



Sustaining Alberta's Economic Advantage Through Smart Investments in Post-Secondary Education

Student priorities for 2010/11 - July 2010

Alberta continues to feel the impact of the global economic downturn, but recent signs show that Canada and our province are leading the way out of the recession and will be poised to be leaders - if we make the right investments and choices.

Alberta's universities and the students and graduates from those institutions are at the core of that economic recovery. Today's university students will be tomorrow's skilled workforce, underwriting Alberta's prosperity by filling newly created positions. Today's university students continue to provide the innovation needed for tomorrow's entrepreneurs.

The Council of Alberta University Students (CAUS) has set five priorities for the 2010/11 year that reflect that need to invest in post-secondary education and protect the gains made for students in previous years.

STUDENTS RECOMMEND:

- Regulating non-instructional mandatory fees;
- Putting the Tuition Fee Policy into legislation;
- Increasing base operating grants to institutions;
- Increasing grants, bursaries and scholarships; and
- Making elections more accessible to students.

Who We Are

CAUS represents the over 70,000 undergraduate students at the University of Alberta, University of Calgary and University of Lethbridge to the government, the public and to other stakeholders.

We are elected student leaders from all three institutions, who run in elections and govern our individual students' unions in order to improve the services we provide students. We are also advocates on behalf of our students, to university administrations, the government and the greater community.

Each of our executive members was elected on a election platform that speaks to need for investment in our institutions. This year's priorities reflect those mandates.

How We Set Priorities

Each year our members gather at the beginning of our terms to talk about what priorities we have for the year, based on our platforms and what is going on at our individual campuses and within the greater Alberta post-secondary system.

This year there was a common thread that each of our institutions and many of our students were facing difficult financial situations - situations that put at risk the investments made from 2004 to today.

The glimmer of hope was that our province's fiscal situation is improving, and that this year would represent the perfect time to make Alberta's post-secondary education the centrepiece of our plan to return to provincial prosperity by sustainably investing our province's human capital.

Our Priorities for 2010/11

Regulating Non-Instructional Mandatory Fees

Students want a regulation put in place limiting fee increases at CPI unless the proposal passes a referendum of students. The regulation as a whole should give students more of a say in which fees are levied at their institution.

At the University of Calgary and University of Alberta, new fees have been instituted starting this September that are specifically targeted to make up shortfalls from other sources of revenue. These new fees are huge, \$450 a year at the University of Calgary and \$290 a year at the University of Alberta.

Putting the Tuition Fee Policy into legislation

Students want the government to solidify the tuition fee policy by putting it back into the Post-Secondary Learning Act. This would require future changes to the policy to be approved by the Legislature.

When the present policy was put into place in 2006 it was taken out of legislation on the premise the flexibility would be better for students. That has not turned out to be the case, as students in some programs will see 70% increases in 2011.

Increasing base operating grants to institutions

Increasing enrolments and costs at our institutions coupled with an increasingly competitive environment for faculty recruitment means increased pressures on limited resources on our campuses. That is why it came as shock when the Government of Alberta did not increase the base operating grant and severely limited or eliminated other operating funds for our institutions.

Students believe that post-secondary education is the smartest investment Alberta can make in its future prosperity and we are therefore asking for funding increases for our institutions.

Increasing the Campus Alberta Grant for operating costs at our institutions represents the best way to ensure Alberta continues to create a sustained economic advantage and the most direct method to increase the quality of education received at Alberta's universities. Alberta's economy will reap the benefits of a stronger, better-educated workforce resulting from these investments in our universities.

Increasing grants, bursaries and scholarships

A number of cuts have been made to our student financial aid system, reducing the available grants, bursaries, debt relief and scholarships. Many students require assistance in pursuing post-secondary education and taking on massive debt is not always the solutions for students, or for an economy built on entrepreneurship. This is especially true among under-represented groups, such as students from northern Alberta, which is where cuts were made. Funding needs to be restored to needs-based grants and bursaries.

Alberta's levels of student debt are already too high, and the recent changes to the student financial aid system are only going to make the situation worse. Many Albertans are already choosing not to go on to university or college for financial reasons and restoring the funding to our grants, bursaries and scholarships is an important step in ensuring our post-secondary system is accessible by all with the qualifications and desire. In the end, we all lose when talented students cannot attend university because of financial hardship.

Making elections more accessible to students

Voter turnout in Alberta's elections is abysmal, and it is even worse among young people in Alberta. Sadly, it is not as easy as it should be to cast a ballot if you are attending one of Alberta's universities and that lack of access is often cited by students as the reason for not voting.

Minor changes are needed to the Elections Act which would increase the opportunity and accessibility of voting for post-secondary students. We are asking for the government to allow students to choose their ordinary residence during studies, establish advance voting stations for multiple constituencies on post-secondary campuses, permit advance voting for all electoral districts at any returning office, select returning officers earlier in the electoral process and to have Elections Alberta work with Students Unions to increase communications with students and encourage voter turnout.

How You Can Help

CAUS has already begun advocating on these priorities to government, but we need your help to make these priorities a reality for our public post-secondary system.

Other interested stakeholders - institutions, faculty, support staff, K-12 stakeholders, and other student groups - need to join in the call to protect access to and the quality of our public institutions.

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