

# The Advice I Wish Someone Had Given Me as an International Student

Published 3 days ago by **Rei Tang**

Thirty years ago, when I first arrived in Toronto, Canada, as an international student at Seneca, I believed that academic success alone would determine my future. For many international students, studying abroad is a great opportunity to enhance their knowledge and improve their quality of life. I thought that if I worked hard, earned good grades, and followed the rules, everything else would fall into place. However, looking back now, I realize there was so much more I needed to understand about finding balance and understanding myself. The advice I wish someone had given me earlier could have saved me a great deal of stress, loneliness, and unnecessary mistakes.

The first piece of advice I wish I had received is that it is okay to ask for help. As an international student, I felt pressure to prove my independence and capability. I wanted to demonstrate to myself that I had a successful career in my home country and that I could handle all my basic needs. When I was ready to start studying, I hesitated to ask questions at the appropriate times because I didn't want to appear weak or unprepared. I silently struggled with academic expectations, cultural differences, and tasks like understanding rental agreements. I now realize that colleges in Canada are designed to support students, and offer dedicated support for international students. Reaching out to professors, academic advisors, or student services is not a sign of failure; it is a smart and necessary step toward success. In short, I was adjusting to a new culture.

Another important lesson I wish I had learned earlier is the importance of building connections. I spent too much time staying within my comfort zone, socializing only with people from my culture (Latinos). While this provided familiarity, it limited my growth. I wish someone had encouraged me to step outside that bubble and engage more with people from different backgrounds. Making friends from diverse cultures not only improves communication skills but also helps reduce loneliness and builds confidence. Canada is a multicultural country and embracing that diversity can make the international experience richer and more meaningful.

I also wish someone had warned me about the emotional challenges of being far from home. Homesickness, culture shock, and self-doubt are real issues that don't go away just because you are strong or motivated. I often ignored my mental health, focusing solely on academics and work. Over time, this approach led to a difficult reality. I've learned that taking care of my mental and emotional well-being is just as important as my studies. Simple habits like maintaining a routine, exercising, and openly discussing my feelings can make a significant difference.

Finally, I wish I had been told that it's okay not to have everything figured out. As an international student, I constantly worried about my future, my immigration status, career choices, and financial stability. This pressure made me overthink and feel impatient. If I could go back, I would remind myself that growth takes time and that uncertainty is a natural part of the journey. Ultimately, being an international student in Canada taught me resilience, independence, and self-awareness. The advice I wish I had received earlier is something I now carry with me, and I hope to share it with others just beginning their journey: "Enjoy your time as an international student, because it will pass very quickly."

(Written by Sergio Vazquez, International Student Coordinator)

Counselling Services: <https://students.senecapolytechnic.ca/spaces/294/counselling-services/home>

International Student Support: <https://students.senecapolytechnic.ca/spaces/283/international-student-support/home>

tags : international-students, ISS, sergio-blog