

Exploring the Role of Cross-Cultural Friendships in the Internationalization of Higher Education in Canada: A Case Study

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BACKGROUND

In 2017, there were 494,525 international students enrolled in Canada, a 119% increase since 2010 (CBIE, 2018). This phenomenon of students moving across borders to pursue education is known as internationalization. Through the integration of international and domestic students and their interactions in higher education settings, there is an expectation that both groups of students will transform their perspectives of cultural others. However, realizing internationalization as a mechanism for intercultural competence development or global citizenship learning is much more complicated (Garson, 2016; Jackson, 2015; Lilley, Barker & Harris, 2015).

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to explore how learning in an informal setting of friendship between cultural “others” may contribute to transformational, intercultural-competence development in students at a Canadian teaching university.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

- ### Grounding Theories for the Research
- ▶ **Critical Theory** (Brookfield, 2012)
 - ▶ **Transformative Learning Theory** (Mezirow, 2012; Cranton & Taylor, 2012)
 - ▶ **Multiple Models of Intercultural Competence Development**
 - ▶ **Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity** (Bennett, 1993)
 - ▶ **Process Model of Intercultural Competence** (Deardorff, 2006)
 - ▶ **Global Citizenship Learning** (Lilley, Barker & Harris, 2015)

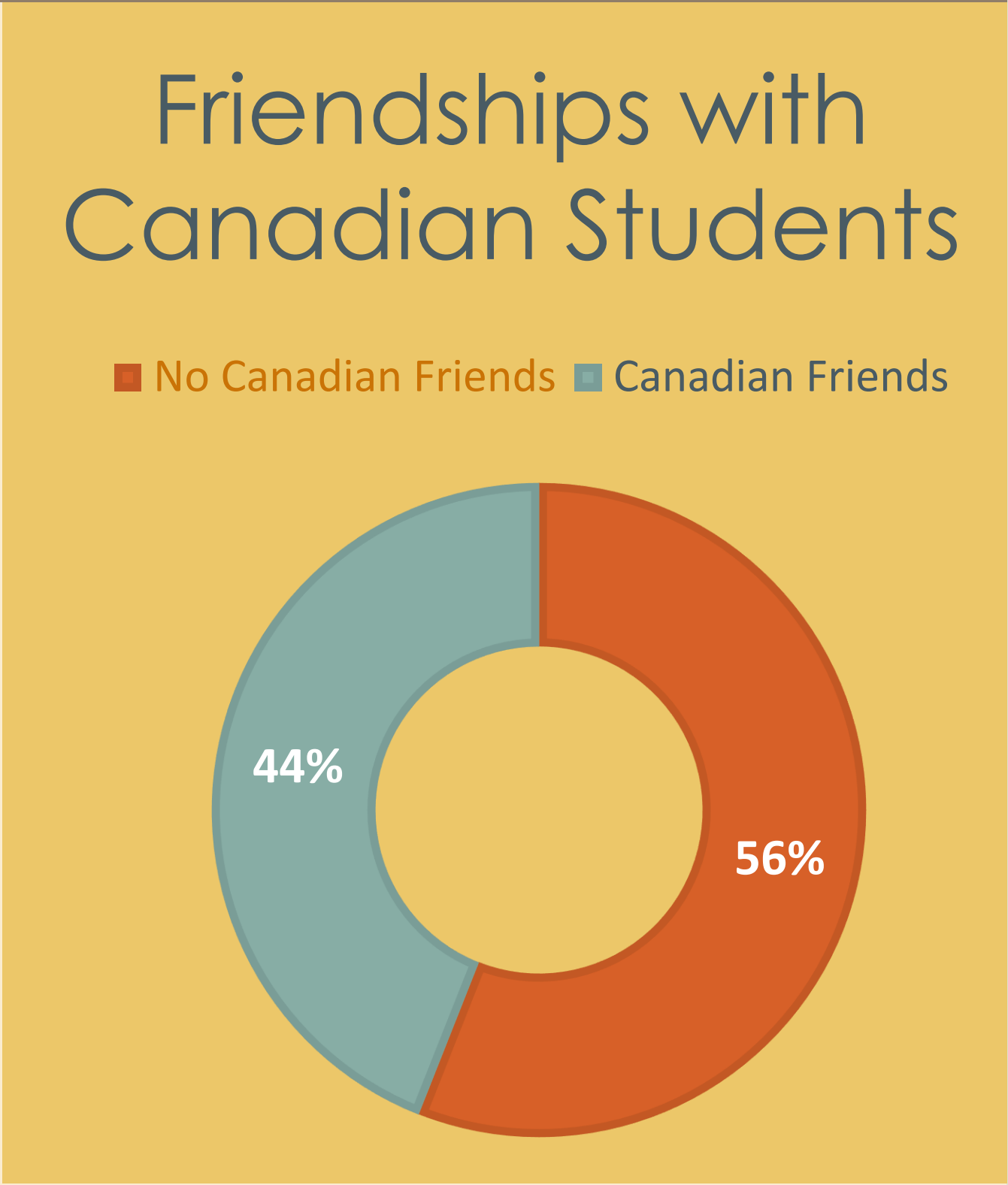


Figure 1. Percentage of International Students who reported having a friendship with a Canadian Student during their studies in Canada (Canadian Bureau of International Education, 2015).



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RESEARCH QUESTION

- How do cross-cultural friendships make a difference when it comes to a more holistic internationalization of post-secondary institutions?**
- ▶ How is the integration of international and domestic students considered in institutional policies and procedures that relate to internationalization?
 - ▶ What are the enablers of intercultural friendships between international and Canadian students? To what extent are supports and programs available at the case institution?
 - ▶ What do international and Canadian students learn from their intercultural friendships? What difference do these friendships make?
 - ▶ How do students perceive their role in the process of internationalization?

METHODOLOGY

- ### Qualitative Case Study
- ▶ Qualitative research
 - ▶ A case study is an in depth exploration of a phenomenon in a bound context.
 - ▶ Case studies can answer “how” and “why” research questions with thick description and analysis of a single unit. They facilitate understanding through the deconstruction and reconstruction of a phenomenon (Baxter & Jacks, 2008).

Document Analysis

- Triangulation or support of findings across data sets
- Strict criteria not set in order to allow flexibility.

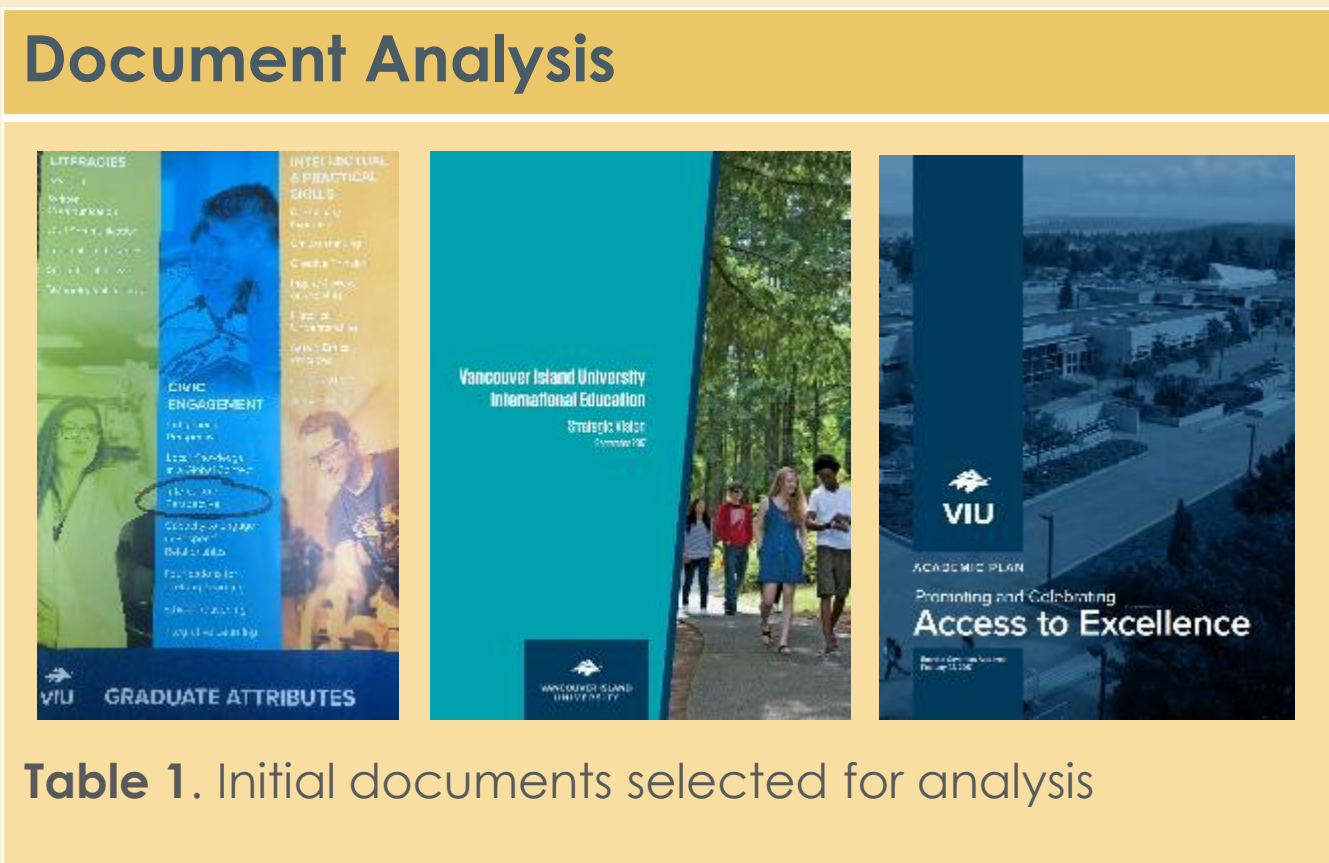
SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

- Criteria established
- Explore ideas, thoughts and experiences.

DATA EXTRACTION & ANALYSIS

- Coding developed
- NVIVO software for assistance in theme analysis of the documents and interviews.

METHODS



- ### Interview Inclusion Criteria
- Students who are currently enrolled in an undergraduate or graduate program at Vancouver Island University and are:
 - An international student who self-identifies as having a friendship with a domestic student. OR
 - A domestic student who self-identifies as having a friendship with an international student.

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

- ### Internationalization and Student Interaction in Policy Documents
- A review of three high-level policy documents at Vancouver Island University; The Graduate Attributes, The International Education Strategic Plan and the Academic Plan found the following:
- ▶ The term “Intercultural” is used **15** times in the three documents. Inconsistent use of the term may indicate that there differing understandings of what “intercultural” means to administrators.
 - ▶ The term “integration” is used to describe desired international and domestic students relationships in the International Strategic Plan. However, neither the concept of integration nor the concept of students connecting with peers and forming positive relationships with each other is mentioned in the Graduate Attributes or the Academic Plan.

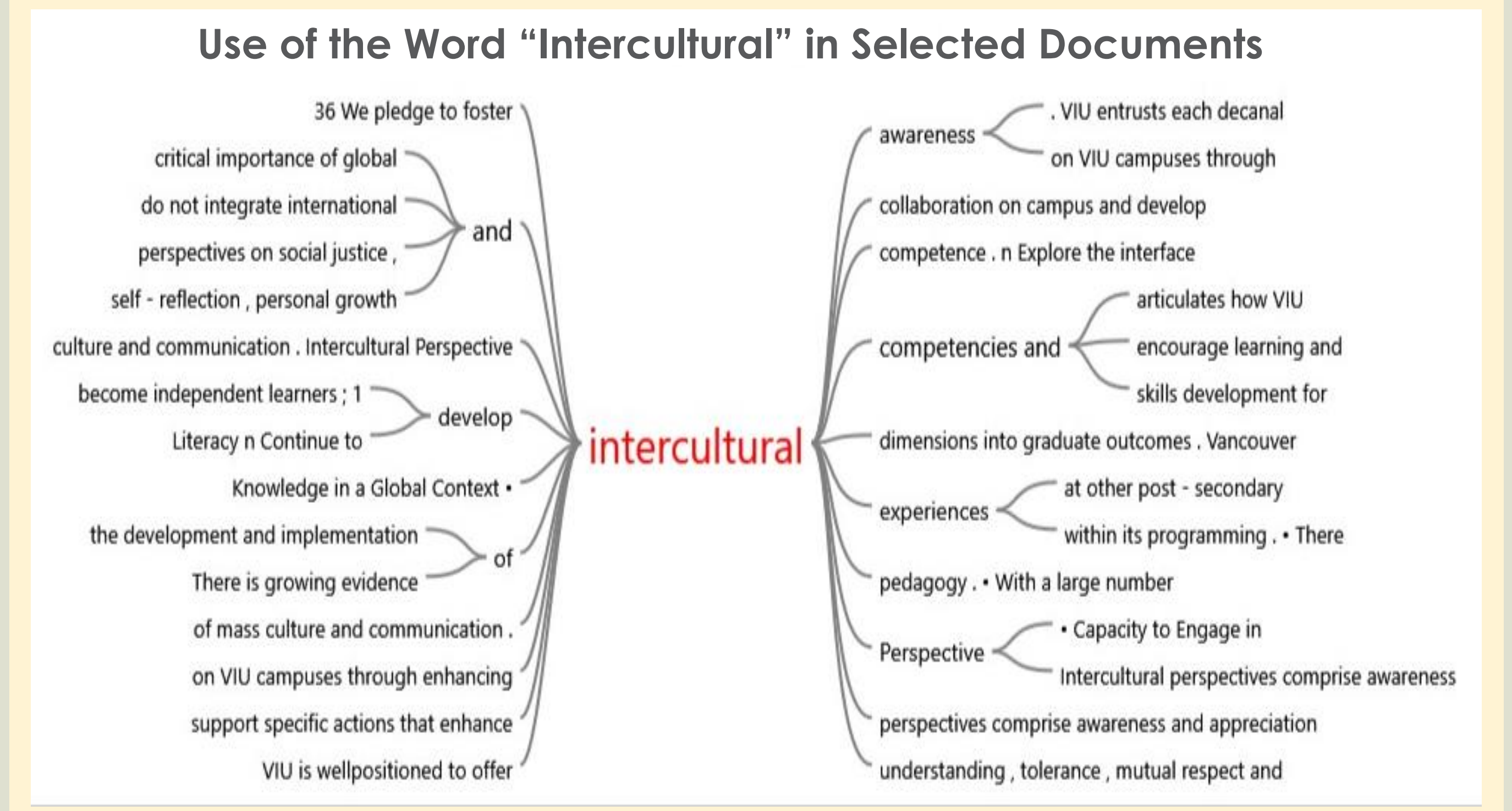


Figure 3. Use of the term intercultural in selected documents.

Suggested Actions to Support International Students

- In class supports
- Activities
- Clubs
- Associations
- Faculty and Staff Pro-D
- Fostering Citizenship in Students

Figure 4. Suggestions found in documents for actions to support international student integration