



# BUILDING STRONGER CANADA-INDIA HIGHER EDUCATION PARTNERSHIPS:

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Summary  
of Roundtable  
Discussions

March 1<sup>st</sup>, Toronto  
& March 8<sup>th</sup>, Vancouver  
2017



ASIA PACIFIC  
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The Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada thanks Global Affairs  
Canada for its generous support for these roundtables.





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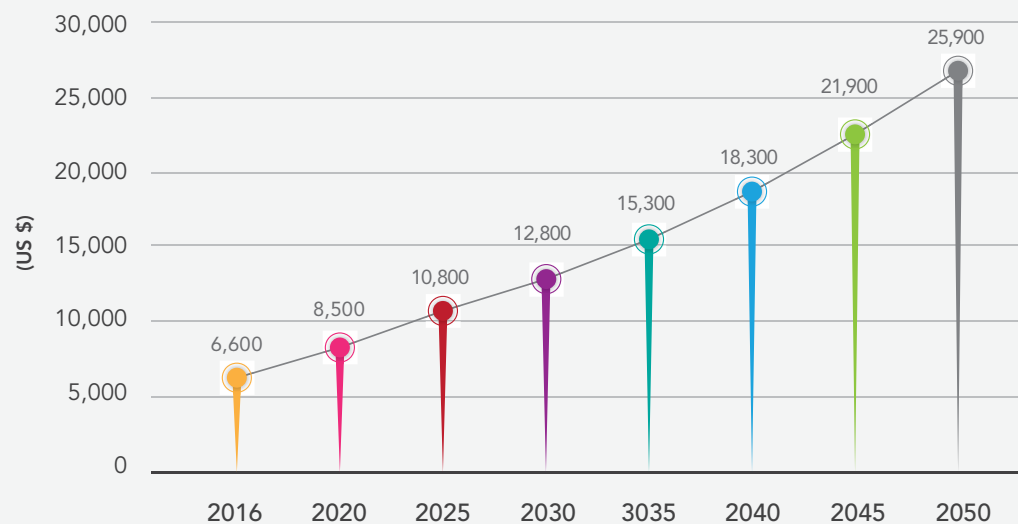
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# SUMMARY REPORT

India is and will be an important economic, development, and higher education partner for Canada. To explore how Canada can increase and improve its higher education engagement with India, the Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada (APF Canada), the International Education Division of Global Affairs Canada, and the Canada-India Business Council (C-IBC) convened stakeholders from education, business, government, and research organizations to discuss both opportunities and challenges. The first discussion took place in Toronto on March 1, 2017 and involved Ontario-based stakeholders, and the second took place in Vancouver on March 8, 2017 and involved British Columbia- and Alberta-based stakeholders. In addition, some participants joined by phone from India, Quebec, and the U.S.

FIG. 1 **India's Projected GDP per Capita, 2016 - 2050**



Source: PwC, *The World in 2050*, <http://www.pwc.com/gx/en/issues/economy/the-world-in-2050.html>

Participants focused on the following three areas:

- **Attracting more Indian students to study at Canadian post-secondary institutions.** India has a very large and young population, with more than a half a billion people under the age of 25. Moreover, years of economic growth and development have given more Indian families the financial means to support their

children's higher education pursuits. However, India's own higher education system has not expanded sufficiently to meet this growing demand, and more and more young Indians are seeking opportunities outside their country. Canada has had some success in attracting these students, but there is considerable room for growth.

■ **Deriving more benefits from higher education agreements with India.**

India's importance within the global economy and global politics is rising rapidly. Moreover, the country has emerged as a major hub of entrepreneurship and innovation. Canada can and should benefit and learn from these developments. One way to do so is for Canadian post-secondary institutions to prioritize India in their internationalization strategies. However, many academic collaboration agreements with Indian partners, like other international partners, remain stuck at the "on paper only" stage and are never fully realized. The main challenge cited by participants was keeping the relationship fresh and dynamic: while MOUs provide for excellent announcements and photo opportunities, without dedicated personnel that focus on the development and execution, agreements quickly become dormant. Institutions and governments are challenged to track the short- and long-term results of agreements.

■ **Articulating the benefits (and challenges) to Canadian students of getting**

**India experience.** India's growing global importance requires Canada to invest more in programs that allow young Canadians to become knowledgeable, skilled, and effective working in and with this strategically important country. One of the best ways to gain such experience is through study and work abroad programs offered through Canadian universities and colleges. However, the number of Canadian students who get such experience is vastly out of proportion to India's importance, and the value of this experience—to participating youth, to their future employers, and to Canada as a whole—needs to be better understood and articulated, and more widely shared.

The sections below provide a summary and highlights of participants' insights and observations on these three areas, and some ideas on how Canada can strengthen higher education ties between the two countries.

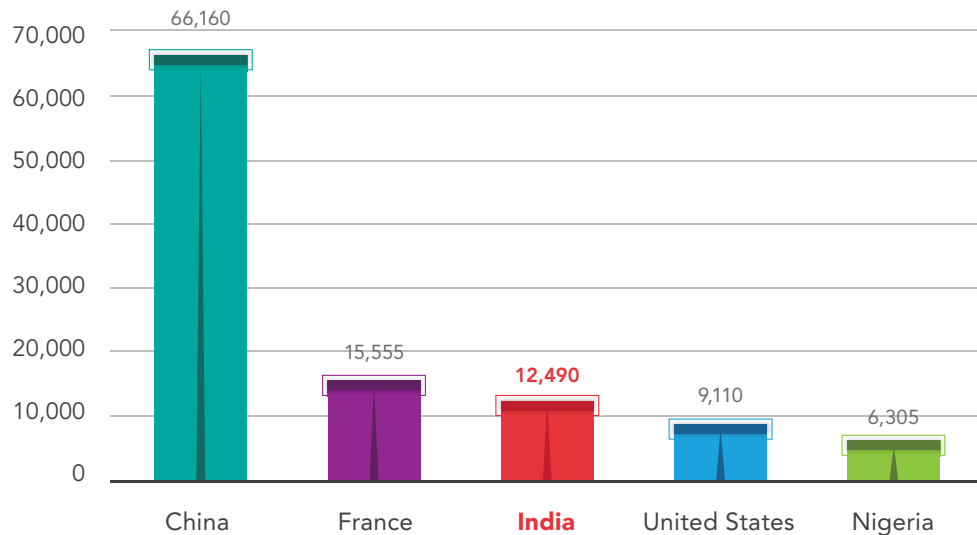
# 01

## ATTRACTING MORE INDIAN STUDENTS TO STUDY AT CANADIAN POST-SECONDARY INSTITUTIONS

According to Sannams4 ([www.sannams4.com](http://www.sannams4.com)), an international firm that specializes in market entry and business development around the world, there are currently 33.3 million students enrolled in higher education in India, and demand is growing. To meet this demand, India will need an additional 800 universities and 400 colleges in the coming years.<sup>1</sup> As the country struggles to accommodate this growth, more Indian students are looking overseas. There are now more than 350,000 Indian international students, a number that is currently growing rapidly, at approximately 20% per year. Some of these students are academic high performers who do not get accepted into India's elite and extremely selective universities.

Canadian post-secondary schools can and should act on this opportunity. In 2015 there were over 48,000 Indian nationals who studied in Canada for six months or more,<sup>2</sup> making India the second-highest sending country. Nevertheless, this is only about 40% of the number of students from China, which numbered more than 118,000 that same year.<sup>3</sup>

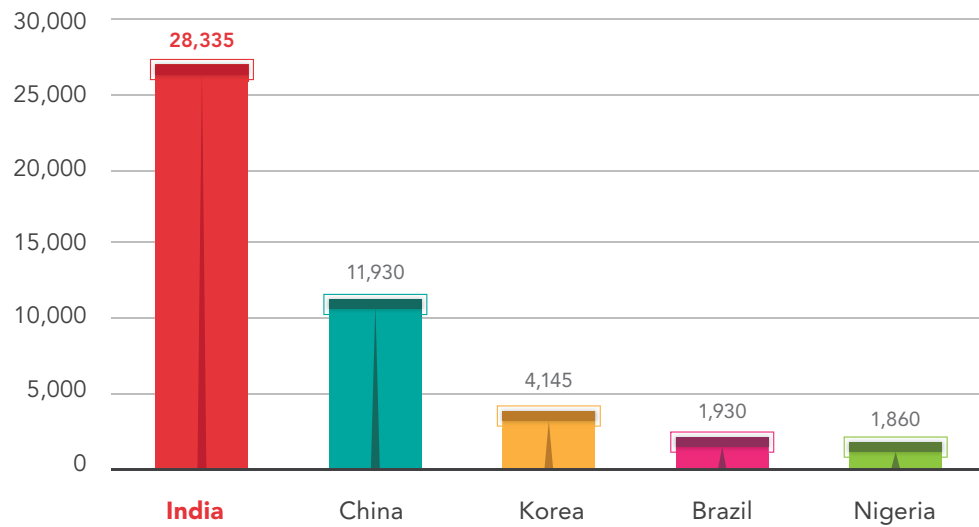
FIG. 2 International University Students in Canada, 2015



Source: CBIE, *A World of Learning 2016*, p. 18

1. "Promoting Canadian Education in India," Presentation by Sannams4 on March 1, 2017 (Toronto) and March 8, 2017 (Vancouver).
2. These numbers are from the Canadian Bureau for International Education, *A World of Learning 2016: Canada's Performance in International Education*, <http://cbie.ca/what-we-do/research-publications/research-and-publications/>.
3. Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE), *A World of Learning 2016: Canada's Performance and Potential in International Education*, p. 17.

FIG. 3 International College Students in Canada, 2015



Source: CBIE, *A World of Learning 2016*, p. 18

The situation is somewhat different for Canadian colleges than it is for Canadian universities. For the former, Indian students are the top source country (as of 2015), with more than 28,000 students, followed by China, with just under 12,000 students. For the latter, India ranks well behind China and even France; in 2015, there were more than 66,000 students from China, but only 12,490 from India.<sup>4</sup>

Sannams<sup>4</sup> provided context for these numbers:

1. Canadian higher education, especially university education, is perceived by many in India as less prestigious than what is offered by U.K. or U.S. universities. There is a tendency to view Canada as an immigration destination rather than a purely education destination.
2. Canadian colleges and institutes have had comparatively more success because they are seen as an affordable option for students who are motivated primarily by obtaining work-readiness skills and having a path to permanent residence.
3. Canada's marketing efforts in India have been limited primarily to the north of India. There is ample opportunity in India's south and east, but Canada is not very visible in these regions.

<sup>4</sup> *A World of Learning 2016*, p. 18.

Sannams<sup>4</sup> and other participants observed that the current political context is a window of opportunity for Canada now that the U.K. and U.S. are experiencing an anti-immigration backlash. In contrast, Canada, receives a high safety-index rating, an important factor for Indian parents considering international options for their children.

Some participants pointed to the Australian case as instructive in the power of proactive and well-co-ordinated marketing; in 2009, several Indian international students there were the victims of crimes. In response, there was a decline in the number of Indian students applying to study in Australia. However, Australia responded quickly with a robust marketing campaign, and these numbers subsequently rebounded. There are now more Indian international students in Australia than in Canada.

Ideas for action included:

- ❑ **Develop a robust and consistent marketing and brand-building strategy for Canada.** This could include the creation of a central promotional body and more confident and deliberate messaging that promotes Canada as more than just a nice place to visit or live. Some participants suggested that a unified Canadian brand was essential, whereas others were skeptical that this would work because the program offerings at Canadian institutions are so differentiated.
- ❑ **Expand marketing and engagement in South and East India,** as part of an overall broadening of Canada's understanding of the Indian education sector.
- ❑ **Emphasize the university-transfer option at Canadian colleges.** Two B.C.-based colleges that have seen rapid growth in students from India estimated that approximately half of those students were interested in the university-transfer option. Many of these students are enrolled in business or STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) programs and are academically strong, but feel they need more time to prepare for studies at a Western university.
- ❑ **Offer niche programs that appeal to Indian students.** Some of the Ontario-based colleges said their success in attracting Indian students was due in part to their specialized program offerings, such as in film or technical fields.
- ❑ **Use and/or create sister city or sister province/state relationships** as leverage for both branding and recruitment, and for building partnerships.
- ❑ **Use top-notch Canadian students studying in India to change perceptions of the quality of Canadian higher education.** (*More on this below.*)



# 02

## DERIVING MORE BENEFITS FROM CANADA-INDIA HIGHER EDUCATION AGREEMENTS

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Many participants agreed that Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) with Indian partners can be a good way to strengthen bilateral academic relationships, but also that many of the activities spelled out in these MOUs never get implemented. While there is no ‘silver bullet’ solution to this challenge, participants suggested the following:

- ❑ **Ensure there is a faculty member at your institution who champions the agreement.** When relevant, it is also helpful to think about engaging alumni and members of the Indian diaspora.
- ❑ **Be persistent in engaging the Indian partner and cultivating the relationship.**
- ❑ **Ensure the partnership is balanced.** Providing funding for joint projects is a way to solidify co-operation, but the partnership should be one between equals. Both sides need to make a significant investment in it.
- ❑ **Look beyond Tier 1 cities.** Many institutions in Tier 2 and Tier 3 Indian cities are less saturated than those in Tier 1 cities, and may be more eager and available to work with Canadian partners. Canadian schools should think less about the ranking of potential Indian partners, and more about finding the right fit.
- ❑ **Learn from failures.** One college participant described a MOU signed between an Indian government agency and several Canadian colleges that sounded promising on paper, but failed to materialize. A post-mortem analysis could help reveal flaws in MOU design, partner selection, or implementation, and suggest lessons for the future.
- ❑ **Encourage Canadian graduate students to develop research partnerships.** To lay a foundation for future Canada-India collaboration, Canadian graduate students should be encouraged to present their work at academic conferences in India.
- ❑ **Don’t forget the role of the federal government on both sides.** This includes providing guidance and financial support. In addition, national and bi-national organizations can assist with implementation, and possibly provide fair and open processes for selecting which projects to support with funding.

# 03

## ARTICULATING THE BENEFITS (AND CHALLENGES) TO CANADIAN STUDENTS OF GETTING INDIA EXPERIENCE

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Organizations such as the Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE), Universities Canada, and Colleges and Institutes Canada have all been trying to increase the number of Canadian students who get study and work experience in other countries, and have done so in part by raising awareness of the benefits, both tangible and intangible, to the students, their future employers, and Canada as a whole.

Similarly, APF Canada has been advocating for more Canadian youth to develop their Asia competence—the knowledge, skills and experiences they will need to be effective in engaging the world’s largest, and arguably most dynamic, region. Within Asia, India should be a priority concern for international experience campaigns, as it is the world’s second-most populous country (behind only China) and on track to become one of the five largest economies within the next 30 years.

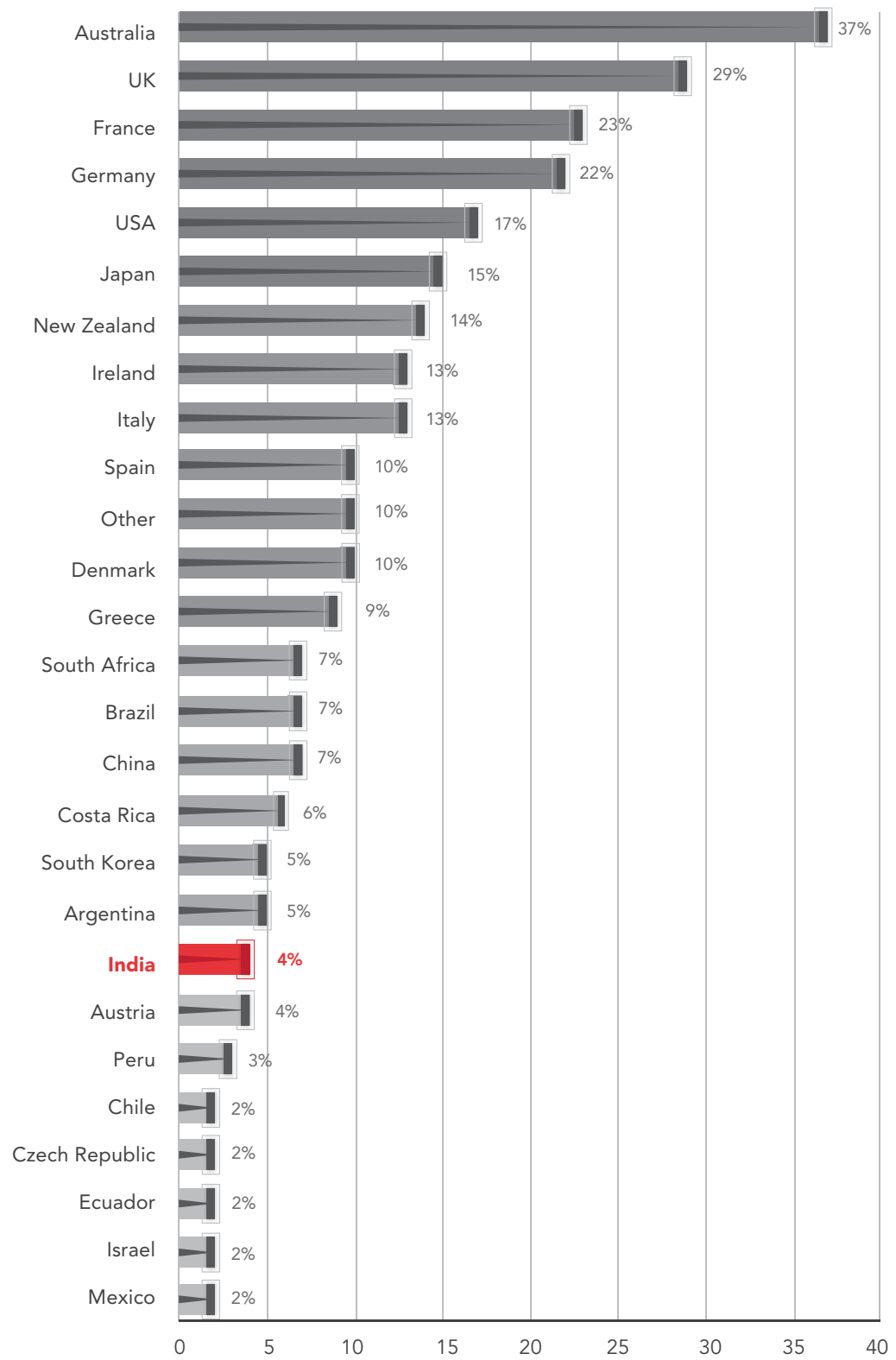
However, the percentage of Canadian students who get study and work experience in this strategically important country is miniscule (*see: Fig.4, p.11*). As one participant framed it, the top destinations for Canadian students do not align with our future priority markets. Participants shared a range of observations about practical and perceptual barriers on both the Indian side and Canadian side.

Barriers on the Indian side include the following:

- ❑ **Many Indian universities lack the infrastructure** to host international students from countries like Canada, including things like residential options and reliable Internet connections.
- ❑ **Businesses or NGOs in India may face challenges or disincentives to host Canadian interns.** For example, an Indian company could hire a local intern at a fraction of the price of a Canadian intern, and would not have to worry about language barriers or the student’s familiarity with the local culture and business practices. Similarly, many India-based NGOs (which are a major source of internship placements for Canadian students) may be grateful for the assistance, but also might feel obligated to provide translation assistance or guidance to students who are not familiar with the local language, culture, and surroundings, all of which takes time away from their core mission.
- ❑ **Difficulty securing the appropriate visa,** especially for students who will be in the country for a full academic term or longer.

FIG. 4

**Canadian Students' Countries of Interest for Learning Abroad**



Source: CBIE, *A World of Learning 2016*, p. 44.

Barriers on the Canadian side include the following:

1. **Perceptions of India** that are shaped heavily by media images of poverty, disease, and a lack of personal safety, especially for women.
2. **Failure to recognize India as a place to get “serious” work experience** in business or high-tech fields.

Participants suggested ways to overcome these barriers. In addition, APF Canada participants shared insights from approximately two dozen interviews they conducted with Canadian students who recently completed internships in India, most of which lasted an academic term.

The main insights can be summarized as follows:

- ❑ To attract more Canadian students to internships in India, **emphasize the nature of the work or organization.** Many of the interviewees interned at NGOs, and said the ‘pull’ factor for them was not the country, but the type of experience they would get and the mission of the organization. Their interest in India grew once they spent time on the ground.
- ❑ **Minimize uncertainties about day-to-day life in India.** Many students are told to expect the unexpected when they go to India, but whenever possible, they should get information in advance about their workplaces, surroundings, and living situations there. Having an institutional connection through a home university or a personal connection to someone who had done the same internship or study program is one of the most persuasive sources of information and assurance.
- ❑ **Go in a pair or small group.** Going with another student helps reduce anxiety about needing to be entirely self-reliant in navigating life on the ground. Interestingly, however, another participant pointed out the downside of going with a large group of Canadians, which could easily result in Canadian students interacting primarily with other Canadian students. That type of arrangement would lessen the likelihood of meaningful interaction with Indian classmates or colleagues.
- ❑ **Share information about safety precautions.** For female students, getting advice from previous interns about precautions for personal safety (not venturing out alone at night and/or travelling with another person, etc.) helped to neutralize their (and their parents’) concerns.
- ❑ **Market these opportunities to students with previous international experience.** The former interns interviewed by APF Canada agreed that India is “not a country for beginners,” meaning that it was helpful to have had previous international experience, especially in non-Western countries, prior to going to India.

- ✦ **Show the strong links between interns' experiences and the development of soft skills.** Because India is viewed as a challenging environment, the students who self-select for internships or study abroad there tend to be those who have already reached a certain level of professional and personal maturity, and who are seeking experiences with a certain level of depth and challenge. Interested stakeholders should find ways to give them higher profile in India so that they can help build up the reputation of Canadian higher education in that country.
  
- ✦ Stakeholders in Canada need to **do more to support these students once they complete their internships or study abroad terms to showcase examples of their professional development.** Most interns can cite specific examples of how their international experience gave them an opportunity to develop cross-cultural communication skills, empathy, resourcefulness, critical thinking, and other types of soft skills that are in high demand by Canadian and international employers. Businesses in Canada that value these skills, and more broadly, a globally-trained workforce, should be vocal and visible on this point, including how such skills and training factor into their own recruiting and hiring practices.
  
- ✦ Stakeholders should also **support and encourage participation in international experience programs offered by organizations beyond traditional university/college channels.** AIESEC Canada ([www.aiesec.ca](http://www.aiesec.ca)), a youth-run non-profit organization that focuses on leadership development and international exchange, has had comparably high success in placing interns in Asian countries, including India. Moreover, AIESEC Canada has member committees active on 29 university campuses and in eight provinces, giving it a strong pan-Canada reach.
  
- ✦ Canadian colleges and universities should **use their alumni networks in India** to develop internships opportunities. These networks could also be a source of mentorship for Canadian students getting work or study experience in India.

# APPENDIX

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## FIGURES

- FIG. 1. India's Projected GDP per Capita, 2016 - 2050 (p.4)
- FIG. 2. International University Students in Canada, 2015 (p.6)
- FIG. 3. International College Students in Canada, 2015 (p.7)
- FIG. 4. Canadian Students' Countries of Interest for Learning Abroad (p.11)



# ABOUT THE ASIA PACIFIC FOUNDATION OF CANADA

**THE ASIA PACIFIC FOUNDATION OF CANADA** is dedicated to strengthening ties between Canada and Asia with a focus on expanding economic relations through trade, investment, and innovation; promoting Canada's expertise in offering solutions to Asia's climate change, energy, food security, and natural resource management challenges; building Asia skills and competencies among Canadians, including young Canadians; and improving Canadians' general understanding of Asia and its growing global influence.

The Foundation is well known for its annual national opinion polls of Canadian attitudes regarding relations with Asia, including Asian foreign investment in Canada and Canada's trade with Asia. The Foundation places an emphasis on China, India, Japan, and South Korea while also developing expertise in emerging markets in the region, particularly economies within ASEAN.

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