

Choosing Canadian graduate schools from afar: East Asian students' perspectives

Liang-Hsuan Chen

Received: 16 August 2005 / Accepted: 2 June 2006 / Published online: 8 July 2006
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Abstract This study seeks to explain why and how international graduate students from East Asia choose to come to Canada to pursue advanced education. A synthesis model is developed to explain their decision-making *process*, while a push–pull model is used to understand the strengths of and relationships among various *factors* that influence the choice of a country, institution, program, and city. The research sample comprised 140 students from China, Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, and Taiwan who enrolled in graduate programs at two large Ontario universities. The research findings reveal the influence of *Institutional Academic Pulling Factors*, *Institutional Administrative Pulling Factors*, the *Canadian Environment*, the *Economics of Canadian Education*, and the ease of *Visa/Immigration*. The research shows a three-stage process, guided first by the focus of the program (i.e., research-oriented vs. professional programs). Other factors—country, institution, and city—interplay simultaneously at the later two stages.

Keywords College choice · Graduate education · International education · International students · Attitude

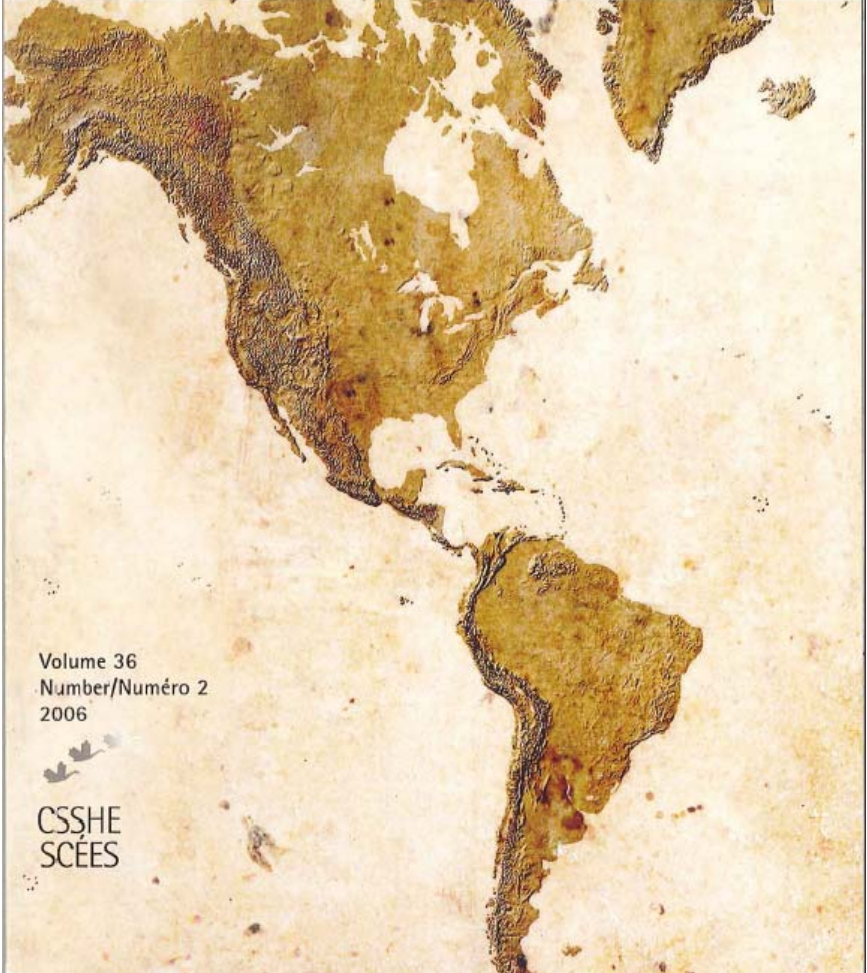
1 Introduction

International graduate students are a special group of people, belonging to the so-called “creative class” (Florida 2002), who travel from afar to pursue advanced education for the love of knowledge and for personal or professional advancement. They play an important role in graduate education by bringing academic, cultural, and economic benefits to the domestic learning environment and society, and they subsequently become ambassadors of the host country. Despite their importance, existing research on the flow of international graduate students, especially in the Canadian context, is minimal. This is the first study focusing on this group of

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Canadian Journal of
Higher Education
Revue canadienne
d'enseignement supérieur



Volume 36
Number/Numéro 2
2006



CSSHE
SCÉES

Volume 18, Number 1 2008

PRINT ISSN: 0884-1241
ELECTRONIC ISSN: 1540-7144

Journal of

Marketing
for
HIGHER
EDUCATION™



The Haworth Press



VOLUME 7 | NUMBER 4

DECEMBER | 2007

International Journal of
Educational Advancement



www.palgrave-journals.com/ijea



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Vol. 24 No. 06

May 2008

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FOCUS

The Bottom Line Mid-May 2008

education for accountants

Teaching offers enriching option

By LIANG CHEN

After spending time in accounting, many people contemplate a career move to a profession that is more interactive, and provides an opportunity to give back to society. Educating college or university students in accounting offers such an option.

However, before considering such a career move, it would be wise to know something of the demand for accounting faculty in higher education, to understand students' attitudes and motivation, and to assess one's qualifications.

A glance at past enrolment and co-op placement data at the Mississauga and Scarborough campuses of the University of Toronto (UT) confirms that students' interest in pursuing accounting as a career is not a new phenomenon.

In fact, the data shows that approximately 60 per cent of commerce students at UT Mississauga and 40 per cent of management students at UT Scarborough choose accounting as a specialty in their university studies, and that the numbers have been increasing every year, over the past several years.

A short survey was conducted at these two campuses to learn about commerce and management students' attitudes toward accounting and the major factors that attract them to pursue accounting as a career. One of the main reasons for choosing these two campuses for this study was that UT Mississauga's commerce program has a focus on accounting and finance, while UT Scarborough's management program has a co-op option with approximately 40 per cent of work placements in accounting.

A total of 515 undergraduate students participated in the study: 159 surveys (31 per cent) and 356 surveys (69 per cent) were collected from UT Mississauga and UT Scarborough, respectively. The findings show that 295 (57 per cent) of the survey participants were considering a career in accounting even before they entered university. However, significantly more domestic students than international students were considering accounting before entering university, 62 per cent of all domestic students in comparison to 39 per cent of all international students.

The top five reasons given by these students were:

- Career opportunities (more and wider choices)
- Content interesting and challenging
- Money
- Influence of significant others (e.g. professors and friends)
- Job security



Chen

The growth of student enrolment in accounting has a direct impact on the demand for teaching faculty.

Liang Chen, CGA, university lecturer

Students were asked to state up to three major reasons influencing their decision to pursue an accounting career. The top answers were money, career opportunities and interesting and challenging content.

Almost 60 per cent of all participants reported that they would pursue an accounting designation, including those who reported that they were not in the accounting stream. Students identified four designations – chartered accountant, certified general accountant, certified management accountant and the American designation of certified public accountant – as their choice of accounting designations.

Sixty-seven students reported that they intended to pursue more than one designation.

Overall, 60 per cent of students indicated an intention to pursue the CA designation, and the percentages for the CMA, CGA and CPA designations were 25 per cent, 14 per cent, and one per cent respectively.

The common reasons mentioned for choosing these designations were money and career opportunities. However, the specific perceptions regarding each of the designations varied. The CA designation is perceived as being more recognized and prestigious, more interesting and challenging, and enabling its holder to do audit and tax work.

The CMA designation is perceived as facilitating work in the management functions, as providing more flexibility in working in various industries and job functions, and as being beneficial for those intending to manage a business.

The CGA designation is perceived as providing greater accessibility (e.g. easy entrance, credit transfer, and lower cost), flexibility (e.g. working full-time and studying part-time), international mobility, and as being complementary to other career interests, such as finance and marketing.

This study shows that students are aware that the skills learned in accounting translate into future earnings potential, more career options, and reduced risk of unemployment. They are also aware that an accounting designation is a stepping stone for a career in finance or marketing, as well for professional and geographic mobility.

These research results imply that there are exciting new career opportunities for accounting professionals who hold a CA, CGA, or CMA designation. Furthermore, opportunities are abundant

for those who have a passion to teach or who would like to consider a career in education.

The growth of student enrolment in accounting has a direct impact on the demand for teaching faculty. At the same time, faculty hired during the expansion of higher education in the late '60s and early '70s are near or at the normal retirement age. These two factors taken together suggest that the demand for qualified accounting faculty can only rise.

Consequently, recruitment for qualified teaching faculty in accounting in the universities and colleges has become a hot issue. In addition to an accounting designation, universities and colleges are recruiting accounting professionals with teaching experience and a graduate degree, like a master of arts, master of education or master of business administration (MBA).

A master degree program provides greater accessibility and flexibility than a doctoral program, as the latter usually have very small admission numbers and a mandatory residence requirement. Among the master's programs, the master of education degree in adult education, higher education, or educational administration, could provide great alternatives for accounting professionals, as they generally cost much less than MBA programs.

In addition, a master's degree in education may compensate for a lack of teaching experience. Alter-

natively, taking adult teaching certificate programs at community colleges may satisfy the teaching experience requirement.

In terms of doctoral programs, some universities offer the so-called "flex-time" doctoral program, which allows doctoral students to meet the residence requirement without taking a leave from their work. Accounting professionals may choose to pursue a doctoral degree in disciplines such as accounting or finance.

Graduates from these doctoral programs are generally prepared to be researchers. An alternative is a doctoral degree in education (either Ed.D. or Ph.D.), and the graduates could work as researchers, administrators or teaching faculty in higher educational institutions.

During the residency year, doctoral students will typically not be able to engage in full-time employment. Therefore, the financial impact of undertaking a doctoral study should be taken into consideration. There are several scholarship programs provided by the Big Four accounting firms. These scholarships are typically tied to a particular university or program.

There are three significant support funding opportunities for doctoral studies provided by the Certified General Accountants of Canada, the Certified General Accountants of Ontario, and the Chartered Accountants of Ontario for their members.

All three organizations provide substantial financial assistance in the form of a forgivable loan. The loan will be forgivable once the candidate completes his/her doctoral studies and obtains a full-time teaching position in an Ontario university. For more information, CA and CGA members should contact their respective associations.

There is more opportunity available to accounting professionals than simply working in a firm. Giving back and leading tomorrow's accountants is another way of serving the industry.

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