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Education bureau to study foreign students – implications for foreign policy

A three-part study that would increase Canada's knowledge of its foreign-student population and of the effect of the Canadian experience on relations with students' home countries, both in the short term and for years to come, is planned by the Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE).

Foreign Students and International Education in Canada: Implications for Foreign Policy will take one year to prepare at an estimated cost of \$116,000. The Donner Canadian Foundation has been asked for a grant of \$106,000, the remainder will come from CBIE's own budget.

"Today's students are tomorrow's leaders may sound like an old cliché," says the Bureau, "but it's more a truism than a cliché. After all, Julius Nyrere was once a foreign student. So were Fidel Castro, Idi Amin, Lester Pearson and Pierre Trudeau. Their foreign studies, by their own admission, had a lasting effect on them."

Statistical data

The first part of the proposed study would consist of an analysis of the existing data base for statistical information on foreign students, with recommendations for improvement. Even the most elementary information on the numbers and basic characteristics of foreign students is extremely difficult or impossible to obtain, since there is no central data base for providing it. Although the information can be picked up piecemeal from different sources, decision-makers at the provincial, federal and home government levels cannot easily obtain data they need to plan intelligently for the future.

Personal interviews

Part two of the study will take the form of personal interviews since the best way to understand perceptions, reactions and expectations of foreign students in Canada is to ask the students themselves. Moreover, impact on Canadian relations abroad will be mea-

sured primarily by the personal perceptions foreign students carry home with them.

Students surveyed will be asked to provide general information, such as age, income, ethnic background, nature of previous schooling, size of their home community and national origin of teachers in their home country.

It is important to understand their reasons for choosing Canada as opposed to their home country or another country. How do their courses and related experiences in Canadian institutions compare with their expectations? Where students consent to provide information on their course grades, it will be valuable to compare their evaluation of the institution with the institution's evaluation of students' performance. Positive and negative contacts with Canadian Government officials and university and community college bureaucracy will also be noted.

Experiences in Canada outside the university and community college are as important as study itself. CBIE will ask about the nature and extent of foreign students' contact with Canadians and about their reaction to Canada. The survey will include information on future plans of students, their return home and the impact they expect their studies will have both on them and their country.

In addition, Canadian colleagues of foreign students will be asked for comparative data. Do Canadian students feel that "foreigners are taking university places away from Canadians"? What are the perceptions of Canadians about the foreign students around them?

Results of this research among foreign and Canadian students will depend on valid methodology. The CBIE has therefore enlisted the Institute of Behavioural Research at York University to execute this part of the study. Random selection of participants, development of the questionnaire, pre-testing, training of interviewers and

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Improvement in labour-management relations, discussions with the provinces to increase language training in schools and measures to help small businesses, were among topics in the Throne Speech released just as we were going to press on October 12. Details will appear in the next issue.