

College options in Canada more varied than in U.S.

Most Americans think they have the best post-secondary system in the world, which is understandable when you see how many of their universities are considered among the rankings of the world's top 50.

Being good at delivering a high-quality post-secondary education is one thing—being able to provide opportunities for your citizens to go and take advantage of the education is another.

That is why countries are often ranked on the proportion of their citizens who hold a post-secondary credential—and right now Canada is on top.

Forty-seven per cent of Canadians between the age of 24 and 65 have some kind of higher education credential such as a certificate, diploma or degree. That's compared to 39 per cent in the U.S.

Here is where it really gets interesting.

In Canada we have 83 universities which have the authority to grant baccalaureate degrees and higher.

In the United States there are 2,618 colleges



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and universities with similar authority. This is significantly higher than Canada, yet we have proportionately more citizens with a degree.

Fifty-five per cent of Canadians hold a degree where only 39 per cent of Americans hold that same credential.

Why? According to Canadian research, tuition is much less in Canada in comparison to some of the private colleges and universities in the United States.

Tuition at higher-end American institutions (where the name of the university seems to mean much more than what you studied or your grades), usually runs around \$30,000 per year. In Canada most students pay on average about \$6,000 per year.

Yet the significant reason—and the one I find most compelling—is

that no matter where you live or where you come from, it's much easier to go to college or university in Canada than in the U.S.

According to Canadian researchers there is much less income inequality in Canada and through our public school systems many students are provided with the same academic preparation to enter post-secondary regardless of which side of the tracks they live on.

What happens in the United States is that wealthy students who have poor grades still end up being accepted into college and universities, thereby displacing more academically prepared, poorer students.

Many of these so called rich students attend prestigious prep schools that prepare them to enter private universities.

Rich, academically-challenged students with poor grades will often squeak by the admission process with help from their prep school advisor (or negotiator, as they have been referred to). So being admitted really can boil down to having the ability to pay, rather than

stellar academic scores.

On the other hand, many poor, high-achieving students will lack the financial capacity to get into a private university to begin with and may have trouble affording tuition at a state university.

Even though all universities in the United States are mandated to ensure a proportion of many poor students are able to attend, tuition free, these seats are limited and thereby difficult to secure.

You would probably have to be within the top one per cent in your admission scores to get into a university tuition-free.

So although the United States has prestigious schools with worldwide reputations for research, innovation and learning, it's not that easy to access these resources for many people.

In Canada, we might not have everything they do, but most of us, if willing, do have the opportunity to attend our best schools.

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