

## STATCAN COVID-19: DATA TO INSIGHTS FOR A BETTER CANADA



# Which postsecondary programs had high levels of international student enrolment prior to COVID-19?

by Marc Frenette, Youjin Choi, and April Doreleyers

Release date: June 15, 2020

---

## How to obtain more information

For information about this product or the wide range of services and data available from Statistics Canada, visit our website, [www.statcan.gc.ca](http://www.statcan.gc.ca).

You can also contact us by

**Email at** [STATCAN.infostats-infostats.STATCAN@canada.ca](mailto:STATCAN.infostats-infostats.STATCAN@canada.ca)

**Telephone**, from Monday to Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., at the following numbers:

- |   |                |
|---|----------------|
| • Statistical Information Service                             | 1-800-263-1136 |
| • National telecommunications device for the hearing impaired | 1-800-363-7629 |
| • Fax line  | 1-514-283-9350 |

### Depository Services Program

- |                  |                |
|------------------|----------------|
| • Inquiries line | 1-800-635-7943 |
| • Fax line       | 1-800-565-7757 |

## Standards of service to the public

Statistics Canada is committed to serving its clients in a prompt, reliable and courteous manner. To this end, Statistics Canada has developed standards of service that its employees observe. To obtain a copy of these service standards, please contact Statistics Canada toll-free at 1-800-263-1136. The service standards are also published on [www.statcan.gc.ca](http://www.statcan.gc.ca) under “Contact us” > “[Standards of service to the public](#)”.

## Note of appreciation

Canada owes the success of its statistical system to a long-standing partnership between Statistics Canada, the citizens of Canada, its businesses, governments and other institutions. Accurate and timely statistical information could not be produced without their continued co-operation and goodwill.

Published by authority of the Minister responsible for Statistics Canada

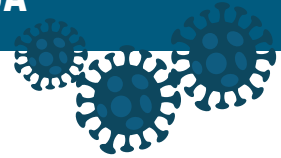
© Her Majesty the Queen in Right of Canada as represented by the Minister of Industry, 2020

All rights reserved. Use of this publication is governed by the Statistics Canada [Open Licence Agreement](#).

An [HTML version](#) is also available.

*Cette publication est aussi disponible en français.*

---



## Which postsecondary programs had high levels of international student enrolment prior to COVID-19?

by **Marc Frenette, Youjin Choi, and April Doreleyers**

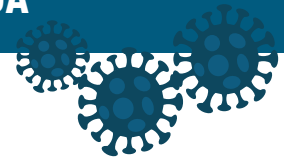
Colleges and universities have increasingly relied on international students as a source of revenue over the last decade or so (Usher, 2019). In colleges, the percentage of enrolments that were international rose from 5.2% in 2009/2010 to 13.2% in 2017/2018. University campuses witnessed a similar increase over the same period (from 8.2% to 14.7%).<sup>1</sup> This increased reliance on international enrolments has raised concerns amid the COVID-19 pandemic, as physical distancing directives may affect programs that require in-person contact through laboratory or studio work, internships, or music recitals. New public health measures also require all individuals entering Canada to quarantine for 14 days.<sup>2</sup> To provide insights into how COVID-19 could potentially impact postsecondary institutions, this article provides estimates of the share of enrolments that were international by academic program and source country prior to COVID-19 based on the Postsecondary Student Information System (PSIS). A more detailed description of the approach is available in Frenette, Choi, and Doreleyers (2020).

Certain programs relied heavily on international student enrolment in 2017/2018 (Chart 1), most notably “Mathematics, Computer and Information Sciences” where almost one-third of college and university enrolments were international.

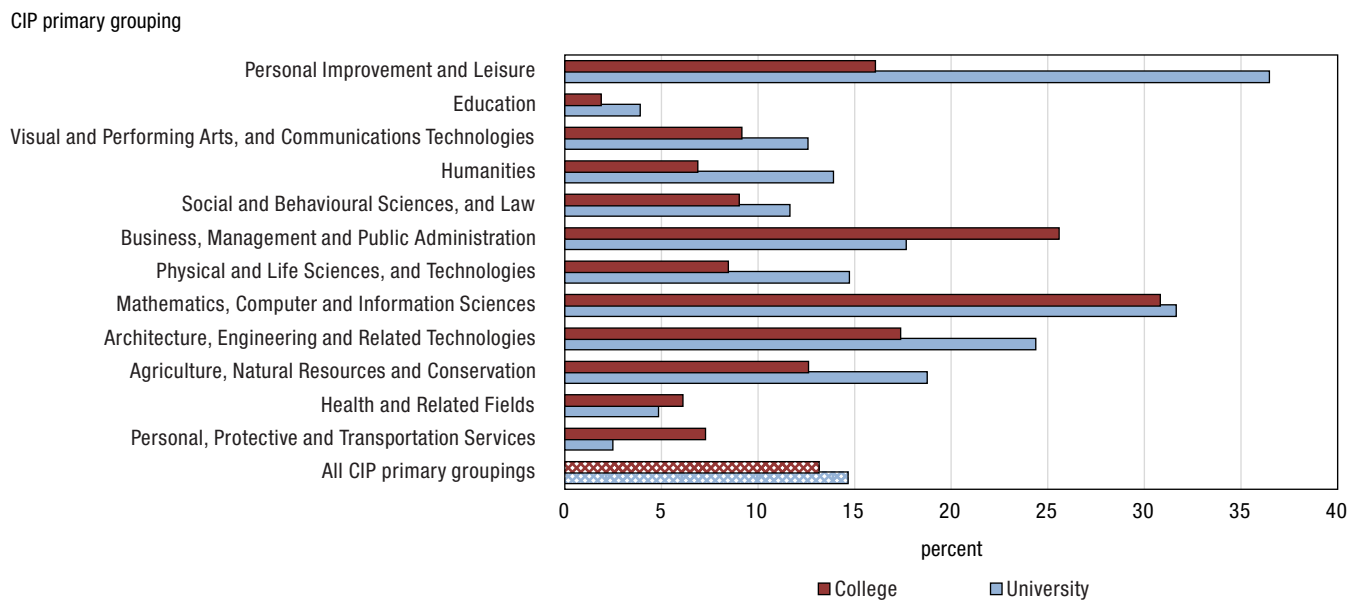
In contrast, many programs requiring a certain degree of in-person time, including “Education”, “Visual and Performing Arts, and Communications Technologies”, “Physical and Life Sciences, and Technologies”, “Agriculture, Natural Resources and Conservation”, and “Health and Related Fields”, generally did not rank very high with regards to international student enrolment compared to other disciplines. However, reliance on international enrolment was still substantial in many of these programs (often over 10%). Moreover, “Architecture, Engineering and Related Technologies” ranked fairly high as a group, and laboratory work is often expected in these programs (particularly in engineering, where rates were quite high—often over 30%).

1. Figures are calculated from the Postsecondary Student Information System (PSIS).

2. At the time of this writing, individuals who have a valid international study permit or were approved for one on or prior to March 18, 2020 are exempt from current travel restrictions, but still have to pass health screenings before boarding flights and upon arrival. They are also required to have a plan to quarantine for the first 14 days in Canada. See [Coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\): Visitors, foreign workers and students](#) for more details.



**Chart 1**  
**International students, as a percentage of 2017/2018 enrolments, by 2016 CIP primary grouping and institution type**



**Note:** CIP = Classification of Instructional Programs.  
**Source:** Postsecondary Student Information System.

Although relatively few enrolments in “Health and Related Fields” were international, this was not the case in “Medical Residency Programs – Subspecialty Certificates” and “Medical Residency Programs – General Certificates”, with rates of 21% and 11%, respectively. In contrast, a much smaller share of nursing students were international.

China was the main source country in 11 of the 12 broad university program areas, often by a wide margin. At the college level, India was the primary source in 9 of the 12 areas, with China often a close second.<sup>3</sup>

Finally, prospective international students may be more likely to stay home as they have yet to invest in a Canadian postsecondary education. The data suggest that international enrolments comprise an even larger share of new enrolments than total enrolments. At the university level, almost 23.8% of new enrolments were international in 2017/2018, compared to 14.7% of total enrolments. In colleges, 16.3% of new enrolments were international, compared to 13.2% of total enrolments.

Although it is still too early to know what will happen to international student enrolment in the Fall 2020 term and how this will impact postsecondary institutions, there are real concerns that demand for Canadian postsecondary education from abroad will decline. This article has highlighted the degree of internationalization of academic programs across Canadian campuses, which could inform discussions around physical distancing, program delivery mode, and international travel guidelines.

3. Although the detailed numbers by academic program were not amenable to being presented in this very short article, they are available upon request



## References

Frenette, M., Y. Choi, and A. Doreleyers. 2020. "International Student Enrolment in Postsecondary Education Programs Prior to COVID-19." No. 105 *Economic Insights*. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 11-626-X. Ottawa: Statistics Canada.

Usher, A., (2019). *The State of Postsecondary Education in Canada, 2019*. Toronto: Higher Education Strategy Associates.

## Related articles

[International Student Enrolment in Postsecondary Education Programs Prior to COVID-19.](#)