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Higher educational institutions as emerging immigrant selection actors: a history of British Columbia's retention of international graduates, 2001–2016

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ABSTRACT

In an effort to more efficiently utilize immigration to mitigate the negative economic impacts of falling population rates, some governments are shifting from human-capital to demand-driven immigrant selection approaches. While employers are typically seen as the resulting non-governmental selection actors, recent niche but growing immigration programs are repositioning higher educational institutions as additional yet inadvertent selection actors, typically unaware of their role. To illustrate the complexities inherent in this policy evolution, I historically trace the past 15 years of immigration selection design targeting international students in the Canadian province of British Columbia and highlight potential implications in light of increasing internationalization. I argue that educational policy researchers need to further understand and engage with the development of increasingly intertwined yet previously neglected policy areas – in this instance, immigration – as higher education assumes new roles in public life.

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Because immigration policy relates to issues typically managed at the nation-state level – e.g. national sovereignty and labor market policies – the contemporary selection of immigrants is almost exclusively the responsibility of national governments (Seidle 2013). Canada, however, is unique; provinces and territories *also* hold authority to set the basic criteria for skilled immigration selection, either entirely (in Quebec) or partially (in all other provinces and territories) through Provincial Nominee Programs[1] (PNPs). Immigrant selection policies are 'central to governance and control within skilled immigration policy' (Boucher and Cerna 2014, 21), and for those interested in understanding this crucial process, Canada's distinct power distribution alone makes its relatively complex selection system a compelling area for analysis, especially given the dramatic increase in PNP utilization over the past 15 years.

During this time of change, however, another novel trend in immigrant selection developed parallel to the rise in provincial application of power over Canadian immigrant selection. In the past decade, some national governments started shifting away from human-capital approaches in favor of demand-driven immigrant selection systems,

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allowing employers to emerge as significant subnational players (Boucher and Cerna 2014). While the role of employers in *migrant* selection is not 'new' – the Canada Pacific Railway's direct recruitment of Chinese temporary foreign workers (TFWs) in the 1880s being one well-known example – their role in permanent *im*migrant selection is unprecedented. As the 2014 special issue 'Skilled Immigration Trends' of *International Migration* showcases, researchers are just beginning to analyze the rising role of employers in these new demand-driven systems – with Canada, New Zealand, and Australia 'leading' the way in allowances for direct non-governmental control.

The intersection of these two shifts in power – (1) increased provincial utilization of control over immigrant selection in Canada, and (2) gradual governmental relinquishment of direct control (into the hands of private entities, e.g. employers) globally – set the stage for a distinct situation in Canada. Today, a new selection actor is beginning to operate alongside Canada's immigration system despite limited research or attention to its role: post-secondary educational institutions. Just as Tyack (1974) identifies a point in American urban education when the system became a 'vast filtering system' (198) as 'educators were increasingly serving as gatekeepers to opportunity' (199), Canada's unique regional, subnational immigration control now allows for highly localized immigration selection policies at a time when governments are experimenting with new ways to select 'successful' immigrants – which, in some programs, is subtly repositioning post-secondary institutions as new gatekeepers to immigration. In some provinces struggling to maintain population levels, institutions work directly with the provincial government to help facilitate international student retention. Here, I focus instead on the more subtle ways immigration policies elsewhere position institutions as actors without their partnership. As a result, institutional stakeholders are largely unaware of this process, instead focusing on short-term implications of international student admissions such as a financial (e.g. international student recruitment) or otherwise strategic (e.g. internationalization) opportunities (Kelly 2000; Altbach and Knight 2007). This results in limited formal knowledge about the long-term implications of this new role as an ethical responsibility, dilemma, or even burden.

Given recent dramatic attempts to increase fee-paying international students and the high stakes at play, why are higher education policy researchers not only largely absent from discussions – but also *unaware* – of immigration selection policy issues, allowing those from other disciplines to dominate the research area? In Fisher et al.'s (2014) otherwise comprehensive chapter outlining the history of post-secondary education policy in BC, for example, no mention of immigration policy or international student enrollment is made. This may be because research on skilled immigrant selection policies (as opposed to other sub-fields, such as immigration settlement/integration) have traditionally been driven by attempts to determine what 'works' in terms of labor market impacts, especially as researched by economists (e.g. Sweetman and Warman 2014). The previously mentioned journal *International Migration*, for example, is a publication of the intergovernmental International Organization for Migration, and its impetus for research is often from a 'migration management' perspective. Here, I intentionally depart from this approach to show how a nuanced historical understanding of policy evolution in this increasingly intertwined yet previously neglected policy area of immigration is important for educational researchers to undertake. In line with Anyon's (2005) call to expand the 'educational policy panoply' to include relevant economic and social policies

with 'consequences for urban education at least as profound as curriculum, pedagogy, and testing' (66), the internationalization of higher education necessitates a similar expansion to engage with not only state – but also local – immigration selection policies.

How, then, did post-secondary institutions emerge to inadvertently fill this new role? In what follows, I trace the history of one province's strategy to target and retain international graduates – namely, the British Columbia (BC) PNP 'International Graduate' (IG) and 'International Post Graduate' (IPG) categories – to show in detail how the provincial management of regional labor markets ushered post-secondary educational institutions to the stage as actors in Canada's immigrant selection process. While the strategy may at first seem like a traditional human-capital approach to immigrant selection, I aim to show how post-secondary institutions' involvement actually creates a new blended approach where institutional demands could eventually begin to drive the system – both by seeking to meet their own institutional needs as well as functioning as a demand-based filter on behalf of the government.

To do so, I first outline the history of Canada's PNP development from 1867 to 1998 to highlight the development of Canada's unique shared immigration system under federalism. Next, I discuss the rapid PNP growth over the following decade and the subsequent tension this caused between provincial and federal control in the early 2000s, and I review the factors contributing to the shift from human-capital to demand-driven immigration systems at that time, situating international graduates within this shift. I then narrow my focus to the *BC* PNP's start in 2001 and the development of the IG and IPG categories as instances where selection agency is explicitly assigned to post-secondary institutions. Finally, I conclude by exploring the broader implications – including those for future research – based on lessons from the past.

1867–mid-1990s: a distant partnership

Canada's formal immigration system began with the 1867 *British North America Act's* establishment of Canadian federalism and subsequent declaration that both immigration and agriculture fell under shared federal–provincial jurisdiction (Baglay 2012); in contrast, the responsibility for higher education fell solely on the provinces. Initially, the Minister of Agriculture was deemed responsible for immigration as the four new provinces (Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick, and Nova Scotia) actively sought immigrants to settle their land (Vineberg 1987). In 1868, the government held a federal–provincial conference on immigration which was 'regarded as an important affair' (Vineberg 1987, 301), repeated annually for six years, and led to Canada's first intergovernmental immigration agreement. Canada's first immigration 'boom' occurred from 1882 to 1891, followed by a larger boom from 1902 to 1930; as numbers increased, the federal government turned its attention away from established provinces and focused instead on populating federally managed western territories (CIC 1995).

Not until after World War II did provinces again seek to independently recruit immigrants – first in small numbers to fill regional labor market needs during the 1950s, then specifically to Quebec as the province sought greater autonomy in a variety of areas from the 1960s onward (Vineberg 1987; Seidle 2013). After three modest agreements between Quebec and the federal government in the 1970s, the signing of the 1991 McDougall/Gagnon-Tremblay Accord gave Quebec unprecedented sole subnational

power to deliver integration services and select all economic migrants in the province (Seidle 2013).

In tandem to Quebec's intergovernmental agreements, Canadian law reinforced an explicit statutory basis for provincial participation in immigration. The 1976 *Immigration Act* (and now the corresponding 2002 *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act*, or IRPA) expanded on the federal and provincial governments' joint jurisdiction to draft Canadian immigration law and policy (*IRPA* 2002, s.8-10; Seidle 2013), while the 1982 *Constitution Act* retained the shared power over immigration and agriculture from the 1867 British North American Act (*Canadian Constitution Act* 1982, s 95). Starting in 1978, provinces began signing modest agreements with the federal government, but none provided provincial involvement in the immigration selection itself (Seidle 2013). With an eye towards Quebec's relatively autonomous selection system, certain 'have not' provinces grew increasingly frustrated with the federal government's immigration management, and things began to change.

Mid-1990s–early 2000s: birth of the PNPs

In 1995, total immigration to Canada fell to a 5-year low of 212,504 newcomers (CIC 1995). For Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, the mid- to late 1990s brought increasing global competition for highly skilled workers – particularly workers in science, technology, and health care fields – due to economic growth and increasing concern about aging populations (Tremblay 2005; Ferrer, Picot, and Riddell 2014). As it had at the turn of the twentieth century, the federal government again sought to meet these specific labor market and populations demands through a combination of permanent immigration and temporary foreign worker programs. However, some Atlantic and Prairie provincial governments voiced their concerns about the uneven distribution of immigrants; in 1995, for example, 88% of immigrants settled in either Ontario, Quebec, or BC; more specifically, the vast majority settled in Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver (Baglay 2012; Seidle 2013). Manitoba also questioned the ability of the federal government's selection criteria to fill its particular need for low-skilled workers (Seidle 2013).

Recognizing its constitutional obligation to work with the provinces but reluctant to create further autonomous systems like the accord with Quebec, the federal government created the PNPs, allowing provincial departments/ministries of labor, education, and immigration to nominate individuals to the federal government for permanent residency (PR) (Seidle 2013). As long as the federal government is satisfied a provincial nominee (1) can establish themselves financially, (2) intends to reside in the nominating province, (3) is not nominated on the basis of a passive, or 'immigration-linked,' investment scheme, and (4) is not medically, criminally, or otherwise inadmissible to Canada, the federal government is obligated to grant them PR (*IRPA* 2002, s. 87). The first PNPs were signed by three provinces in 1998, and initially, PNP flows were expected to be minimal. However, over the following decade, PNP admissions steadily increased, even when federal levels decreased from 2001–2003, 2005–2007, and 2010–2011. In addition, the 2006 Conservative government removed limits to individual provinces, which contributed to increases (Seidle 2013). Between 2004 and 2008, the number of people immigrating to Canada through a PNP increased from 6248 to 22,418;[2] in 2008, over half of all new immigrants

landing in Prince Edward Island, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and New Brunswick came through a PNP (British Columbia Ministry of Advanced Education and Labour Market Development 2009).

By 2009, all provinces (except Quebec) and two of the three territories had PNP agreements in place with the federal government. Provinces used PNPs to attract immigrants who, at least in theory, would solve unique provincial needs, just as they had in Canada's early history – for example, purchase and operate farms, invest in particular industries, start new businesses, or simply *stay* in the province due to significant social ties to the region. That year, in 2009 – when the federal government reinstated provincial-specific quotas amidst increasing concern about competition between the PNP and federal immigration programs – individual provincial ministers reacted by calling for higher overall PNP quotas, a clear sign of the significant role PNPs had come to play in the regional management of population and labor markets (Seidle 2013).

The early 2010s: an auditor's headache

By 2009, tensions between the federal and provincial governments came to a head – and critiques of the federal government's immigration policy were strong. That year, the very first page of the Auditor General of Canada's report began with a scathing critique of immigration as a 'prime example' of bad policy:

> Despite good intentions, there are examples of policies adopted, programs launched or changed, and commitments made without a full analysis of the risks involved, the resources needed, the potential impact on other players, and the steps required to achieve the desired results. We also see examples where there is no long-term vision or strategy to guide a department's overall programming, and others where there is no ongoing evaluation of program effectiveness. The result can be a fragmented approach to programming in response to a problem of the day, creating other problems that were not anticipated. *A prime example is immigration programming.* (Auditor General of Canada 2009a, 1–2, emphasis added)

The report went on to comment primarily on a wide range of *federal* immigration concerns; its main critique of the PNPs was that they had 'become highly diverse and complex over time, with selection criteria that var[ied] substantially from one province to another' and 'more than 50 different categories, each with its own selection approach and criteria' (2009b, 25). Indeed, after a decade of development, the PNPs had established such a variety of categories that the Auditor General found that 'a number of issues require [d] attention' related to PNP quality assurance mechanisms and evaluations – since, 'given their increasing diversity and significant growth in recent years, it would be time to take stock of these programs and formally evaluate them to assess the extent to which they are achieving their intended results' (Auditor General of Canada 2009b, 25). However, the authority to define 'intended results' (i.e. federal or provincial) was unclear.

In response to the Auditor General's critiques, the then Department of Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC, now known as Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, or IRCC) conducted a federal evaluation in 2011, clarifying that 'while the PNP was initially focused exclusively on attracting skilled workers to contribute to the provinces' economic objectives, many PTs have incorporated additional objectives, such as regional development and population growth, into their PN programs over time' (CIC 2011, iii). From the provinces' perspective, the PNPs allowed much-needed regional flexibility not only

responding more nimbly to changing labor market demands – since processing times were typically half those of federal immigration programs – but also creating schemes to entice immigrants to stay in particular provinces. Even if their programs failed in attracting and retaining 'desirable' immigrants – and several did fail – the provinces could tinker with programs to suit their individual needs in a way the massive federal government simply could not.

The PNPs also allowed provinces to develop selection criteria targeting immigrants from an increasingly large pool (rising from 110,616 in 2002 to 213,441 in 2012) of both high and semi-skilled TFWs already in Canada, solving the increasingly difficult problem faced by the federal government of 'integrating' immigrants successfully into the labor market (Seidle 2013). With federal immigration programs traditionally focusing on assessing factors (e.g. work experience and language abilities) measured *outside* Canada, immigration legislation previously required that immigration applications be submitted from outside Canada – preventing many temporary residents (e.g. international students and TFWs) to remain in the country of residence (Tremblay 2005). Yet due to various difficulties applying their skills in new and different contexts, many OECD countries saw 'deteriorating economic performance(s)' of immigrants arriving since the 1970s (Akbari and MacDonald 2014, 811; Sweetman and Warman 2014). Although Canada's legal objectives for immigration range from 'enrich and strengthen the social and cultural fabric of Canadian society' to 'support and assist the development of minority official languages communities in Canada,' the *de facto* measurement of Canadian immigration policies has primarily focused on their ability to 'support the development of a strong and prosperous Canadian economy' and 'permit Canada to pursue the maximum social, cultural and economic benefits of immigration' – with a strong focus on *economic* benefits (*IRPA* 2002, s.3(1)). Both governmental and academic measurements of immigration 'success' have typically focused on reported income over time and, more specifically, the prevalence of immigrants who utilize Canadian social assistance after landing. The 'deteriorating economic performances' of immigrants, in other words, was of paramount concern to the Canadian government, sparking plans to shift from human capital to demand-driving immigration programming.

At the federal level, this shift proved to be slow-moving. Before *IRPA*, changing federal immigration programs was often a time-consuming and difficult process at the legislative level. In 2002, *IRPA* introduced Ministerial Instructions (MIs), which allowed the Minister to bypass the Parliament of Canada and issue special instructions directly to immigration officers; still, MIs were not widely used until the early 2010s. Thus, it was the provinces – which had the authorization to create immigration selection criteria without going through parliament at any level – where innovation in immigrant selection took place.

Most provinces used PNPs to attract people who would not otherwise settle in their region. However, for provinces with high levels of existing immigration flows as well as TFWs interested in settling permanently – namely Ontario and BC – the ability to select immigrants based on proven experience within Canada was appealing. Some PNPs thus created a new opportunity for provinces to select immigrants *after* testing their ability to establish themselves economically in Canada, creating a two-step immigration process. It also allowed provinces to target one of the most highly sought-after groups of temporary residents: international graduates.

'Golden' immigrants: international graduates as immigrants

From the inception of the PNP program, attempts at retaining locally educated post-secondary international students were found among the myriad PNP categories. At least eight provinces developed PNP categories specifically targeting graduates from post-secondary institutions during the 2000s (CIC 2011). The categories typically required graduates to obtain work experience or, at minimum, a job offer from an eligible employer before nomination 'to ensure that their temporary immigration responds to labour market needs' (Tremblay 2005, 213; see also CIC 2011).

The rationale for retaining international graduates was rooted in the early 2000s growth in human resource migration (particularly in science and technology) among OECD countries, caused by 'sustained economic growth and the development of the information economy' (Tremblay 2005, 197). Research measuring immigration economic integration in the mid-2000s showed that a 'local' degree increased the likelihood of labor market integration, since international graduates tend to be young and possess advanced language skills, recognized qualifications, relevant training, and an overall high degree of 'acculturation' (Tremblay 2005; Sweetman and Warman 2014). Globally, students were increasingly studying outside of their home countries, while OECD countries sought young, highly skilled immigrants to fill not only immigration gaps but perceived gaps in public funding for post-secondary education and supporting local economies. A 2011 report written by the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, in partnership with provincial and territorial ministers of immigration offers the following rationale:

> The economic benefits of recruiting foreign students to study in Canada go beyond their immediate impact in terms of spending and jobs. Like others in the global landscape, Canada is facing acute demographic pressures as its population ages and baby boomers retire. The demands on the country's social infrastructure that these changes imply will put pressure on government bottom lines. In addition to improving access and outcomes for domestic students, part of the solution lies in increasing the number of foreign students studying in Canada, encouraging some of them to stay, and facilitating their immigration. (2011, 14)

This policy talk highlights a few key trends of the rhetoric of this time: the benefits are primarily *economic* (for both domestic students and governments), Canada must *compete* with other countries for these benefits, and Canada should be *selective* in the students it allows to stay.

Enticing international students to stay was framed as a win-win for the provinces: international students brought in valuable tuition dollars to the provincially funded post-secondary educational sector and generated economic activity for the provinces; their 'integration' process was, in a way, subsidized by the institutions, who helped students develop strong ties to the region; those with university degrees were highly educated relative to other immigrants, typically meaning higher average earnings over time; and the provinces could set certain parameters to retain only those who fit their needs. As a stream, their long-term 'economic establishment' was among the most successful, and those PNP steams targeting international graduates were the only in which the majority (55%) held 'A' (that is, the highest 'skilled') level jobs on the National Occupation Classification (NOC) scale upon becoming permanent residents (NOC) (CIC 2011). In these ways, although they made up just 4% of all PNP immigrants in the 2000s, international graduates

were seen by the provinces as the 'ideal' highly skilled immigrants (CIC 2011), a position the Canadian government increasingly makes to this day.

The federal government developed similar thoughts on a larger scale. The Post-Graduation Work Permit Program (PGWP), which enabled students to work in Canada post-graduation as TFWs through a series of pilot projects until a national program was put into place in 2005, was implemented at the federal level to enable recent graduates a chance to compete in the Canadian labor market. Because the PGWP gave graduates an 'open' work permit – that is, exempt from the normal Labour Market Impact Assessment (formally known as a Labour Market Opinion) requirements and unbound to any one employer – international graduates had up to three years to access the Canadian labor market on relatively equal footing with Canadian citizens and PRs, at least legally (CIC 2006). For young and relatively inexperienced would-be immigrants, the PGWP became a very appealing – and, in many cases, the only – way to gain access to the Canadian labor market.

The federal government initially intended the PGWP to act as a 'test' period for recent graduates to prove their ability to succeed in the Canadian labor market (Ferrer, Picot, and Riddell 2014). If an individual could find and retain 'skilled' full-time work (defined by the federal government as jobs within the NOC categories A, B, or 0) for one to two years,[3] they could apply for PR through the federal Canadian Experience Class (CEC) designed in September 2008 specifically to retain recent graduates and experienced TFWs. However, the federal government's PGWP also allowed recent graduates to qualify for competing PNP programs which were, at least until 2014, faster and more attractive than available federal options. In its 2011 evaluation report, CIC recognized that the overlap between CEC and some PNPs 'lies most notably with the international student graduate streams and the use of TFW in combination with some skilled and semi-skilled worker streams' (2011, 30). In one example, the report showed how most international graduate PNP requirements were identical to those of CEC – except CEC required *stricter* language requirements (CIC 2011). While the creation of the high-profile CEC was described as a 'major innovation in Canadian immigration policy' (Sweetman and Warman 2014, 391) and earned one of the Auditor General's few compliments in its 2009 report, the program essentially built upon the proven successes of the provinces' abilities to better gauge who would ultimately succeed economically – and thus created a competition between the provinces and the federal government for international students with particular profiles.

Indeed, by 2010, international graduates wanting to immigrate to Canada had their pick of several PNPs and the CEC to choose from – assuming, that is, they could find a skilled job. For those who could, there was never an easier time in modern history to immigrate to Canada, with just one caveat: the completion of a qualifying post-secondary educational program was required first. To qualify through this pathway, prospective immigrants had to make a significant investment – financial and otherwise – in Canada before gaining the opportunity to 'prove' their adaptability as immigrants. As we will see, while employers may be choosier, there was no shortage of educational institutions interested in their business.

'Golden' immigrants: a focus on international students

Immigration programs were not alone in competing for international students. The mid-1990s to mid-2000s showed a dramatic growth in global student mobility and the

internationalization of education systems, caused by 'developments in communications, faster information flows, and proactive student recruitment policies in many host countries' (Tremblay 2005, 197). In Canada, for example, overall international student enrollment at all levels increased by 82% between 2003 (159,426) and 2013 (290,000) (CBIE 2015a), while the number of international students enrolled in Canadian universities specifically doubled between 1999–2000 and 2006–2007 (Fisher and Rubenson 2014).

The increase in international student enrollment in Canada is in part due to intense marketing and recruitment efforts; indeed, growth in international student enrollment is seen as one major factor in pushing Canadian higher education systems towards marketization (Fisher and Rubenson 2014). But who did the recruiting? The federal government actively sought to increase international student numbers in Canada through efforts such as the 2014 Foreign Affairs, Trade & Development Canada's International Education Strategy, which aimed to double the number of international students in Canada by 2022 (from the 2011 level) and increase the number of international students who remain in Canada as PRs after graduation (Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada 2014), while some provincial governments also followed suit (e.g. British Columbia Ministry of Advanced Education 2012). Indeed, the 'Possibility of Immigration' is listed as one of the 'Top Reasons to Study in Canada' on the federal government's 'Imagine Education au/in Canada' recruitment/branding website, making the link explicit early on. Yet as Fisher and Rubenson (2014) note in the case of BC, the recent dramatic increase in international student enrollment was 'driven less by explicit government policies than by institutions that are trying to make up some of the revenue lost due to decreases in government funding' (317). Educational institutions – facing an increasingly competitive global market for tuition-generating international students as growing economies developed their post-secondary education sectors – benefited significantly from the introduction of programs to retain international students, at least partially for their value as recruitment tools.

These primarily economic-focused positive benefits of international students on receiving communities are well documented during the turn of the century until today – for example, they provide a source of direct (e.g. tuition) and indirect (increasing enrollments) funding for national education systems; economic contributions to domestic demand; economic and trade gains; and a source of future workers for knowledge-intensive sectors (Tremblay 2005). The positive benefits to sending countries are much more contested; for developing economies, commonly cited benefits include remittances, brain circulation (as opposed to brain drain), an increase in language, culture, social customs, and personal networks which develop 'ideal ambassadors for economic and commercial relations' (Tremblay 2005, 224), and an 'expand[ed] participation in tertiary education when the domestic offer is insufficient to meet a growing demand' (Tremblay 2005, 224).

The *negative* impacts on sending countries and individual students are important but unfortunately out of the scope of this paper. For the purposes here what is important to note is that higher education institutions clearly saw immigration as a positive recruitment tool for students and focused on the positive aspects of the changing system. A quote from the non-profit Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE) sums up the sector's sentiments in a *University Affairs* article titled 'Changes to immigration rules are a boon to international student recruitment':

> For many years international students and international graduates of our institutions were somewhat ignored … I think there just wasn't a strong understanding that they were *golden*, in a sense, because they had Canadian credentials, they had already integrated to some extent and they had shown adaptability … it is a very important thing for many students to know that there are potential opportunities that might lead to permanent residence status or longer-term work experience after graduation. (Tamburri 2013, emphasis added)

Why would an educational organization like CBIE to stress the importance for students to know about opportunities leading to PR? Higher educational institutions are historically involved in supporting career preparation and transition, but supporting and advocating for students' *immigration* goals is a new arena for the sector. It is here that the unstated potential for PR as a nascent tool for recruiting international students begins to emerge publically.

Even students themselves highlight the importance the 'possibility of immigration' plays in the recruitment of international students who knowingly pay an extra fee for the right to study beside domestic students. In a critique of the federal Express Entry's initial lack of spaces for international graduates in early 2015, the executive director of the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations said:

> International students pay up to three times (as much as Canadians) in tuition. One of the selling features for Canada's international education is the opportunity for foreign students to immigrate and stay in Canada after earning their Canadian experience … The perception is Canada is making it more difficult for them. There's no more real advantage with their Canadian education. Canada could be losing out to other countries in attracting international students. (Keung 2015)

The quote above showcases a changing perspective on the role of Canadian post-secondary education from a student perspective as well.[4]

Before moving forward, it is necessary to briefly acknowledge the limited reliable data existing around both international post-secondary student immigration intentions and outcomes in Canada and also highlight the need for further research in understanding the intentions of international students. International students are highly diverse and choose to study in Canada for a wide range of reasons; many do not wish to remain in Canada after graduation, and this paper does not seek to discount their experiences. A significant number, for example, are conditionally funded by their state governments and are expected to return after completing their program, while others choose to go on to study or work in their home or a third country. While researchers and practitioners alike widely sense that permanent immigration is a goal for a significant (and likely majority) of international post-secondary students in Canada, there is a lack of reliable data to confirm this fact; more research is needed in this area.

The most frequently referenced statistic that ~50% of all international post-secondary students studying in Canada intend to apply for Canadian PR is based on the somewhat problematic 2014 and 2015 CBIE International Student Survey; the reality may be a much higher percentage. In 2015, for example, just over 4000 students responded to CBIE's survey, reflecting just ~1.5% of all post-secondary international students in Canada and involving the participation of only 2 of the 10 largest universities based on full-time undergraduate enrollment (Universities Canada 2014; CBIE 2015b). Despite this limitation, it is one of the few available sources measuring international student data on a large scale; it is also important to note that while ~50% of the 2015 survey respondents

reported an intention to apply for PR, an additional 34% were 'not sure,' meaning only 15% are sure they do not intend to apply for PR (CBIE 2015b). Using this survey data – despite its issues – points to the likelihood that more than 3/4 of students either wish for, or are considering, PR. Small-scale studies certainly point to PR as an increasingly important goal for international students (e.g. Axiom Consultants Inc. 2012; Bepple 2014), and IRCC's data shows that, between 2009 and 2013, there was a 110% increase in the number of international students who held a post-graduation work permit in the year directly following their studies (CIC 2015).

As we turn now to the BC PNP in particular, we will see how BC's 'International Graduate' (IG) and 'International Post Graduate' (IPG) categories offered PR pathways to students based primarily on a radically new approach: their ability to graduate from post-secondary institutions – period. No previous work experience required.

Late 1990s to the present: the BC PNP and the first international graduates

BC was one of the first provinces to sign an initial PNP agreement with the federal government in 1998 during its shift away from its traditional role as a resource producer (Fisher et al. 2014). However, in comparison with other early signers (Saskatchewan and Manitoba in 1998; New Brunswick and Newfoundland and Labrador in 1999), immigrant recruitment was not initially a focus for the BC government, partially since the province already received the third-highest number of immigrants after Ontario and Quebec. No immigrants were brought in through the PNP until the program officially began operating in 2001, and then only in very small numbers with a specific goal of attracting highly skilled immigrants – a different approach from the other early adopters who had significantly different needs (Province of British Columbia 2010; Seidle 2013). 2001 also notably marks a transition in BC government from the New Democratic Party to the more conservative Liberal government, which 'made market ideology the cornerstone of its fiscal policy' after coming into power (Fisher et al. 2014, 72). In 2004, the BC government signed a second agreement, which remained in force until 2010; the third was signed in 2010 and remained in force until April 2015 (Government of Canada 2010) when a fourth agreement was put in place for another five years (Government of Canada 2015).

The total number of BC PNP immigrants began to rise in 2005 but still remained relatively low; only 789 individuals immigrated through the program that year (Government of Canada 2004; Seidle 2013). However – with the exception of a slight decrease in 2010 – BC PNP numbers have risen steadily since then, in line with the overall increase in PNP participation across Canada since the mid-2000s. In 2008, the total number of BC PNP immigrants was 3629; by 2012, the number was 5932, or 16% of total BC immigrants (British Columbia Ministry of Advanced Education and Labour Market Development 2009; Seidle 2013). 2012 also marks the year when BC's International Education Strategy was just aiming to increase international students in BC by 50% over four years and promote PR transitions (British Columbia Ministry of Advanced Education 2012). For the year of 2015, the federal government imposed a quota of 5500 nominees for the BC PNP, which BC noted early on that it 'intend[ed] to fully utilize' (Province of British Columbia 2015a). After negotiating BC's quota with the federal government in early February 2016 but before the number was officially set, BC's Premier noted it was 'at about 5,500

now; we need it to be 9,000 because we need to skills match people who are going to become Canadian citizens' (Hunter and Stone 2016).

Since its inception, the BC PNP consisted of two main streams of categories: the Strategic Operations stream (i.e. targeted economic classes) and the Business stream (Province of British Columbia 2011). Within each stream are several different categories targeting various immigrant profiles; each has gone through adjustments since 2001. BC was one province with a typical international graduate PNP category contingent on obtaining a full-time, permanent job offer within the province, called the 'International Graduate' (IG) category – meaning, in this case, recipients of a degree, diploma or certificate within the past two years from a recognized post-secondary institution in Canada authorized to grant degrees. In sharp contrast with federal economic immigration options and most other PNPs, the BC PNP was unique in that no previous work experience was required – just an offer of employment.

Between 2005 and 2010, 916 of the 9963 nominated applicants came through the IG category (Province of British Columbia 2011). The average age of IG applicants (27) was lower than the overall BC PNP average (35), and 84% of IG applicants held a university degree (Province of British Columbia 2011). Although only 64% of IGs felt that 'the salary they received was fair given their skills and experience' (compared with 71% of all BC PNPs), the province viewed the young age and high educational levels of IGs as a long-term investment in future taxpayers (Province of British Columbia 2011, 21). In fact, the IG program specifically allowed 'low' and 'semi-skilled' IGs (e.g. those with jobs at the NOC C and D level) to apply if their employer could prove a promotional plan for advancement to NOC A, B, or 0 – and the graduate could pass a language test. In the eyes of BC, just as in those of other provinces as well as the federal government, IGs with a proven ability to integrate into the labor market were a highly sought-after immigrant profile with relatively little uptake of immigrants in comparison with other categories (Province of British Columbia 2011).

Platinum IGs: the BC PNP's IPG category

After a decade of landing only a small portion of the desired number international graduates, BC was hungry for more ways to attract such highly valuable immigrants. The April 2010 Canada-British Columbia Immigration Agreement contained a special annex on international students, which began with the statement, 'Canada and British Columbia agree that attracting and retaining international students is an important element of British Columbia's international education and immigration agenda … ' and included as one of five objectives as 'cooperate on policy changes that facilitate attraction, transition of certain international students to PR, and their retention in the province' (Government of Canada 2010). Shortly after – in May 2010 – the then Minister of Advanced Education and Labour Market Development Moira Stilwell announced the launch of the BC PNP International Post-Graduate (IPG) Pilot category (Province of British Columbia 2010). The rationale behind the program was similar to those in other provinces, based in ministry labor market forecasts of a provincial shortage in highly skilled workers, and particularly in technical and scientific fields (Province of British Columbia 2010). For the next three years, the BC PNP would run a pilot project nominating international graduates from BC graduate degree programs in natural, health, and applied sciences who intended to reside in BC.

No job offer or work experience was required – simply a graduate-level science degree from an eligible BC post-secondary institution.

The IPG Pilot was relatively small and, unlike other immigration streams, unanimously considered a success by the province and popular media. After nominating 734 individuals, the BC government announced that the pilot would be extended as a permanent program in August 2013 (Province of British Columbia 2013). Notably, of the initial 734 nominees, 93% were master's graduates (as opposed to Ph.D. graduates). This could be because there are significantly more master's students in BC than Ph.D. students. It could also be because, until January 2015, Ph.D. students had the option of applying for Canada's Federal Skilled Worker Program (FSWP) Ph.D. stream after completing two years of a Ph.D. program; they often had a vested interest to do so, since PR status is required to access much of the funding available for graduate students and often favorably impacts Canadian job prospects. Yet an additional reason may be that Ph.D. students – particularly those in the targeted fields – are more likely to leave Canada entirely after graduation (often to work in academic or research positions within the United States) or are less concerned about their immigration status, as academic positions are often considered sufficiently 'skilled' to warrant immigration support from educational institutions and governments alike.

Although the IPG Program is now referred to as a 'permanent' program, it is likely to change as the tug of war between federal and provincial control of immigration continues. In April/May 2014, for example, changes to the federal government's TFW program lead to a dramatic increase in BC PNP applications – described by the *Globe and Mail* as 'unmanageable flood of applicants seeking entry to Canada through British Columbia' (Hunter 2015). This increased the nomination processing time from the traditional 1–2 months to 10–13 months in December 2014 and thus limited the BC PNP's ability to react nimbly to labor market demands – and also made the IPG a less compelling option. In January 2015, a third level of complexity was added to the existing BC PNP international graduate streams – the BC PNP Express Entry British Columbia – reflecting the federal government's attempted integration of PNPs with the new federal Express Entry application management and prioritization system for certain economic immigrants; applicants who qualify for *both* the IPG and a federal economic immigration category then qualified for fast-track processing by the federal government (Province of British Columbia 2015a).

Up until April 2015, the PNPs remained more advantageous for graduates than either the CEC or the FSWP – both, as we have seen, targeted international students but still required a minimum of one year of full-time work experience (Baglay 2012). Yet on 31 March 2015,[5] the BC PNP announced a 'temporary pause' in its intake for 90 days 'in order to introduce a new streamlined application process and program criteria' (Province of British Columbia 2015b). Although the *Globe and Mail* described BC's actions as having 'abruptly shut the door' (Hunter 2015), the pause actually coincided with end of the BC government's current agreement with the federal government and signaled a re-negotiation process. The 2015 Canada-British Columbia Immigration Agreement was signed on 7 April and, similar to the 2010 agreement, contained a similar strongly worded annex on international students, beginning with the assertion that 'attracting and retaining international students is a priority for [both Canada and BC]' (Government of Canada 2015). The agreement did not lift the pause, however. While both the traditional IG and IPG streams were affected, the pause did *not* apply to select categories: health care

professionals, the Northeast pilot project, and all Express Entry British Columbia categories. This meant that international graduates who qualified for *both* the IG or IPG *and* one of the federal Express Entry categories (CEC, FSWP, and Federal Skilled Trades Program (FSTP), all which require a minimum of one year work experience) could still apply during the pause.

On 1 September 2015, the BC PNP paused all IG and IPG intake due to predictions of exceeding the annual quota; it remained closed until late January 2016, when the province revealed a new Skills Immigration Registration system to rank applicants in a similar way as Express Entry's human-capital approach. The IG and IPG were reinstituted in both their original form and in conjunction with Express Entry (requiring qualification through CEC, FSWP, and FSTP), and all IPG applications were exempted from the human-capital selection process. Yet again, this marked a major change to selection criteria.

Although the IG and IPG themselves continue to change, programs targeting international students and graduates are on track to both expand and increase on the provincial and federal level. 'Opportunities Ontario' recently followed BC's IG and IPG examples, creating immigrant retention PNP streams for both master's and Ph.D. holders without job offers. Many provinces in eastern Canada are experimenting with ways to retain international students in the region. Finally, since the new federal Liberal government came to power in November 2015, the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship John McCallum has continued to publically describe international students as 'ideal' immigrants and is expected to announce changes to Express Entry in fall 2016 aimed to make the selection criteria more favorable for international graduates.

Discussion

Within the existing literature on immigration, the role of significant actors beyond the nation-state is still relatively new as a concept; the particular role of educational instructions as selection actors is entirely absent. Even direct employer influence on immigration[6] selection is still lacking in-depth study, in part because New Zealand, Australia, and Canada are still relatively unique in the amount of power they give to employers in the process (Boucher and Cerna 2014). However, this shift in policy has significant implications. Guest editors of the aforementioned 2014 review of current policy trends in skilled immigration policy, for example, write that 'given an increasing focus upon employer selection within skilled immigration policies, this question [of who selects skilled immigrants, and on what bases] goes to the heart of state-employer relationships, and indeed, questions of state sovereignty over immigration selection' (Boucher and Cerna 2014, 21). As the BC PNP IG and, in particular, the IPG categories show, educational institutions have unprecedented influence in BC's immigrant selection process, and similar questions can be asked about the changing nature of state–educational institution relationships.

With no requirement for a graduate to interact with the labor market in order to qualify, the only true selection criteria (other than previously mentioned federally required screening such as an inadmissibility assessment) for the IPG is done at the educational institution through the admission and graduation procedures. In some ways, admission into a BC science graduate program at any university – with widely varying admission requirements and tuition costs – virtually equates to an immigration option. The IG is similar; although the student is expected to find a permanent job offer, the skill level is extremely flexible, and no actual work experience is required. In this way, immigration policy posits

post-secondary admissions as a new and highly significant step in the immigrant selection process without their awareness.

CIC has recently acknowledged the increasing role higher educational institutions play in selecting future immigrants, admitting in 2015 that

> as international students are selected by educational institutions based on their own criteria and according to their policies, the [International Student Program] is demand-driven and the CIC role is limited to processing applications of those students who have been accepted to study in Canada. (CIC 2015, 20)

Despite students' increasing interest in working in and immigrating to Canada post-graduation, however, there was only a 25% increase in the number of students who transitioned to PR status through the economic class (as opposed to family or humanitarian classes) during the same time period, leading CIC (2015) to note in a recent evaluation of the international student program that 'the number of international students transitioning [to PR status] may be viewed as low in comparison to the total number of international students coming to Canada' (38) and to recommend that, moving forward, the international student program must ensure alignment with PR programs. This points to potentially increasing responsibilities on the part of higher educational institutions to connect their admission policies with the demographic needs of Canada.

As international student tuition becomes more deeply entrenched as long-term structural solutions to financial woes – and governments increasingly rely on 'just-in-time' style immigration as a solution to labor market and populations gaps – the promise of immigration is becoming more and more tightly entwined with recruitment, blurring the line between where student selection ends and immigrant selection begins. Having shown the emergence of higher educational institutions as immigrant selection actors, I conclude by offering five open-ended areas for consideration and encouraged future research.

(1) Potential to increase marketization of higher education

In political theory literature, state immigrant admission decisions are frequently compared with university selection decisions (Walzer 1983; Carens 2003; Tannock 2011). The analogy is used to distinguish between morally acceptable discrimination decisions (e.g. 'objective' criteria such as test scores) from unacceptable discriminatory decisions (e.g. barring a particular gender or race) to serve a collective and public good. However, lacking reference to educational theory, these comparisons fail to recognize that higher public education is almost uniformly organized at the nation-state or subnation-state level – e.g. largely at the provincial level in Canada – whereas post-secondary admissions decisions are in fact, at least in part, a global process. Canadian universities select applicants through separate admissions procedures from beyond the nation-state level, challenging what is traditionally thought of as a collective and public good. In addition, public education's subtle privatization threatens to transform public education into an entirely individual and privatized good – and the BC PNPs may become examples of this shift.

Further data are needed about how individual institutions are responding. As an example of the complexity, since 7 November 2003, the BC Ministry of Advanced Education has issued approvals and consents across 41 different post-secondary institutions as follows:

Level	Number of programs
Bachelor	181
Master's	112
Doctoral	28
Other (e.g. Associate, JD)	12

Source: Province of British Columbia (2015b).

In slightly over 10 years, a full 333 new programs were added to serve students in the province. As certain sections of skilled job markets tighten, degree inflation progresses, and institutions increasingly compete for funding, one can imagine the potential for post-secondary programs – particularly professional master's level programs targeting international students – to intentionally function as a source of revenue, using the ease of PR as a selling point. In this way, institutions may develop and recruit for programs specifically designed to serve as expensive doors into the IPG immigration pathway, and public institutions may run individual programs which function much more like those in their private counterparts. Further research is needed on the extent to which higher education program design/creation and admission policies take into consideration immigration.

(2) Differences between higher educational institutions and employers as actors

Higher educational institutions generally have more limited knowledge of provincial skill requirements in comparison with employers and operate under a variety of mandates which are not necessarily in line with those of employers. If educational institutions recruit students based on the potential of immigration, what would be the implications of significant mismatch in the labor market upon graduation? Further research is needed to expand on the long-term implications of a new immigration actor operating alongside, and potentially in contrast to, employers.

(3) Unintended consequences due to lack of policy coordination

As Baglay (2012) points out, the skyrocketing use of MIs means immigration policies 'may change quickly and without notice' and the policy landscape is 'more fluid and is in need of constant monitoring' (138). PNP selection criteria can be rapidly adjusted, and caps are reached without public warning. This is an unprecedented time in terms of the speed at which immigration changes can be, and are, implemented – especially compared with the speed at which educational intuitions can respond, should they choose to be more actively involved with their new role. As we saw with the competition between the CEC and PNP IG streams, two related policies which develop in isolation from one another may have unintended results. Without better coordination and/or communication between immigration – both at the federal and provincial level – and higher education policies, the increasing dependency may develop vulnerabilities which can emerge rapidly.

(4) Changes to the role of higher education

Fisher et al.'s (2014) analysis of post-secondary education policy in BC highlights the connection between education and work as a long-term provincial trend, noting that 'the

public's perception that a good education is the passport to personal prosperity, coupled with the popular notion that an educated citizenry is a necessity for a nation's prosperity, drives [post-secondary education's place as a] policy priority' (117). Fisher et al. did not have immigration in mind, but immigration via higher education can be seen to work this way quite literally – offering a passport to Canada's labor market, facilitated by national rhetoric around the importance of highly educated and integrated students as 'ideal' immigrants. As Johnston & Lee write, 'over the past two decades there has been a shift in Canadian education policy from a focus on education as a public good to education as a commodity' (2014, 209) – and purchasing that commodity can now function as a new type of ladder not just in reach of a higher socio-economic class, but also towards a new citizenship and permanent access to a new labor market. It is important for higher educational institutions need to ensure their involvement occurs in a thoughtful, ethical, and informed way, and more research is needed regarding the implications of this shift in role and potentially the impact on future demographics.

(5) International student decision-making and behavior

Finally, further research is needed in understanding how important PR is for international students, as well as the ways the shifting internationalization landscape impacts the lived experience of individual students' lives. For students to whom immigration is a priority, policy changes can dramatically influence their educational decisions – for example, deciding to gain a master's degree before a Ph.D., rather than fast-tracking directly into a Ph.D., or taking a break between degrees and attempting to gain PR before pursing graduate school in order to qualify for federal funding, student loans, and domestic tuition rates. While student behavior may be useful for institutions to understand for a variety of reasons, most importantly institutions should look further into the possibility that they are reproducing structural harm in the process. Recent research is showing that international students' expectations of post-graduation work and immigration do not match to their expectations (e.g. Scott et al. 2015). Higher educational institutions are positioned in a gatekeeper role with many financial resources via tuition, but ultimately the product students are most interested in may not be the education but rather the access to a labor market through a policy institutions do not – and likely cannot – control. Until educational institutions more deeply understand their role within the immigration system, there is danger of exploiting a system with no one specific entity at the driver's seat but rather an amalgamation of autonomous forces.

Notes

1. The Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada term 'Provincial Nominee Program' refers to programs in both the provinces and territories (with the exclusion of Quebec, which has its own separate provincially run immigration selection system). For consistency, I use the term 'province' to refer to both provinces and territories.
2. Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada includes both principal applicants and their spouse/dependents in their immigration stream total calculations; out of the 22,418 individuals who immigrated through a PNP in 2008, for example, 37% were principal applicants and 63% were spouse/dependents (British Columbia Ministry of Advanced Education and Labour Market Development 2009).

3. The CEC work experience requirements have ranged from one to two years with variation based on category.
4. The quote is misinformed about the Express Entry program; as the program adjusts and matures, international graduates are likely to qualify for PR if they can 'succeed' in the labor market. However, the changing perspective remains reflected.
5. Sadly, one day after the author gave a presentation to ~150 international graduate students on how to apply for the BC PNP.
6. As opposed to employer influence on migration, i.e. non-permanent – at least, intended to be non-permanent – human movement. As the Swiss author Max Frisch famously (and heart-wrenchingly) described guest worker programs in 1986, 'We asked for workers. We got people instead.'

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