

# Then and Now: What Has Changed and What Hasn't

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Over the past thirty years, the experience of being an international student at Seneca has transformed in many ways. Advances in technology, changes in communication, and the globalization of education have reshaped how students study abroad. However, despite these developments, some aspects of the international student experience remain unchanged. The challenges of adapting to a new culture, managing academic pressure, and fostering a sense of belonging are still very real today. A comparison of the past and the present reveals both considerable progress and enduring similarities. Additionally, the resources available at Seneca have also evolved.

One of the most significant changes over the past thirty years is the role of technology. In the 1990s, international students at Seneca had limited options for communicating with family and friends back home. Phone calls were expensive, and letters could take weeks to arrive. The quickest way to communicate was through fax. Today, communication is instant and affordable. With smartphones, video calls, and messaging apps, students can easily stay connected with loved ones regardless of where they are in the world. This constant connection helps to reduce feelings of loneliness and homesickness, which were much bigger challenges for students studying in Canada.

Technology has significantly transformed the way students prepare to study abroad. Thirty years ago, accessing information about colleges, housing, and immigration processes was quite challenging. Students typically relied on printed brochures, education agents, or recommendations from others. For instance, I recall when a group of professors from China visited Seneca and learned about the institution; they were eager to send their children to attend. Today, nearly all information is available online. Universities provide comprehensive websites, virtual campus tours, and online application systems. Social media platforms enable prospective students to connect with current students, allowing them to gain insights into real experiences even before arriving. At Seneca, students can also have a mentor before their arrival to help them navigate the transition smoothly.

Another significant change is the growing diversity and increasing number of international students. Over the past 25 years, the enrollment of international students at Seneca has risen steadily. Globalization has made studying abroad more common and accessible. Many colleges and universities actively recruit students from various countries and offer services tailored to support them, including dedicated international student offices, orientation programs, and cultural support groups. Additionally, the expansion of scholarships and exchange programs has provided more students with opportunities to pursue education outside their home countries.

However, despite these changes, several aspects of the Seneca international student experience have remained consistent. One of the biggest challenges is the cultural adjustment. Moving to a new country often requires adapting to different customs, languages, teaching styles, and social norms. While online resources can provide helpful information, nothing can truly replicate the experience of living in a new culture, which can often be surprising and challenging.

Homesickness is another enduring experience for many international students. Although technology has made it easier to communicate with family, it cannot fully replace the comfort of being physically close to loved ones. Many Seneca international students still find themselves missing home, especially during holidays or significant family events. Learning to cope with these emotions is an imperative part of the international student journey. To help you adjust more quickly to life at Seneca, consider reaching out to the student services department for information about available resources.

Academic expectations remain challenging for international students. They often feel pressure to succeed, both from themselves and their families, who may have invested considerable resources in their education. Adjusting to a different educational system, such as new grading styles, participation requirements, and research methods, takes time and effort. Although Seneca now offers more support services, the responsibility for adapting still largely falls on the students themselves.

In conclusion, the experience of being an international student today is different from what it was thirty years ago, particularly in terms of technology, access to information, and institutional support. These changes have made studying abroad more connected, informed, and accessible. However, some fundamental challenges, such as cultural adjustment, homesickness, and academic pressure, remain largely unchanged. The journey of studying in another country is both challenging and rewarding, just as it was decades ago.

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