



NAVITAS ALTERNATIVES AND REFLECTIONS

- An exploration of in house alternatives to Navitas and key questions to consider when reviewing the Navitas proposal.

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1. Preface

This document outlines alternative models and key deliberation questions for the Senate Ad Hoc Committee’s consideration regarding the proposed Navitas partnership. Drawing on concerns raised by members of the campus community—including faculty, librarians, archivists, staff, and students—it highlights the need for more careful evaluation of the partnership’s impact on academic quality, equity, institutional governance, and Western’s long-term strategic goals.

The emergence of private pathway college partnerships like Navitas reflects a significant shift toward privatization in Canadian public universities. Such partnerships are often framed by senior administrators as neutral instruments of internationalization, even though they represent a deeper redefinition of the university’s public mission. Rapid adoption of these models risks embedding private logics into institutional structures with long-term consequences (Tamtik, 2022).

It is important to recognize that decisions made rapidly, particularly those involving academic programming and student pathways, have lasting impacts on the university’s reputation, student outcomes, and public trust. While the university administration may cite financial pressures as a justification for privatization, it is critical to thoroughly evaluate all public, university-led alternatives before concluding that outsourcing is the only option. Internationalization should strengthen Western’s future without compromising its academic mission, reputation or public character. Privatization is not a neutral solution to fiscal

pressures; it reshapes who teaches, how students are supported, and whose interests the institution ultimately serves (Larsen, 2020).

This guiding document presents university-led alternatives that align with Western’s Strategic Plan, maintain public control over education, and strengthen Western’s global engagement. These alternatives include expanding Western’s international footprint through university-run learning centres abroad, developing a Western-designed foundation year for international students, enhancing on-campus academic and language support services, and embedding preparatory pathways within existing undergraduate programs. These approaches offer sustainable, public, and academically rigorous pathways to achieving Western’s internationalization objectives without reliance on private intermediaries.

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Towards Equitable and Sustainable Internationalization

An international campus can be a vital component of a globally engaged university, but how Western pursues internationalization matters. Faculty, staff, students, librarians, and archivists have consistently voiced support for equitable, transparent, and sustainable approaches that uphold the university’s academic values and public mission.

Do Your Research

Informed decisions require deeper understanding. Take time to explore the facts, consult campus experts, and weigh public alternatives—your diligence will shape Western’s future.



2. Alternatives to Navitas for Advancing Internationalization

In lieu of a private partnership, the university can pursue internally governed strategies that expand Western's international profile while preserving its commitment to public education, equity, and academic excellence. Alternatives to private partnerships are essential to resist the normalization of commodification in public universities, a trend increasingly identified in Canadian higher education. These models, once embedded, reshape institutional priorities and reduce future options for public, accountable internationalization strategies (Tamtik, 2022).

Aligned with Western's Strategic Plan, the following five alternatives are proposed:

- **Develop International Learning Centres Abroad**
- **Create a Western Designed Foundation Year for International students**
- **Expand On-Campus English Language and Academic Support**
- **Embed Preparatory Tracks within Undergraduate Degrees**
- **Bolster International Recruitment**

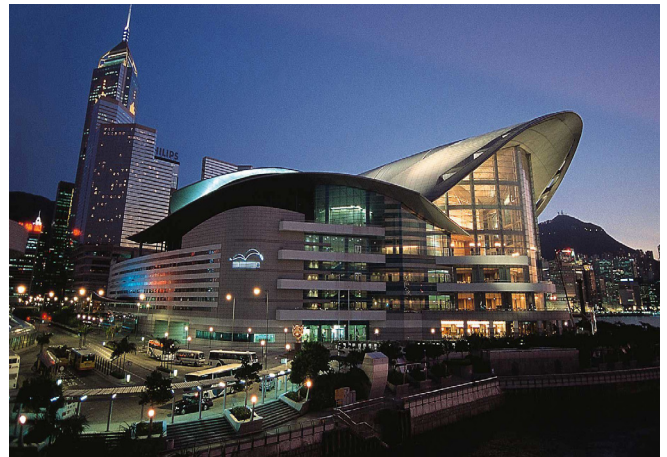
2.1 Develop International Learning Centres Abroad

- Establish English language learning centres in target countries to increase Western's visibility and prepare prospective students.
- Maintain full curricular control and provide direct pathways to Western, eliminating the need for third-party intermediaries.
- Use these centres to build lasting relationships and expand Western's reputation globally at relatively low operational costs.

Comparable Models: NYU Abu Dhabi and Shanghai, University of Nottingham Malaysia and China

In Practice: A Scalable and Strategic Approach to Global Presence

Western has existing institutional experience on which to build. **Ivey's Hong Kong campus** has served as a longstanding base for executive education, alumni engagement, and brand recognition in Asia. This model demonstrates that **high-impact, regionally embedded learning hubs can be operated effectively** without third-party involvement.



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A similar opportunity emerged through WELC's proposed Thailand-based English language centre, which would have provided a fully Western-administered program.

Although that proposal did not move forward, it laid the groundwork for replicable models of **Western-run learning centres abroad**.

These centres could:

- Offer academic **English instruction and Western cultural orientation**;
- Build toward **2+2 or 1+3 programming** in partnership with public universities abroad, allowing students to transition into Western undergraduate degrees after completing early coursework locally;

- Create stronger **pipelines for graduate and professional programs** through early relationship-building and advising;
- Leverage existing units like **Western International, WELC, and Faculties with international priorities** to deliver programming in a cohesive, cost-effective manner.

By maintaining full academic and operational control, Western avoids outsourcing risk while enhancing global visibility, strengthening recruitment pipelines, and contributing to sustainable, values-aligned internationalization.

2.2 Create a Western Designed Foundation Year for International Students

- Develop a dedicated foundation stream for international students, integrating targeted academic preparation with degree credit and English language support.
- Extend structured support beyond the first year to promote persistence, equity, and student success throughout the undergraduate journey.
- Retain academic integrity, allowing the university to adjust programming based on ongoing performance assessments and feedback.

Comparable Models: University of Toronto IFP, UBC Vantage College

In Practice: A Foundation Year Embedded in Year One

Western is well positioned to implement a **Foundation Year for international students** rooted in internal experience and affiliate-campus success. In 2020, **a mapped-out foundation stream for Medical Sciences demonstrated how targeted support can be built into Year One** while maintaining progression toward degree completion.

This Western-designed Foundation Year would:

- Enroll international students **directly into first-year undergraduate programs**, not a pre-university track;
- Offer **credit-bearing courses** in academic communication, writing, and learning strategies, alongside discipline-specific credits;
- Integrate and enhance support through **existing units** like the Writing Support Centre, WELC, and Western International;

- Provide **ongoing, structured support beyond the first year**, encouraging retention and long-term academic success.

To stay on a four-year graduation timeline, students would be encouraged to **complete summer courses after each academic year**, a model already in use for many professional and international pathways.

Unlike outsourced pathway programs, this model retains full academic oversight, allowing Western to **evaluate and adapt programming** based on outcomes and student feedback. It builds on what is already working within Western's ecosystem—particularly the KEY Program at King's—and offers a coordinated, inclusive, and academically rigorous alternative.

2.3 Expand On-Campus English Language and Academic Support

- Establish a centralized English Language Learning and Academic Support Centre open to all students, promoting inclusion and academic success.
- Offer for-credit courses in academic writing, learning strategies, and academic communication, serving both international and domestic students.
- Position Western as a leader in comprehensive student support while avoiding the outsourcing of academic services.

In Practice: A Scalable and Strategic Approach to Global Presence

Western already has three strong units offering overlapping support for students' English language development and academic success:

- **Writing Support Centre (WSC)** provides inclusive, discipline-agnostic writing support through one-to-one appointments, workshops, and for-credit Writing Studies courses.
- **Western English Language Centre (WELC)** supports conditionally admitted students through intensive English for Academic Purposes (EAP) programming and language training.
- **Western International (WI)** offers co-curricular and transition support for international students, including intercultural communication workshops, conversation circles, and referrals to academic resources.

These three centres—each offering important, yet fragmented, services—can be strategically aligned under one coordinated academic umbrella to provide more integrated and impactful English language and academic communication support. An integration strategy could account for:

Academic Alignment: Bring the WSC, WELC, and relevant Western International programs together under an academic portfolio (e.g., VP Academic or Teaching & Learning) to ensure credibility, cohesion, and curricular integration.

For-Credit Course Development: Pool expertise to develop credit-bearing courses in academic writing, communication, and English language development that:

- serve both multilingual international and domestic students;
- are recognized across disciplines;
- can be scaffolded from first year through graduate studies.

Specialized supports for Multilingual Learners:

Use WELC’s language pedagogy and WSC’s writing instruction expertise to develop new offerings such as:

- *Grammar and Style for Academic Writers (0.5 credit)*
- *Academic Communication for International STEM Students*
- *Capstone Writing for Multilingual Researchers (grad-focused)*

Shared Staffing and Resources: Cross-train staff, develop shared resources (e.g., self-directed writing modules, communication workshops), and embed language-aware pedagogy into existing courses through faculty development.

Unlike private pathway providers, this model keeps academic control within Western, promotes inclusive excellence, and aligns with Western’s strategic goals in internationalization, equity, and student experience.



WELC, WSC, and WI each offer English language support through various programs. Combining efforts could strengthen and streamline services for International students.

2.4 Embed Preparatory Tracks within Undergraduate Degrees

- Design preparatory pathways that blend foundational academic courses with skill-building supports as prerequisites for degree progression.
- Integrate these pathways within faculties’ existing program structures, ensuring alignment with Senate-approved curriculum standards.
- In-house academic support programs, such as WELC at Western and Western International offer existing models for language instruction and support that protects labour rights and preserves academic standards. Outsourcing these services to for-profit providers has undermined established programs and displaced staff at other institutions (Larsen, 2020).

Comparable Models: University of Victoria (Academic Writing Requirement), Simon Fraser University (Foundations of Academic Literacy)

Did You Know...

Western is the one of the few U15 Universities who does not offer academic credit for Western students enrolled in the Academic English Program at WELC

In Practice: Embedded Preparatory Tracks for Inclusive Academic Success

Western is well-positioned to embed preparatory academic tracks within undergraduate degrees by leveraging existing in-house resources that support both international and domestic students. Unlike stand-alone foundation years, these embedded pathways would integrate targeted skill development—such as academic communication, English for Academic Purposes (EAP), and study strategies—directly into students’ degree programs as credit-bearing prerequisites or co-requisites for progression.



The WELC-designed EASE program supports international students while they continue their undergraduate studies at Western.

One existing model is Western’s **EASE (English Academic Skills Enhancement)** program, which supports students in Social Science who require a Dean’s waiver to continue in their program by combining undergraduate courses with additional academic and English language support through the **Western English Language Centre (WELC)**. The EASE program already demonstrates how language development and academic skill-building can be embedded without removing students from their degree pathway—supporting both retention and student success.

By aligning the Western English Language Centre (WELC), the Writing Support Centre (WSC), and Western International (WI) under a coordinated preparatory track initiative, the university can expand for-credit offerings that are centrally delivered and quality-assured.

These might include courses such as:

- **Integrated Academic Communication** (EAP with disciplinary writing focus)
- **Academic Resilience and Learning Strategies**
- **Introduction to Canadian Academic Culture**

These courses would be developed and delivered by Western instructors, governed by Senate-approved curriculum standards, and fully integrated within faculty program maps. Students could be placed into preparatory tracks based on admissions indicators or early diagnostics and would remain fully enrolled in their degrees, preserving their pathway to graduation without delay—particularly if summer or intercession terms are used to distribute credit loads.

Importantly, embedded preparatory tracks offer a flexible, equitable way to support diverse learners. Students from any background—including those who may have received lower grades in **ENG4U** (or an equivalent course)—could choose to take these courses to strengthen their writing and academic skills early in their degree. This model promotes inclusive excellence by removing unnecessary barriers while ensuring all students have access to the tools needed for long-term success.

2.5 Bolster Existing International Recruitment

A multi-pronged international recruitment strategy was developed in 2021 while recruitment was housed under Western International, with a clear understanding of the need for added resourcing. This strategy included digital marketing, branding, high school partnerships, 2+2 programming, direct recruitment, agent networks, in-country representation, and improved scholarships, all aligned with Western’s academic values and brand. However, despite this strong foundation, the momentum dissipated under subsequent leadership changes and restructuring. As a result, much of this well-developed plan was left unrealized. A renewed effort can build on these previous initiatives to strengthen Western’s global recruitment efforts, keeping the focus on institutional integrity rather than outsourcing these critical functions.



A multi-pronged approach to internationalization was developed in 2021 and can be used as a framework for expanding recruitment at Western

Reinvesting in internal capacity ensures long-term sustainability and enables Western to remain responsive to global shifts, such as changes in visa policy, regional competition, or geopolitical dynamics. Strengthening recruitment operations internally not only helps Western adapt to these shifts, but also fosters closer ties between academic units and international strategy, creating a unified approach that attracts students whose goals and values align with Western’s institutional mission.

In Practice: Coordinated, Multi-Pronged Recruitment Reinvestment

Western can revitalize its international recruitment plan by expanding on the internal model proposed in 2021—prior to administrative restructuring—that identified resourcing gaps and strategic opportunities. This could emphasize:

Digital Marketing and Brand-Building: To ensure success, international recruitment efforts must be closely coordinated with central communications. The communications team needs to understand the nuances of international recruitment, including region-specific drivers such as affordability, academic reputation, and career opportunities. By persona mapping and tailoring messages for

different countries, Western can avoid generic materials and create targeted, impactful content that resonates with prospective students and strengthens Western’s global brand.

High School and Post-Secondary Partnerships: Formalize relationships with international high schools and post-secondary institutions, including fast tracked admission for high school partners, expanded 2+2 programming and dual-degree pathways.

Agent Relationships and Training: Western was slower than some peer institutions in adopting agents as part of its recruitment strategy, but significant progress has been made in building and strengthening these relationships. Moving forward, it is essential to deepen partnerships with carefully selected agents, ensuring they are well-trained and aligned with Western’s academic values and recruitment goals. This includes regular in-person visits, engaging agents through webinars, and providing continuous support to ensure Western remains top of mind when advising prospective students. By strengthening these partnerships and ensuring transparency, Western can ensure agents effectively represent the university and advocate for its strengths in a competitive global market.

In-Country Representation: Expand Western’s global footprint by enhancing in-country representation, building on successful partnerships like the one with Grok in China. This year-round presence provides consistent visibility, supports local recruitment efforts, and fosters long-term relationships. Expanding this model to other strategic markets such as the U.S., India, Vietnam, Brazil, and Nigeria ensures local knowledge and trusted relationships are maintained, allowing Western to respond quickly to changing market dynamics and engage with prospective students directly in their regions.

U.S. Market Strategy: Develop a dedicated U.S. recruitment plan that emphasizes affordability, quality, and access, highlighting Western’s competitive tuition and strong research profile. In the context of rising challenges in the U.S., including increased tuition costs, political polarization, and restrictive policies on academic freedom, many students, scholars, and faculty are seeking alternatives outside the U.S. Western’s commitment to inclusive, high-quality education, coupled with its strong research infrastructure and supportive academic environment, makes it an attractive option for those looking for a more welcoming and affordable academic experience. By positioning Western as a destination for those disillusioned with the current climate in the U.S., we can tap into a growing demand for opportunities that offer both academic freedom and financial accessibility.

Direct Recruitment and Faculty Engagement: Embed recruitment into academic units by encouraging faculty participation in outreach efforts, recruitment webinars, and international travel that supports both research and student engagement. Many faculty members are curious about recruitment and eager to contribute, but it’s important to ensure that messaging about these efforts reaches beyond the dean’s office. By involving faculty directly, Western can create a more cohesive and collaborative approach to recruitment, leveraging faculty expertise and networks to attract students whose academic and professional interests align with the university’s strengths.

A revitalized, collaborative approach to international recruitment—grounded in coordinated communications, robust partnerships, and faculty engagement—will allow Western to amplify its global presence and attract high-calibre students who are aligned with its values and strengths. By investing strategically across these fronts, Western can position itself as a premier destination for international learners in an increasingly competitive landscape.

Did You Know...

Of the U15 Universities we would be the only in Ontario to partner with Navitas. Most other U15’s have their own multi-pronged recruitment approach and don’t rely on privatization of teaching and core academic services to bolster numbers.



Growing political polarization in the U.S. opens space to position Western as a stable, inclusive alternative for students seeking academic freedom and global perspective.

3. Key Questions to Ask About a Navitas Partnership

As Western explores a potential partnership with Navitas, it is critical to engage in a thorough, evidence-based examination of the implications for academic quality, equity, governance, and institutional identity. The following questions are intended to guide reflection, inform decision-making, and ensure that any move toward privatized international recruitment is approached with transparency, academic rigor, and accountability to the broader university community.

■ Track Record, Academic Standards, and Transparency

1. How have other universities assessed the academic outcomes and overall success of Navitas students compared to directly admitted international students (e.g., GPA trends, retention, time-to-degree)?
2. Where Navitas partnerships have ended or been modified at other institutions, what were the reasons, and what lessons can Western draw from these experiences?
3. How does Navitas ensure ongoing alignment with host university academic standards, and how frequently is its performance independently audited or reviewed?
4. How will Western ensure that decision-making about international partnerships does not simply normalize privatization under the banner of internationalization, as seen at other Canadian institutions? (Tamtik, 2022)

■ Student Experience, Equity, and Support

1. What commitments will be made to guarantee that Navitas students have equitable access to all university services, housing, advising, and co-curricular programs?
2. Will Navitas students be members of (respectively) USC and SOGS? If not, how will their (individual and collective) interests be represented?
3. What mechanisms will be in place to ensure that academic and language support extend beyond the first year, minimizing risks of second-year attrition?
4. How will Western prevent the creation of a two-tiered student experience where pathway students and direct-entry students receive different levels of academic and social integration?

■ Pedagogy and Instructional Integrity

1. How will academic departments retain control over curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment for courses involving Navitas students?
2. How will additional instructional demands (including increased sectioning, space needs, additional instructional hours and workload) be addressed, particularly in faculties with diverse and rigorous first-year programs?
3. What safeguards will protect against grading inflation or financial pressures that might undermine academic standards?
4. How will Western ensure that pathway instructors are integrated into academic life and supported by faculty governance, rather than being employed under separate, non-unionized or otherwise precarious conditions that undermine existing teaching standards? (Larsen, 2020)

■ Strategic Oversight and Institutional Governance

1. How will Western maintain central, Senate-led oversight over the creation of any new academic structures associated with the partnership?
2. Who holds primary responsibility for strategic leadership of internationalization efforts, particularly given recent structural changes and vacant leadership roles?
3. How will Western International, the Registrar's Office, and faculties coordinate to ensure consistency and accountability in the internationalization strategy?

■ Professional Master's Programs and Institutional Identity

1. What principles will govern the identification, development, and approval of professional Master's programs associated with Navitas?
2. Will the rapid expansion of such programs risk altering the research-intensive character of the university?
3. Will hiring practices relating to professional Masters programs support the research intensive character of the university, expectations for academic qualifications and sustained commitment to the programs?
4. How will the university ensure that professional Master's programs for international students do not divert resources from its research mission or core undergraduate programs?

■ Process, Pace, and Transparency

1. What milestones, timelines, and consultation requirements will shape Senate's oversight of this decision and how will appropriate timelines be ensured?
2. How has the university assessed institutional capacity to manage the workload associated with this major initiative within an accelerated timeframe?
3. How will full transparency in reporting, consultation outcomes, and decision-making be guaranteed throughout this process?
4. How is Western ensuring that internal processes critically evaluate narratives of financial necessity and resist the rationalization strategies documented in other Canadian Navitas agreements? (Tamtik, 2022)

■ Financial and Reputational Risk

1. How will the senior administration ensure that no reputational harm results from the partnership—for example, the perception that Western is lowering its standards, acting out of financial desperation, or deviating from the norms of peer institutions?
2. What contingencies are in place if enrollment or revenue projections tied to the partnership are not met?
3. How will Western ensure transparency in financial arrangements with Navitas, including revenue sharing, overhead costs, and reinvestment in academic priorities?
4. What safeguards will protect against mission drift, in which financial imperatives tied to the partnership begin to overshadow academic goals or alter Western's institutional identity?

Did You Know...

Western's Facts and Figures (2023–2024) describes a "Global Campus" with 5,720 international students from 126 countries—representing 13.57% of the student body. If the goal is to reach 20%, there are more sustainable, university-led pathways to get there than partnering with Navitas.

4. A Call for Caution and Collegial Oversight

As Senate reviews the Navitas proposal, it is critical to consider whether the university's goals for internationalization can be achieved through public, transparent, and academically sound alternatives. The models proposed here enable Western to expand its global footprint, diversify its international student body, and enhance student experience—while maintaining full control over academic quality, preserving collegial governance, and upholding the university's public mission.

Relying on private pathway colleges risks reinforcing neoliberal, market-driven models of internationalization. These models often lack transparency, increase institutional dependence on precarious labour, and commodify international students (Tamtik, 2022; Larsen, 2020). Such partnerships have also been shown to weaken in-house programs, diminish academic oversight, and divert resources away from core educational values (Larsen, 2020).

Experiences at other Canadian institutions demonstrate that privatization through Navitas can result in degraded working conditions, the erosion of long-standing academic programs, and weakened commitments to equity and public accountability (Larsen, 2020). Positions against privatization are the dominant standpoint in the Canadian higher education sector. In 2023 the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations passed a motion on behalf of 18,000 faculty, academic librarians and professionals that “opposes the outsourcing of any of the teaching mission at Ontario’s public universities to private, for-profit corporations.” **In 2023, the Canadian Association of University Teachers, representing over 72,000 academic staff, reaffirmed its position against “the deregulation and privatization of higher education institutions and services in Canada, whether through the establishment and accreditation of private post-secondary institutions or the privatization of public institutions through such measures as Private Financing Initiatives and Public-Private Partnerships, outsourcing, the establishment of for-profit programmes, and the use of private consultants.”**

Quick decisions, especially those involving privatization of educational services, carry long-term consequences for Western's reputation, academic integrity, and financial sustainability. While financial pressures are real, it is essential that the university's budget challenges not drive choices that undermine its core values. Sustainable, public solutions are available—and they deserve serious, thorough exploration before any irreversible commitments are made.

