



**Sobey School  
of Business**

Saint Mary's University

## **Immigration and Skilled Labour Force in Atlantic Canada: The role of Employers and International Students**

**March 8, 2024**

### **Speaker Bios**

#### **Ather H. Akbari (Chair)**

Dr. Akbari is a labour economist. He has published in the areas of immigration economics, education economics, and health economics. Of late, he studies small area immigration, the labour market performance of religious groups in Canada, and the role of international students in Canadian labour markets. Dr. Akbari chairs the Atlantic Research Group on Economics of Immigration, Aging and Diversity (ARGEIAD). His policy-oriented research has been cited in national and international news media such as The Globe and Mail, Toronto Star, The Economist magazine, The New York Times, Wall Street Journal, etc.

#### **Fernanda Damiani (Panelist)**

Fernanda Damiani is a Senior Program Advisor, responsible for the International Student file, private career colleges and public colleges, with the Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour Department of the Government of New Brunswick. She embarked on her journey as an international student originally from Brazil. Fernanda graduated with a Bachelor of Arts from St. Thomas University, majoring in journalism and communications. After completing her studies, Fernanda transitioned into a career in public service, initially working in the Immigration Branch of the Department, and then moving to the Post-Secondary Education field, where she brings a unique perspective shaped by her experiences as an international student.

#### **Paul Dixon (Moderator)**

Dr. Dixon is a Professor of Operations Management in the Sobey School of Business. He has worked at Saint Mary's for 43 years, in both teaching/research and administrative capacities. He has taught courses in mathematics, statistics, manufacturing and service operations management, project management, and business research methods. His research publications have appeared in Management Science, IIE Transactions, Journal of Operations Management and the International Journal of Production Research. From 1980 to 1991 his research was funded by NSERC. His previous administrative experience includes Associate Vice-President (Enrolment) & Registrar (2005 – 2017); Dean of Commerce (1997-2002); Acting MBA Director (1999-2000); Acting Dean of Commerce (1991-3 and 1996-7); Associate Dean of Commerce (1989-91), and Chairperson Department of Finance and Management Science (1987- 9). He has also served as a director on various boards (Canadian Federation of Business School Deans, Junior Achievement Nova Scotia, ITANS, Aerospace and Defence Industry Human Resource Partnership). He served on the MPHEC Information and Analysis Committee from 2009 to 2015. His current research interests are with respect to changing student demographics, domestically and internationally, new opportunities for student recruitment, programs and services needed to attract and engage those not participating in post-



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secondary education, determinants of student persistence and success.

**Tony Fang (Keynote speaker)**

Dr. Fang is the Stephen Jarislowsky Chair in Economic and Cultural Transformation at Memorial University. He also holds the J. Robert Beyster Faculty Fellowship at Rutgers University and an adjunct Professorship with the University of Toronto and Toronto Metropolitan University. Previously, he served on a World Bank's Expert Advisory Committee on Migration and Development (2014-19), as the President of the Chinese Economists Society (2012-13), and the Domain Leader at CERIS, Ontario Metropolis Centre (2009-12). He was a visiting professor at Harvard University and NBER, the Wharton School of Business, and Chinese University of Hong Kong. In 2017, he was made a Fellow of Royal Society of Arts (FRSA).

He has published in such journals as *Strategic Management Journal*, *Industrial and Labor Relations Review (Cornell)*, *Industrial Relations (Berkeley)*, *British Journal of Industrial Relations (LSE)*, *Relations International Journal of Human Resource Management*, *Journal of World Business*, *International Migration*, *Journal of Immigrant and Refugee Studies*, *Canadian Journal of Economics*, *Canadian Public Policy*, *China Economic Review*, and *Review of Development Economics*. He has received 15 awards from Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) and 5 research grants Employment and Social Development Canada (HRSDC), totaling \$4.5 million. Recently he was invited by the Government of Canada as a member for the Expert Consultation on Private Pensions in Canada,

and the task force for the Review of *Employment. Equity Act*.

**Peter Halpin (Panelist)**

Peter Halpin has served as the Executive Director, Association of Atlantic Universities (AAU) since December 1, 2003. In his capacity as Executive Director, Peter serves as an advocate for the region's university sector with governments and other key stakeholders in higher education, regionally and nationally. Prior to joining the AAU, Peter worked as a public affairs consultant, specializing in issue and opportunity management, marketing communications, news media relations and crisis communications.

**Francesca Southwell (Panelist)**

Francesca Southwell is a third-year international undergraduate student at SMU, pursuing a Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science. She was born in Venezuela and raised in the Caribbean Island of Antigua and Barbuda. She is an elected member of the Board of Directors of the Saint Mary's University Students' Association (SMUSA). She was a member of the board's HR & Governance Committee in the first term. Now in her second term, she is serving as the Election Committee Chair. Francesca always aims to bring fresh perspective on student matters and is motivated to lead with purpose. She has also been a member of the SMU Debate Society, SMU Cheerleading and spent a brief time on the SMU Equestrian Team. Outside of the university, Francesca enjoys painting, conceptualising business ideas, as well as solutions to crises going on around the world.