

The global economic downturn continues to leave its impact on our provincial economy, our post-secondary student body, our universities and on government revenues.

The Council of Alberta University Students (CAUS), which represents undergraduate students at the University of Alberta, the University of Calgary and the University of Lethbridge prepared a case for taking the opportunity to make a series of strategic investments in our institutions to lay the groundwork for our recovery - a recovery fueled by the graduates from world-class universities and a post-secondary system that is accessed by all qualified Albertans.

The 2010 provincial budget, as well as the aftermath of the decline in institutional revenues, has placed that vision in danger. Students face the prospect of coming to a campus in 2010/11 that is less affordable, less accessible, and where the quality of education has suffered.

Our universities and their students represent the best place to put our trust in our future prosperity. By putting education first among the many priorities established by our society we will ensure our province's future is bright.

The core of what our universities do - teaching students and creating knowledge - will not only outlast the current fiscal situation, it will ultimately be the solution to it.

STUDENTS RECOMMEND:

- Limiting tuition increases for all students to CPI for 2010/11 and rejecting market modifier proposals;
- Regulating mandatory non-instructional fees at Alberta institutions that will limit increases and require student referendums for new fees;
- Increase the amount of scholarships, bursaries and grants and reduce student debt;
- Reverse cuts to operating funds to universities;
- Amend the Elections Act to make it easier for students to vote in Alberta elections.

AVERAGE UNDERGRADUATE TUITION IN CANADA

Province	Tuition
Québec	\$2,272
Newfoundland and Labrador	\$2,619
Manitoba	\$3,377
Prince Edward Island	\$4,710
British Columbia	\$4,840
Canadian Average	\$4,917
Saskatchewan	\$5,238
New Brunswick	\$5,479
Alberta	\$5,520
Nova Scotia	\$5,696
Ontario	\$5,951

Keeping the tuition cap for all students

In the 2008 election the Progressive Conservatives promised Albertans that if elected they would “extend the commitment to limit annual tuition increases to the rate of inflation, saving a current four-year undergraduate student more than \$3,800.” That promise is under threat by what institutions label “market modifiers,” a large tuition increase in a specific program based on what the market can bear. These proposals call for dramatic increases in specific programs of more than 60% in some cases, and if approved, would represent a clear breach of that promise.

CAUS has been consistent that such an increase needs to be rejected by the Government of Alberta which should continue to limit all tuition increases to CPI. Allowing tuition to rise during this economic crisis would only exacerbate the barriers that learners and their families face when seeking a degree. Tuition is often the single largest expense in getting an education, and it is certainly the one cost of getting a post-secondary education where the provincial government has direct influence.

Overall, undergraduate tuition in Alberta is well above the national average, with only students in Nova Scotia and Ontario paying more and the average Canadian student paying \$600 less than Albertans. Even looking at individual programs, Albertans tend to pay more, and rising tuition in professional programs will only serve to limit those professions to those who can pay to enter them. Creating a system where learners' choices are constrained by financial means, rather than their ability, passion and work ethic, will ultimately damage Alberta's economy.

Regulating non-instructional fees

Historically, Alberta's research universities have levied relatively low mandatory fees compared to other Canadian institutions and focused those fees on additional value-added services that are beyond the normal campus experience such as campus recreation facilities, universal transit passes and athletic teams. Typically, these fees were only implemented after extensive consultation with students and after a successful student referendum. The economic downturn has now placed that tradition in serious jeopardy as the University of Calgary and University of Alberta are moving to levy mandatory fees that will function as a tuition increase by another name, taking advantage of a legal loophole that CAUS is demanding the government close.

The guidelines offered to institutions state that:

"The following fees are excluded from the TFR [and are considered non-instructional fees]: visa student differential fees charged to international students, application and/or registration fees, student services fees, recreation and athletic, institutional health and/or dental coverage fees, graduation, parchment replacement and/or transcript fees, student card and/or yearbook fees, and/or prior learning assessment fees, invigilation fees (exam supervisor fees) and/or fees to obtain an extension to complete a course...

It is expected that the fees charged for Non-Instructional Activities/Services will not be greater than the amount that is required to cover the direct and indirect costs for providing those activities or services."

Institutions are now looking to exploit the ambiguity in the guidelines, charging a fee for everything imaginable on campus that can be interpreted as non-instructional, such as campus security, air handling, student space, enrolment services, and the list goes on - services that students believe are an essential part of offering an education.

The proposed fees are enormous - if approved, the increase in the cost of getting an education at Alberta universities will be larger than any past tuition increase and will inevitably place a university education out of the reach of many qualified Albertans.

TOTAL COST OF TUITION AND FEE INCREASES

Program	Tuition	Fees	Total
2009/10 U of C Arts	\$5,161	\$657	\$5,818
2010/11 U of C Arts	\$5,238	\$1,059	\$6,298
2009/10 U of A Arts	\$5,101	\$1,113	\$6,214
2010/11 U of A Arts	\$5,178	\$1,771	\$6,948
2009/10 U of C Business	\$5,161	\$657	\$5,818
2010/11 U of C Business	\$7,560	\$1,059	\$8,619
2009/10 U of A Law	\$9,797	\$1,113	\$10,910
2010/11 U of A Law	\$12,797	\$1,771	\$14,568

* 2010/11 figures based on proposals for market modifiers and additional new fees

To contrast that, the revenues from these fees are not planned to expand any services or offer any additional benefit to students equivalent to the increase in costs. Indeed, the fee is intended to go well beyond the list of fees that are considered as non-instructional fees in the guidelines, a list that students believe should be considered as exhaustive.

These fees are being proposed at what must be considered as the last minute and are a cash grab by institutions, taking advantage of a legal loophole and an economic situation to establish a permanent hike to student fees.

CAUS is demanding that the government immediately clarify to institutions that the list of non-instructional fees provided for in the Tuition Fee Policy Guide is in fact exhaustive, and that the fees proposed at the University of Calgary and the University of Alberta are not permitted.

Further, CAUS is asking that the government:

- Place limits and policy regarding non-instructional mandatory fees within regulation;
- Clarify services and activities such as campus security are considered essential to a learning environment and are not to be subject to a non-instructional fee;
- Require new non-instructional fees and increases to existing fees beyond CPI be subject to a campus-wide student referendum.

Improving Student Financial Aid

Alberta's student financial aid system took a major step backwards in the 2010 provincial budget, with a \$54 million cut to scholarships, bursaries and grants that was offset only by \$30 million in additional student debt. Students recognize that the Government of Alberta was faced with difficult choices but it is as important to realize that students have also been hit hard by the economic downturn and are now forced to consider difficult choices of their own, including whether or not they can afford to continue their studies.

Looking past the 2010 budget CAUS believes the Government of Alberta would do well to revisit the commitments made in the Affordability Framework and ensure that the student financial aid system achieves a balance of getting students the resources they need while in school while ensuring they do not graduate with debt that is beyond their ability to manage.

MORE SCHOLARSHIPS AND GRANTS

Cutting millions of dollars in non-refundable aid by the Government of Alberta and simply adding more debt on top of tens of thousands of dollars owed by Alberta's students has been characterized as prudent in order to balance the government's books. But to the thousands of students who received the Alberta Opportunities Bursary, the Northern Student Supplement or the Student Loan Relief Benefit this must seem like callous comfort as they now face the prospect of getting a post-secondary education financed by going further in debt.

Alberta had enjoyed an a national reputation of rewarding excellence through scholarships beyond compare. Alberta had also begun investing heavily in bursaries and grants to encourage participation and completion, figures where Alberta ranks lowest among Canadian provinces. Reversing these programs places any progress made since 2004 in jeopardy and needs to be seen as an area for re-investment moving forward.

KEEPING STUDENT DEBT MANAGEABLE

Imagine graduating with \$40,000 of student debt, or \$60,000 - that's the scenario thousands of Albertans face when looking to get an education, and it is a prospect that is too daunting for many that choose instead to either leave their studies before completing or never starting a degree in the first place.

The 2010 provincial budget removed a large amount of non-repayable assistance and replaced it with debt. While CAUS agrees with the government that it is important to ensure that individual awards are not lowered as a result of cuts to post-secondary funding, grants and debt reduction strategies must make up an important part of our student financial aid system.

DEBT CONCERN BY CANADIAN STUDENTS

Concern on being able to repay debt	
Concerned or very concerned	57%
Neutral	12%
Unconcerned	31%

Concern over the amount of time to repay debt	
Concerned or very concerned	66%
Neutral	10%
Unconcerned	24%

* from the 2010 Canada Student Survey conducted by Canada Education Project

Research targeting current students in our universities show a majority of students are concerned with their ability to repay their debt and the amount of time it will take to do so.

CAUS believes that student debt in Alberta is already too high. It is a barrier to students choosing to enter the system and a burden to graduates who face a daunting bill at the start of their careers. The measures that remain in place to keep debt low - the Loan Completion Payment and the Repayment Assistance Program - are vital tools but need to be complimented with additional tools and the commitment to these programs has to be maintained for the long term.

TOTAL COSTS OF STUDENT DEBT

Loan	Per month	Interest	Total cost
\$50,000	\$567.57	\$14,703	\$64,703
\$40,000	\$454.06	\$11,763	\$51,763
\$30,000	\$340.54	\$8,882	\$38,822
\$25,000	\$283.79	\$7,352	\$32,352
\$20,000	\$227.03	\$5,881	\$25,881
\$15,000	\$170.27	\$4,411	\$19,411

* assumes a 3% prime rate and the maximum repayment period using HRSDC loan calculator

THE NEED FOR ELECTORAL REFORM FOR ALBERTA STUDENTS COMPARED TO OTHER JURISDICTIONS

	BC	AB	SK	MB	ON	QC	NS	NB	PEI	NF	CAN
Allows students to choose their ordinary residence	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES
Have advance polls at post-secondary institutions	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO						
Permit advance voting for all electoral divisions at polls	YES	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO	NO
Select returning officers earlier in the electoral process	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	YES	NO	NO	YES	YES	YES
Have election officials work with students' unions	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO

Funding our public universities

Alberta's post-secondary institutions are all looking at funding shortfalls from declining public funding, and at a minimum Alberta needs to fund our institutions' operating budgets in 2011 to restore operating funding cuts from this year thereby ensuring the new Campus Alberta grant works for learners, communities and institutions as well as it does for government.

The impact of these cuts are being felt on campus and in the classroom, and CAUS believes they are damaging our reputation and quality of our education.

FUNDING CUTS AT ALBERTA'S RESEARCH UNIVERSITIES

Institution	Cut
University of Calgary	\$17.5 M
University of Alberta	\$10.0 M
University of Lethbridge	\$2.7 M
TOTAL	\$30.2 M

Making it easier for students to vote

Voter turnout at Alberta elections reached a record low in the 2008 election, with only 40.6% of eligible Albertans turning, and the Leger Marketing survey conducted by Elections Alberta following the vote showed younger Albertans being one of the demographic groups least likely to turn out. The same survey showed that students faced significant barriers to voting based on residency requirements and gaining physical access to the polls on election day.

Unfortunately the democratic system itself is partially to blame for this poor turnout, particularly among post-secondary students. There are numerous barriers for students to get through in order to vote.

Fortunately, there are some clear and easy changes that the Government of Alberta and Elections Alberta can do before the next provincial election to make it easier for post-secondary students to vote.

- Allow students to choose between their home during studies and their family home to be their ordinary residence;
- Establish advance voting stations for multiple constituencies on post-secondary campuses;
- Permit advance voting for all electoral divisions at any advance poll;
- Select returning officers earlier in the electoral process; and
- Have Elections Alberta work with students' unions to encourage voter turnout among students.

You can download our paper outlining these five recommendations and how to improve voter turnout among post-secondary students at our website, www.caus.net.

Who is CAUS?

CAUS represents the interests of over 70,000 university students across Alberta. We represent undergraduate students from the University of Alberta, the University of Calgary and the University of Lethbridge to the public, government and other post-secondary education stakeholders.

#2, 9908 - 109 Street NW
 Edmonton, Alberta T5K 1H5
 780-297-4531 / duncan@caus.net
<http://www.caus.net>