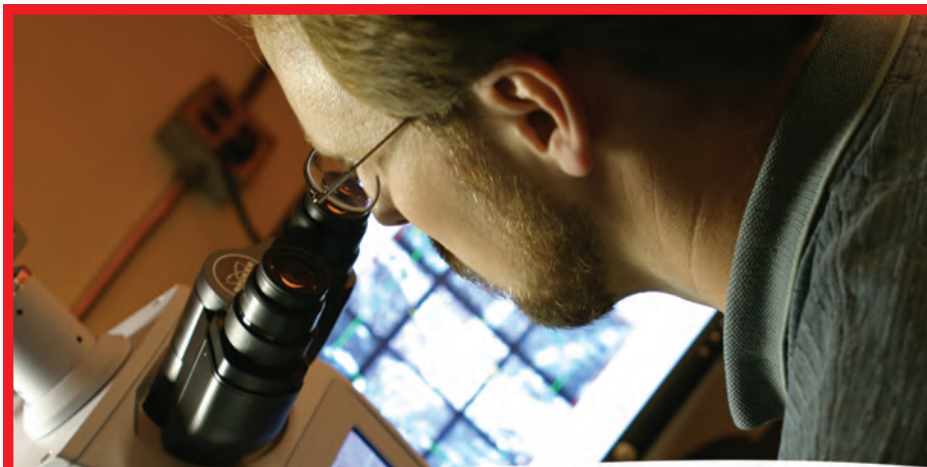
“That’s the potential here that I don’t see anywhere else in the world.”

Accelerating medical careers for international graduates

The Canadian College of Naturopathic Medicine in Toronto offers international medical graduates (IMGs) the chance to further their careers in Canada through its IMG bridge delivery program, which kicked off in May 2013 with 22 students.

A key feature of the program is its compressed time frame: students can earn a naturopathic medicine diploma in two years instead of the usual four. The program allows for reasonable sequencing of required courses and early clinic exposure, with more than 1,000 hours of primary clinic experience and the chance for students to serve as interns in clinics run by the college.

Now in his third term at the college, Hany Henein worked as a general practitioner in his home country, Egypt, before starting the program. He believes in integrative medicine and was also drawn to the program because of its two-year duration. He particularly appreciates its supportive approach. “The sincere, positive spirit and warm atmosphere is the best part of the program,” he says.



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