

American students choosing B.C. could help offset impacts of federal immigration caps: lawyer



The University of British Columbia campus. (CityNews Image)



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The University of British Columbia says “social and political shifts” could be influencing an influx of applications from American students.

One Vancouver immigration lawyer says that increase comes after the federal government put a cap on student visas last year, driving the total number of applications down.

Will Tao with Heron Law Offices says post-secondary institutions are likely hoping the influx of American students will help offset the financial impacts of the caps — which have forced program closures and layoffs at some local schools.

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UBC isn't one of those schools, but says it's seen about a 30 per cent jump in applications from U.S.-based students.

Tao says it's a chance for Canada to establish itself as an alternate destination for students.

"I think it's an opportunity for Canada to stand up for fundamental human rights. So if you're talking about something like trans rights, that's been a huge issue. So I think from that perspective, being able to provide a safer haven for individuals, I think is a positive thing from an economic perspective. I think there absolutely is an opportunity here," said Tao.

But he says he's identified a double standard in welcoming American students as the feds move to severely restrict the number of international students in Canada.

"I think that in order to try and alleviate what was a targeted problem in those issues, we definitely unfortunately harmed

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according to the government.

Immigration consultant Neera Agnihotri says Ottawa has become much stricter with applications and entry requirements for students, making it harder for Indian nationals to get to Canada.

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She adds that Canada isn't seen as desirable of a destination anymore, with students telling their families back home how expensive it can be to live here.

“Students are speaking out saying, ‘Hey, this is the reality here. We’re going to food banks or to gurdwaras or mandirs to eat our meals. We don’t have money for food, and we are not highly accepted.’... So the biases have created so much diversion between the two communities as well,” said Agnihotri.

Along with the high cost of living, and the difficulty in finding work without permanent residency, she says there’s a public perception in India that Canada isn’t a safe place anymore.

“They hear the negative stories. A child disappearing; there’s murders happening there. My God, food — even to eat and to work and to maintain their studies, the emotional, mental stress that these students are now facing finally: parents in India are opening their eyes to say, ‘No, we don’t want to put our children through this.’”

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