

unfairness of differential fees

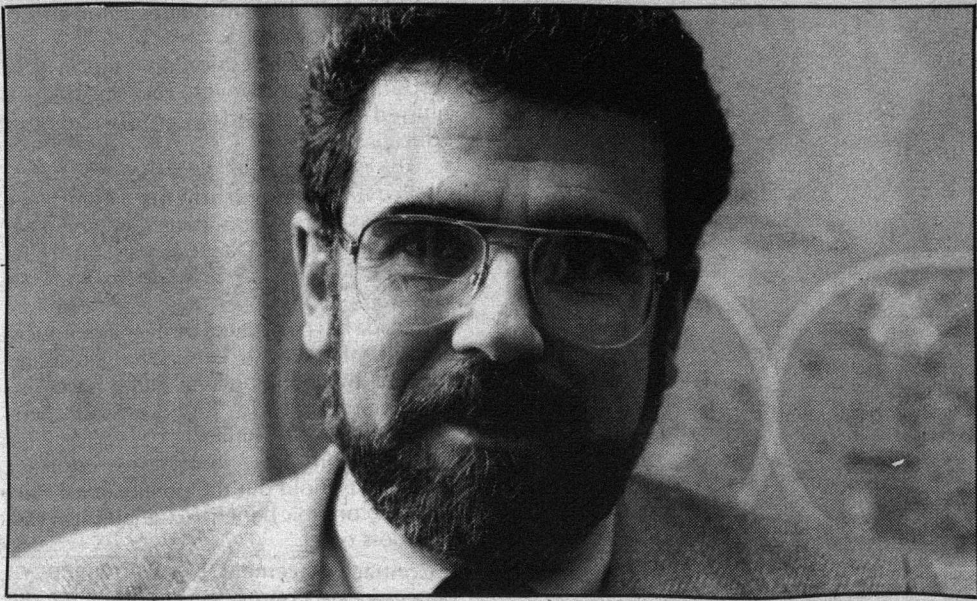


Photo Bill Dokoch

"It is good for students to be taught by people who have global perspectives" Wilfred Allan

"After all, it is not our country. We get the benefits and should pay for the facilities and education. But if it is too much, I'd go to another country or stay in Hong Kong".

Chan applied at the U of A because one of his high school teachers in Hong Kong who graduated from the U of A recommended it to him.

"She said that it is a good university and the tuition fee is quite inexpensive compared to some Eastern Canadian universities".

While Chan might not be affected severely by the escalating costs, some foreign students from developing countries face a hard time financially.

In 1983, for instance, Nigeria imposed currency transfer restrictions, causing many Nigerian students to go home before the completion of their studies.

Okoro confirmed that there are fewer Nigerian students in Canada now.

"Those who are able to go abroad may find it tough financially because there isn't enough money from home".

"Back home, we have no such thing as differential fees. Foreign students live with Nigerian students in the same dorm. . . but here. . . since it's the policy, we can't quarrel about it", Okoro said resignedly.

"This differential fee causes decrease in foreign graduate students in Canada which is a pity because if they come to Canada, they could help Canada's progress in many fields through their research", said Otto.

In 1982-83, international students represented 6% of full time undergraduate students in Canadian universities, 15.8% of full time students at the masters level, and 28.5% of full time doctoral students.

"My guess is a majority of the faculty and staff here were foreign students before. It is good for the students to be taught by people who have global perspectives", Allan said.

Restrictions on study abroad, financially or numerically, can be damaging, particularly to the world's least developed nations where universities as well as academically and technically qualified people are desperately needed for the nations' development.

Restrictions on study in Canada may eventually lead to similar defensive actions by other countries favored by Canadian students.

In 1983, there were some 20,000 Canadians enrolled abroad.

Does the presence of foreign students in Canadian universities benefit Canadians academically?

"Maybe", said Richardson.

"You have to remember that too many foreign students coming here may prevent some Canadians to further their studies because of limited space in some universities", Richardson continued.

According to a briefing paper published by the North-South Institute, the popular conception that foreign students compete with Canadians for access to higher education is based more on fear than fact.

The number of foreign students in Canada is considerably smaller than in many other countries such as France and Switzerland. Canada is on a par with Australia, New Zealand and West Germany.

The paper also claimed that in fact, in

many cases, foreign students may help to expand educational opportunities for Canadians. Foreign student enrolment in specialized programs has allowed some programs to continue despite weak domestic demand.

Allan raised the issue of scholarships or awards for foreign students.

"The U of A should be proud of its support services for the foreign students. We have Third World Scholarship program, and an emergency fund for foreign students", said Allan.

"However, there is still some discrimination. Some scholarships are restricted to Albertans or Canadians only. Why not reward on academic merit?

"If we believe that education is universal, let us be universal. Why not give the scholarship to a student from Hong Kong or Jakarta if he or she well deserves it?" Allan asserted.

"Canada has benefited from the foreign students in many ways. In fact, I think we should pay them for being here," said Tonge.

In terms of trade, the top 19 source countries of foreign students, excluding the U.S., together make up 51% of total Canadian exports for non-American markets in 1984.

These countries are Malaysia, Trinidad, Singapore, United Kingdom, Morocco, China, Japan, India, Philippines, Libya, West Germany, France, Jamaica, Mexico, Greece, Venezuela, Indonesia, and Kenya.

"What we gain in terms of differential fees is very small compared to the goodwill and possible trades in the future with the foreign students", said Tonge.

"Foreign students, when they go home, are very likely to become people who would hold important positions, in business or government for example, and if they have a good impression of Canada, it's highly likely that they would keep us in mind for future business", Tonge explained.

"Business is business. We can not be sure that they would be doing business with us. What if they have a better deal?" asked Richardson.

"If the quality and value of the Canadian products is the same as from other countries, I would choose the Canadian ones", said Okoro. His opinion is echoed by both Chan and Otto.

Allan believes that the foreign students help in promoting better relations between nations.

"The provincial sort of thinking that foreign students are a burden rather than a resource is very narrow", said Allan.

"It is not uncommon now for Albertans who travel abroad for business reasons to find out that they are talking to U of A graduates".

Allan also gave examples on the strong ties that could be formed between foreign students and Canadians.

"Last year's UN General Assembly's president was from Zambia who used to study in Canada. Lhasaka regarded Canada as his second country and did more things for Canada in his capacity as the president because he knows that when he assigned chairmanships to Canadians, they would know what to do".

"Someone from China, for example, would like to be friends first before he or she

does business with you. Let's get to know each other first and then we can get down to business", Allan explained. "So, if that person used to study here, he or she would understand why Americans behave the way they do in business (let's get down to business right away) and the Canadians would also understand more why the Chinese are more reserved".

Richardson thinks that he had benefited from his experience as a foreign student in Japan a few years ago.

"Being in Japan helped me to know more about the Japanese people and culture. I'd be happy to deal with them at the business level. Even though the business may be few and far in between, it may be large in terms of dollar", said Richardson.

Allan hopes that there will be more students exchange programs in the future.

"In a truly great university of the world, one will find a very strong international component in it", he stated.

"I wish more of the Canadian students at the U of A took the initiative to get to know some of the foreign students", said Allan.

"It could be such a wonderful experience for both".

Allan cited an example of those students who get to know and make friends with foreign students. They get more involved in the local activities when they visit their friends' countries. They went to weddings, community events, even funerals. Things that they would not have done if they were there on a "tourist trip".

"Interestingly enough, they learned more about Canada that way", Allan observed.

"Sure, I believe that foreign students enrich our culture, but there are some problems here", said Richardson.

"For example, the Chinese Student Association is very active. It's good, it supports the Chinese students, but it becomes so tight knit that it is the only form of social activity for the Chinese students. They might as well be in a Chinese university", Richardson stated.

Chan admits that many foreign students only interact socially with other students coming from the same country or speaking the same language.

"First of all, there is a language barrier. Many international students can't communicate effectively in English and the Canadian students get fed up. Honestly, it's not much fun talking to somebody who doesn't understand you half of the time".

"Well, initially it is very difficult to speak a language that's not your native tongue, but practice helps, so speak more", Okoro advised.

Allan acknowledged that the language barrier often prevents foreign students from becoming more involved socially with

Canadians.

"Some students' English even deteriorates by the time they graduate. In order to study at the U, they have to work hard on improving their English, but once they get in, some attend large classes where it is not necessary to talk and they study with friends who speak the same language. As the result, their English is poorer when they graduate".

Chan said that another reason contributing to the minimal participation of foreign students is cultural background.

"We come from different cultural backgrounds. Sometimes the way we think and behave differs".

"I suppose it is because of different continents and different cultures", Okoro mused.

"In Africa, for example, we smile a lot — warmly and genuinely. People in Edmonton are more reserved and conservative. Their smiles seem to be pasted on. We are a gregarious type of people, we like to interact with other people. I won't say that the people here are cold, because of the weather (chuckle), but reserved. . . certainly", said Okoro.

"In terms of culture, yes, I believe that we do help enrich the Canadian culture. We brought knowledge of Nigeria. For example, when I put on Nigerian attire, people would ask about the way it is made and what it is made from and so on. . .

"Or when the Nigerian Students Association holds some events, we cook Nigerian dishes and usually receive a good response from Canadians. Some even ask for recipes", Okoro continued.

Okoro is not happy with the fact the foreign students and their spouses are not permitted to seek employment in Canada.

"Anybody should be given the opportunity to work if he or she is well qualified", said Okoro.

Otto agreed and added: "even if it is restricted to minor or part time jobs only".

"Since we are students, we don't expect to have a full time job here, but part time jobs would help to generate extra income that could make our stay in Canada more pleasurable", said Okoro.

"It's a catch 22 situation. We want to welcome the foreign students and show them the Canadian way; but they enjoy it so much that they decide to stay, so we end up with foreign students who would compete with Canadians in the job opportunities. I don't think it's a good idea", mused Richardson.

Okoro gave a very emphatic "No!" when asked if he would like to stay in Canada to work.

"I definitely would like to go home, even if I am offered a job here. Canada is already ing. And having acquired the knowledge here,

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"(Foreign students) are using our facilities and the Canadian taxpayers are paying for part of their education costs" Scott Richardson

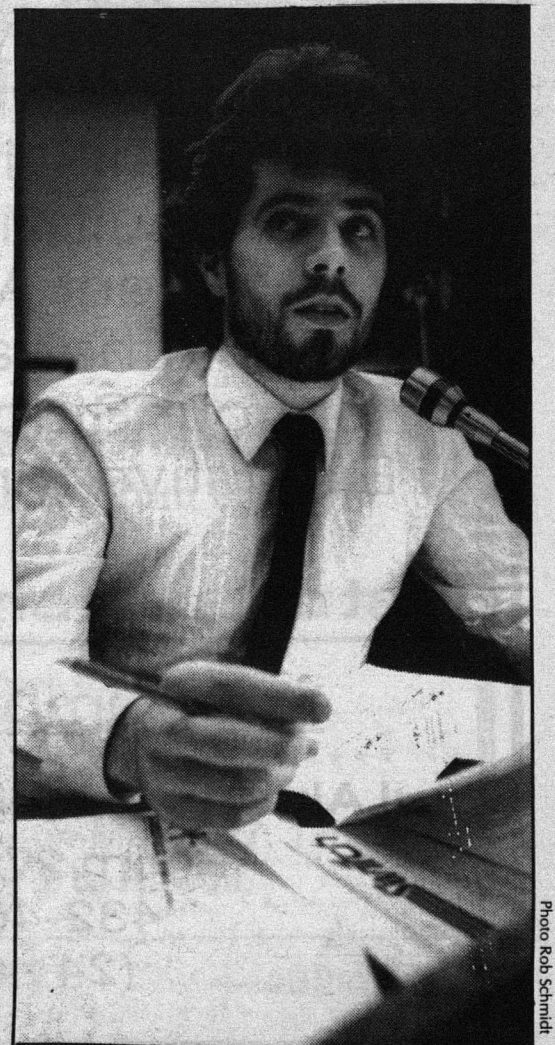


Photo Rob Schmidt