

Discussion Document – March 7, 2025

Internationalization at Western: A Multi-Pronged Approach

Executive Summary

As a globally engaged institution, Western University aims to realize its goals of increasing international reach and impact. A key component of Western’s global engagement goals is international education. To achieve these goals alongside our direct recruitment efforts, Western is in the early stages of exploring a partnership with Navitas, a well-known third-party provider of international education with a long history of collaborating with public institutions in Canada. Navitas International Colleges provide a robust transition experience, preparing students for academic and professional success. Under the potential partnership, both undergraduate and professional master’s students would study at the International College before bridging to Western. The proposed partnership with Navitas would bring important benefits to Western—accelerating our globalization goals and generating additional revenue to support the teaching and research missions that define us as a world-class university.

A Great University is a Global University

All great universities have deep global connections through research collaborations, graduate student training, and undergraduate student education, as well as a broad and diverse alumni base. The grand challenges facing the world cannot be solved by any one university or researcher on their own—this requires concerted efforts by universities to partner with others, complement each other’s strengths, pool resources, and build capacity. Our global engagement plan, *Western in the World*, our strategic plan, *Towards Western at 150*, and our Western research strategic plan, *Mobilize for Impact!*, set ambitious goals for Western to increase its international reach and impact.



Educating international students is part of our mandate as a globally connected university. Our graduates, wherever they may live, become our lifelong ambassadors, supporters and collaborators as they take up positions in industry, government, or higher education. At the same time, we know that a mix of domestic and international students brings multicultural perspectives and diverse strengths to the entire community, enhancing the educational experience. This is why our global engagement, and strategic plans call for increasing our international enrolment, particularly undergraduate enrolment, to at least 20 per cent.

A truly globally connected university needs to educate international students as part of its global engagement mandate.

Internationalization at Western

In recent years, Western has strengthened its focus on educating international students and expanding its global reach. We have invested substantial resources, enabling us to focus on diverse regions of the world through the hiring of regional recruiters in key markets. These regional recruiters are incremental staff within Admissions and Recruitment, reinforcing our commitment to focused outreach. We have also engaged more third-party private sector agents and made better use of international platforms. While our efforts had some success, several factors have put us in a position where we are sliding backward, rather than moving forward.

At the same time, our ability to leverage financial levers to support international recruitment has diminished. Domestic tuition has been frozen at pre-2018 levels, and provincial grants have remained stagnant at 2016–17 levels. With inflation and rising labour and infrastructure costs, Western's operating budget is under growing pressure.

Many other large Canadian universities established internationalization strategies long before Western. As a result, we don't have the same depth of diverse and trusted relationships that others developed over the past two decades, and the same can be said for our research partnerships. Consequently, we are trending behind our peer institutions.

The world has experienced a number of disruptions that have limited our progress, as well as that of other universities. The COVID-19 pandemic, new geo-political instability, and now the federal international study permit caps have not only constrained our recruitment efforts and potential, but also impacted Canada's international reputation, making us more vulnerable in an already challenging landscape.

As evident in *Figure 1*, we have the lowest proportion of international undergraduate students in the U6 (7.5 per cent in 2024–25) and are far below our peers' average of 18.3 per cent. While all but one institution in the U6 have seen declining international enrolments, Western's losses are deeper and start from a lower fraction. The trend has been a steady decrease since 2019–20.

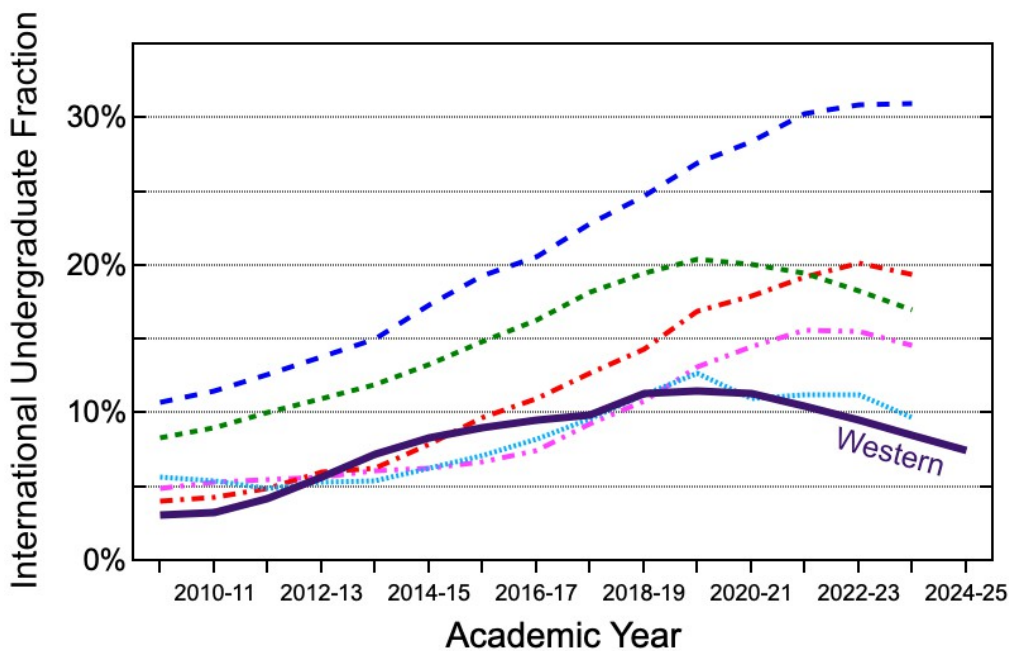


Figure 1. Proportion of international undergraduate students in the U6.

The downward trend in international undergraduate student fees since 2020-21 (see Figure 2) amounts to \$40 million in lost revenue per year—funds that would go a long way to supporting our research and teaching missions by providing more funds for grants, scholarships, and faculty and staff hiring.

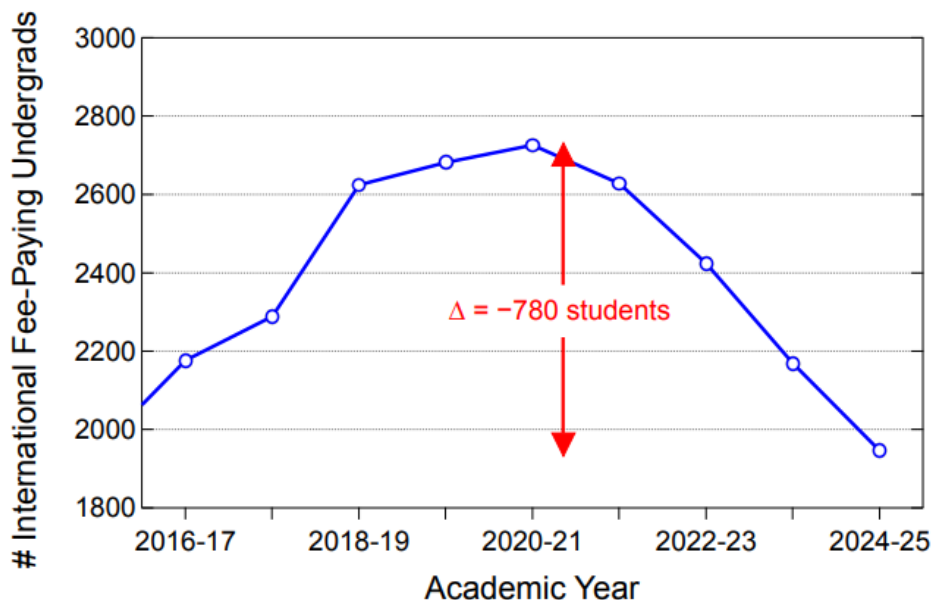


Figure 2. Total number of undergraduate students at Western paying international fees (2016–2025). The decrease of 780 students represents \$40 million in lost revenue.

In sum, internationalization in the current context requires a multi-pronged approach—one that is comprised of multiple parallel tracks, including sustained direct recruitment efforts, as we have been doing; exploring transnational education concepts; and tapping into the expertise of international education providers with a proven track record of working with public institutions in Canada.

Educating international graduate and undergraduate students is an important aspect of Western's global engagement strategy. We want to attract talent from around the world, and encourage global and diverse perspectives in our classrooms. At the same time, the financial realities will likely compound over the next years, and there is no indication that the Province will provide sustained new incremental funding for higher education.

In 2019, Western first explored a potential partnership with Navitas as one way to strengthen its international recruitment strategy. Given the declining trends in enrolment and financial constraints, it is time to consider whether a complementary effort like this could help Western regain lost momentum.

Potential Partnership with a Third-Party International Education Provider

It is common practice for universities to turn to industry specialists to augment their in-house recruiting efforts. At Western, we apply high ethical standards to third-party relationships. We already employ 22 agencies to recruit from 60 countries. Third-party providers have well established relationships and highly specialized expertise to support universities with recruitment, first-year education and wrap-around services for students new to Canada. Seven Canadian institutions (the University of Alberta, the University of Manitoba, Simon Fraser University, Toronto Metropolitan University, the University of Lethbridge, the University of Victoria and Wilfrid Laurier University) have partnered with international education providers/recruiters to establish pathways on their campuses. Partnering with a third-party provider would augment our current capacity to recruit internationally by adding to Western's existing international student recruitment streams.

One such provider is [Navitas Canada](#). Navitas has more than 30 years of experience establishing pathways and now operates with 39 university partners (five in Canada) in 16 countries. Navitas annually recruits more than 60,000 students from 151 countries. It would take Western decades to come close to developing such a network on our own and would require significant investment.

At the undergraduate level, Navitas provides an individually tailored pathway program that is equivalent to a first-year university program preparing students for progression into their second year at the partner university. During their first year at the International College, students would pay the same international tuition level as in effect at Western and would receive personalized academic and cultural support, helping them to adapt to both

university-level instruction and life in a new country. This model expands access to international education to a greater number of students.

Canadian universities that have partnered with Navitas have not reduced staffing levels within their in-house international recruitment teams; in fact, some have grown due to adoption of an integrated recruitment approach and by reinvesting incremental resources generated through the partnership.

If Western partnered with Navitas, we would be the first university in Canada to collaborate on recruiting professional master's students. Professional master's programs serve students with undergraduate degrees—often paired with significant work experience—who seek to advance their careers. Unlike research-based master's programs, which provide experience and training in research and scholarship, professional master's programs are specifically designed for re-skilling and upskilling with a great focus on real-world applications, often including experiential learning opportunities such as practicums or internships. There is a global demand for such credentials in a wide range of fields including education, engineering, health care, information and media, business and finance, analytics, etc. Expanding professional master's enrolment is a priority for our faculties.

The proposed partnership would provide opportunities for international students who do not meet the traditional admission requirements, or who wish to enhance their background or learning skills prior to entering a graduate program, to earn a Western degree. The International College would provide a structured pathway for students to gain the necessary academic background to meet the entrance requirements for a professional master's program at Western. It would also prepare students to be successful in graduate-level education in Canada.

Beyond Canada, Navitas collaborates with institutions worldwide at the undergraduate and graduate level, including many top-ranked universities such as the University of Melbourne (ranked 13th globally in the QS World University Rankings 2025), University of Sydney (QS 18), Lancaster University (QS 141) and Deakin University (QS 197), among others.

Why Navitas?

Navitas has a long track record in several countries, including Canada, partnering with public education institutions for over 20 years. They are familiar with the features of the Canadian education system and its regulatory environments. Policymakers in provincial governments, including Ontario, trust Navitas to advise on international student trends worldwide. Navitas Canada ownership is substantially Canadian and its leadership consists of an experienced Canada-based executive team and advisory board comprised of former university presidents, senior civil servants, and long-serving international education leaders.

As noted above, Navitas has active partnerships with 39 universities around the world. In the Navitas portfolio, Western would be a distinct offering for students looking for a highly ranked, comprehensive, research-intensive university in Canada.

Navitas has evolved since Western first considered a partnership 2019. They have continued their record of success and have established new partnerships. And the nature of those partnerships has changed. In recent partnerships with other Canadian universities, instructors in Navitas programs are academic staff at the partner university.

Under a new potential partnership with Navitas, International College instructors would be academic staff at Western with rights under the Collective Agreement between Western and the University of Western Ontario Faculty Association (UWOFA). The specifics of this arrangement would need to be determined through discussions between Western and UWOFA. With input from the Western community, we can establish an agreement that aligns with our institutional priorities.

How would a partnership with Navitas work at Western?

It is important that any proposed partnership with Navitas address several key elements for a proposal to move forward.

Recruitment Oversight: Western is committed to ethical and responsible recruitment practices, ensuring that international students receive transparent guidance and strong academic support. Any potential partnership must align with these values. Navitas will follow the same ethical recruitment practices as Western requires of all its third-party providers.

Pathway Admission and Transition to Western: The potential partnership must attract talented students to Western. We are committed to maintaining our high admissions standards and ensuring incoming students are prepared to succeed in our programs and contribute to our learning community. Undergraduate students entering through the international college pathway would be recruited from a Western-approved band, allowing Western's direct recruitment and college recruitment to work in tandem. Students may enter with slightly different academic profiles, and they would have demonstrated their abilities through the pathway program before progressing to Western. We need to be confident that the support provided by Navitas will set students up for successful progression to programs at Western.

Academic Work: High-quality instruction is the product of high-quality instructors. Instructors would have to meet our expectations and be appropriately recognized within Western's employment structures and faculty bargaining units. Under a new potential partnership with Navitas, International College instructors would be

academic staff at Western who would have rights under the Collective Agreement between Western and UWOFA. Details of this arrangement would need to be worked out between the University and UWOFA.

Academic Oversight: We must have oversight of the academic programming in the International College, as Western's Senate-approved courses would be taught there. We would also oversee assessment criteria to ensure that students entering our programs in the second year have met the same first-year learning outcomes and standards as their peers. Departments would be engaged in this oversight and would be funded for this.

Student Support Services: Students at the International College would receive additional student support services designed to ensure they are set up for success as they enter Western. These include an additional hour of instruction per week, an infusion of course content with disciplinary literacy, separate English-language instruction (delivered through our own English language program), additional non-credit courses as required, and social and cultural integration support.

Student Experience: It will be essential that students in the International College integrate with Western students and the surrounding community immediately, and not be isolated from the rest of campus. Labs and specialized instruction would be booked on the Main Campus at Western. Students at the first-year International College would pay ancillary fees like Western students and have access to library, social, recreational, health, and mental health services offered through Student Experience and Western International. We would need to work with the Western's University Students' Council (USC) and Society of Graduate Students (SOGS) to explore how International College students could participate in clubs and student activities. We would work with faculties, departments, programs and support units on ways to welcome and integrate students early.

Western has by far the largest fleet of residences in Ontario, and second only to the University of British Columbia in Canada. We are in the enviable position to be able to offer all first-year students a spot in residence, and with a new undergraduate residence underway, we will be able to offer multi-year housing options.

Success Metrics: The success of the partnership will need to be quantified. We will develop clear metrics, such as student graduation rates, diversity of students' home countries, and distribution across a range of programs, with reports to Senate.

As the proposal is developed, other priorities brought forward from the Western community will be considered as we collectively aim to adapt to different trends in the international space.

Benefits to Western

Western stands to gain significant benefits from a partnership with Navitas. As a university community, we set ambitious goals for ourselves: expanding our global reach, growing our faculty, staff and student complements, and increasing our impact both locally and globally. International education is a key part of this vision.

Partnering with Navitas would allow us to leverage their specialized expertise and proven success in international student education, as well as their extensive global recruitment network. With over 60,000 students recruited annually from across the globe, their reach is one that would take Western decades and substantial investment to build on our own.

Global Engagement: A partnership with Navitas would help us meet our Senate-endorsed global engagement goals. We would be able to reach international students who may not have otherwise considered Western or who would require additional academic preparation before fully integrating into our programs. These students would add to our overall enrolment level. Our campus would be more diverse, with students from a wider range of countries enrolling in a broad set of disciplines and programs.

The proposed partnership would also strengthen our global reputation. International ranking agencies consider the education of international students as an important criterion for their evaluation.

Navitas' track record of attracting and preparing international students for successful academic transitions has been demonstrated at other institutions. Through their partnership with Navitas, students enroll across a broad spectrum of disciplines, demonstrating the potential impact such a model could have at Western.

A growing international student base today means greater global alumni connections in the future. Western's international graduates will be tomorrow's leaders in government, industry, and higher education worldwide and, as our lifelong ambassadors, contribute to Western's profile and reputation on the global stage.

Financial: The financial benefits are significant. Not only would the proposed International College operate at no direct cost to Western, but it would also produce direct financial benefits to Western:

- New Benefits:
 - During year one of undergraduate studies, students pay tuition to the College set at the same level as international tuition in effect at Western.

Navitas would pay a royalty associated with the students enrolled in first year at the International College.

- We would receive international tuition for undergraduate students in years two, three, and four of their study and for graduate students when they transition to any of our professional master's programs. These are students who would not otherwise come to us. As an illustration, 200 incremental undergraduate students, who successfully transition to Western would result in approximately \$10 million in tuition revenue.
- A steady stream of additional revenue would increase our ability to advance our educational and research missions by allowing us to make further to investments in faculty, student supports, staff positions and research infrastructure that benefit both faculties and support units.
- This partnership would create more teaching opportunities under the Collective Agreement.
- Revenue Sharing:
 - At Western, we would share a significant portion of the royalties from year one at the International College with the programs providing academic oversight to Navitas' pathway programs.
 - The sharing of international student tuition from years two to four will follow our normal revenue sharing practices.
 - A significant portion of the incremental revenue would be invested back into scholarships for international students.
- Cost Recovery:
 - Navitas would pay rent for the space it occupies/uses on our campus.

Governance

Both Senate and Board approvals would be required.