

CAUS

Council of Alberta University Students

International Student Affordability, Employment, and Housing in Alberta

Preventing Student Exploitation in Post-Secondary Education

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Executive Summary

International undergraduates studying in Alberta are subject to high-cost tuition, limited employment opportunities, and precarious housing. These students are enmeshed within an intricate policy web linking federal, provincial, and institutional jurisdictions, leading to a diffusion of responsibility among policy-makers. This leaves these undergraduates without serious action taken to address the issues they face. Alberta has seen large growth in the number of international students attending universities in the province, but that influx has been exploited rather than nourished.



This research will focus on three core issue areas for international undergraduates in Alberta: affordability, employment, and housing. At the end of this report a number of policy recommendations will be suggested, including:

- Immediately freeze tuition for international undergraduate students and regulate any future increases to the Consumer Price Index;
- Restore provincial post-secondary education funding to 1992-1993 levels and adjust tuition to the Consumer Price Index each year thereafter;
- Bring international differential fees under provincial regulation, and tie future increase to the Consumer Price Index;
- Open access for international students to financial assistance programs;
- Strengthen communications between universities and prospective students on housing options and accurate cost of living estimates;
- Create a provincial strategy between employers, universities, and the province to hire more international undergraduates in meaningful positions to keep them living in Alberta for years to come;
- Review the current International Graduate Category ineligible occupations list under the Alberta Immigrant Nominee Program to open more pathways to careers and citizenship.

Background on International Students in Canada

Recent Growth

Canada has been rapidly expanding the number of international students that it welcomes each year. In 2007, there were 180,000 international students studying here, and in nine years that number increased to 415,000.¹ In 2014, the federal government launched the International Education Strategy that set targets of attracting 450,000 international students to Canada, which would “see international student expenditures in Canada rise to over \$16.1 billion”.² The internationalization of Canadian higher education is a major economic initiative above anything else. Recent government research indicated that international students studying in Canada generate \$11 billion in revenue annually.³

A working definition of internationalization comes from de Wit et al building on Knight’s work who define it as “the intentional process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions and delivery of post-secondary education, in order to enhance the quality of education and research

for all students and staff, and to make a meaningful contribution to society.”⁴

Internationalization is a key pillar of institutional planning across Canada. A 2014 survey of Canadian universities shows that 95% of respondents identify internationalization as part of their strategic plans, and 82% identify it as one of their “top five priorities.”⁵ However, the basis of internationalizing Canada’s post-secondary sector on the premise of drumming-up revenue for cash-strapped universities reflects a significant change from the past. This drift is one from the socio-cultural and academic values that served as the grounding for internationalizing efforts after the Second World War, into “a complex, chaotic and unpredictable edubusiness”.⁶

Critical scholars argue that this drift “can pose challenges for universities regarding the need to balance fiscal pressures with their social and educational responsibilities to students.”⁷ The meaningful contributions that internationalization brings to Canadian universities are at risk when international students are framed as revenue-boosters for schools that see their public funding decrease with each passing year.

Affordability and Growing Reliance on International Tuition

International students do not have the same protections from unregulated fee increases as domestic students do. They are subject to tuition that is now three to four times higher than domestic rates, as well as differential modifiers set by each institution that are used to account for the lack of Canadian government subsidies of international student tuition. Alberta and Ontario were the first two provinces to introduce differential fees for international students in 1977, using the

Average degree program tuition increases compared to CPI, 2006-2017



Source: Statistics Canada, The Daily (2006-2017), Consumer Price Index, historical summary (1997-2016)

argument that “Canadian taxpayers were not willing to subsidize the rising numbers of foreign students whose families paid no taxes in Canada.”⁸

RBC Economics estimates that the average international student spends \$31,700 annually on “tuition, books, accommodation, meals, transportation and discretionary spending,”⁹ totalling expenses to nearly \$127,000 during the course of a four-year degree. That estimate may even be conservative. A study published in 2017 surveyed a group of international students who paid over \$40,000 per year in tuition and living expenses at a Western Canadian university.¹⁰ These participants also held the view that universities use international students “for revenue generation.”

Canadian institutions often defend increases in international tuition by pointing to the higher tuition rates in other developed countries. However, RBC notes that the relative affordability of learning at Canadian institutions is one of “factors [that] will bolster Canada’s position as a top learning destination despite intense global competition for talent.”¹¹ By increasing tuition rates to match global peers, a significant competitive advantage for Canadian universities may be lost in the process.

There is a very strong relationship between decreasing public funds for universities and ever-increasing international tuition rates. Provincial funding as well as municipal grants, across Canada, have decreased as a share of university funding by 3% since 2000 while total revenues from tuition have increased by 5%.¹² While federal funds are not as large a proportion of university revenue as they have been historically, they have been relatively static across Canada. Between 2000/01 and 2015/16 the provincial share of total revenues to universities across Canada dropped by 3.27%, and the share of tuition increased by 9.07%.¹³ The shift away from public financing of universities places students in line to fill the gap, and with little protections from increases, international students will be relied upon to bolster university budgets.

Emerging Issues

Canada is credited with being an attractive destination to study due to its “improved affordability (as a result of currency exchange movement) and improved access to student visas”¹⁴ yet part of the Canadian advantage may be at risk due to unmitigated annual increases in tuition fees. China provides the most international students to Canada, followed by India, South Korea, France, and the United States. These five states comprise 60% of all international students studying in Canada.¹⁵

The areas from which Canada primarily draws students are regions that are experiencing an “income shift.”¹⁶ The largest amount of students come from Asia-Pacific, where a growing middle class is gaining the ability to send their children abroad to gain English proficiency, increase their employability, build social capital, and potentially study in a host nation with fast-tracked immigration laws.¹⁷

A major setback in retaining international graduates in Canada was the combining of the Canada Experience Class program into the Express Entry pool, which gave international students who sought permanent residency within Canada a unique pool to compete for citizenship.

Since the beginning of 2015, international graduates must now compete with most other applicants for citizenship, and with a points-based immigration system, these graduates are at a distinct disadvantage. Without a comparable amount of education and professional experience that other economic migrants bring in the Express Entry pool, international graduates are less likely to be selected from the pool. Recent graduates from Canadian universities were in a far worse position for immigration under Express Entry before recent reforms, and key issues remain.

Along with the changes made in 2015, the federal government amended the system by making LMIA, or Labour Market Impact Assessments, worth less points, from 600 to 200, and added more points to degrees completed in Canada. LMIA are employer-sponsored documents that can secure employment for international graduates or other foreign workers, but the process to receive one often drives employers to bring potential employees through “oversubscribed” provincial nomination programs instead.¹⁸ Now that LMIA are worth fewer points, they are no longer a critical need for international graduates. The intent behind these changes was seemingly to take pressure off of the system because “they’re so

swamped in the LMIA office right now that processing times have tripled.”¹⁹

Provincial nomination in its current form does not present an advantageous alternative for either employers or international graduates. In 2015, only 698 of a total of 12,000 Express Entry invitations were sent to provincial nominees.²⁰ In 2016, this number expanded to comprise over 8,000 new arrivals, yet only 2 provincial nominees decided to land in Alberta in 2016.²¹ It is difficult to determine which of these provincial nominees are post-graduate international students, or other economic migrants.

While there have been some relaxations in federal regulations surrounding international student work in Canada, there are fraud-based justifications used to keep this progress incremental. In June 2014 the federal government amended the Immigrant and Refugee Protection Act. The regulatory tweaks were explained through language that held the integrity of Canada’s immigration system as the primary reason for incremental change.

In 2006 the Pacific Division of the Canadian Border Services Agency (CBSA) examined the ongoing issue of student visa-based immigration fraud, and concluded that the practice “poses risks to the immigration program’s integrity, and to public safety and national security”.²² Fear of increased fraud activity seems to be a key determinant of whether or not relaxation of international student immigration policies will happen at the federal level, and while potential security risks need to be considered seriously, they should not serve as an impediment to policy choices that will allow more newcomers to begin their lives in Canada.



Atlantic Canada

There are more than 14,000 international students studying across Atlantic Canada, and a recent survey of over 100 graduates indicates that 77% of respondents want to ultimately live and work in the region due to its low cost of living, high quality of life, and other factors.²³ Despite a tripling in immigration over the past 15 years, nearly half of those immigrants leave the region within five years.²⁴ While international graduates in the region are more likely to stay in the region, only 52% are employed within their field of study.²⁵

Atlantic universities are struggling with maintaining domestic enrolment: over the past decade, enrolment in humanities programs across the Maritimes has declined 45%, and overall enrolment has now been dropping for four consecutive years.²⁶ In 2015-16, domestic student enrolment in the Maritime provinces decreased by 2.3%, and international student enrolment increased by 2.6%.²⁷ If current trends of declining domestic enrolment continue, it’s likely that international students will be covering for the loss in revenue.



Ontario

Ontario has the most international students in Canada, and has seen 88.5% growth in their international student population since 2011.²⁸ This increase has been met with a doubling of revenue from international tuition, moving from \$620 million in 2011-12 to \$1.28 billion just four years later.²⁹

Ontario has displayed the symptoms of reliance on international tuition to fund their operations. While Laurentian University only has 600 international students, their tuition fees provide 20% of the school’s total revenue, and 8% of their total operating budget.³⁰ Fanshawe College, one of Canada’s largest technical colleges, has seen its international population jump from 12% to nearly 25% in two years, with those new students paying more than four times the amount of tuition fees than their domestic contemporaries.³¹

Nearly 20% of all students at the University of Toronto are international students, and over 82% of them are undergraduates.³² International undergraduate students attending the U of T can expect to pay approximately 3.3x to 7.3x more in tuition than domestic students.³³ A motivating factor for increasing international student tuition in Ontario can be found in the fact that “total operating grant provided by the province to Ontario universities has effectively been frozen”³⁴ leaving these universities to explore their revenue generation options.

The Council of Ontario Universities has discovered that government grants as a percentage of university operating revenue have decreased from 46% in 2011-12 to 40% in 2015-16.³⁵ When public funds make up less of the available funds universities have to operate, students inevitably bear the burden of maintaining stable funding.

Another cause driving universities to increase revenue from international tuition is declining domestic enrolment. Domestic enrolment rates have not kept pace with those of international students, and institutions in communities with fewer domestic applicants will likely decide to bring in more international students and then proceed to increase their tuition rates³⁶.



Quebec

Quebec has the third-highest amount of international students in Canada behind Ontario and British Columbia, and the province uses specific tools to grant international students a provincial nomination. Cities in Quebec have been financing programs to help international students make the transition to living in Canada after they graduate. Montreal had a \$1.3 million infusion into the I Love Montreal program that hopes to see a “tripling [of] the number of international students who stay in the region after graduation.”³⁷

Quebec faces a unique set of challenges that is not evident in other jurisdictions. The Institut de Quebec has highlighted three major factors holding back international graduates from staying in the province: French language skills, knowledge of the province’s immigration process, and access to employment.³⁸



British Columbia

In 2014 international students spent \$2.3 billion in British Columbia, which had the effect of supporting 25,500 jobs in the province.³⁹ These numbers have been expanding, and BC is now home to over 130,000 international students who spend an estimated \$3.5 billion every year.⁴⁰ British Columbia has the highest proportion of international students to domestic students in Canada, where nearly one in five university students have come from abroad. These students also pay \$21,486 per year in tuition, nearly four times the domestic average.⁴¹

Critics are pointing to budget cuts to public universities as an inciting factor for the continually increasing cost of education for B.C.’s international students, with the Confederation of University Faculty Associations of B.C. calling the increases “a financial strategy for universities to increase income.”⁴²

In 2015 the University of British Columbia instituted a 37% increase in international student tuition that was rolled out over the course of three years.⁴³ This amounts to an increase of \$12,189 for BA students, and \$16,835 for an applied sciences degree. These increases place many of their undergraduate programs at higher prices than their global competitors.⁴⁴

While a defence of having higher international tuition is that these students require extra supports that domestic students do not need, the \$107.9 million UBC gained in revenue from these increases has reportedly gone towards “excellence in research, teaching and learning and the student experience,” while a much smaller portion went towards direct supports for international students.⁴⁵

International students, like their domestic counterparts, have also been affected by Vancouver’s rental crisis. 20% of B.C.’s international students live in the city which boasts “one of the worst in the world” rental vacancy rates of 0.6% in 2017.⁴⁶

The Condition of International Undergraduates in Alberta

Post-secondary institutions in Alberta are internationalizing at an unprecedented rate: there are now more international students in the province than ever before, comprising nearly seven percent of all post-secondary students.⁴⁷ The number of international students studying in the province has been steadily increasing since 2004-05, and from 2011 to 2016, international student enrolment at Alberta’s universities increased by 40%.⁴⁸ There are over 18,000 international undergraduates studying in the province, comprising a total of 6.9% of Full Load Equivalent (FLE) students. The University of Alberta has more international students than any other institution in the province, with over 6,600 students, or 15% of their student body.⁴⁹

In 2014 it was estimated that international students in Alberta spend \$567.7 million annually and supported 7,173 jobs. Their economic activity indirectly creates a total output of \$1.2 billion in Alberta, while the total output created by international student activity in Canada surpassed \$15 billion in 2014.⁵⁰ As of 2015, 34.6% of international students in

Alberta are studying in applied or bachelor's degree programs. International students in Alberta are more likely than domestic students to be enrolled in master or doctoral programs.⁵¹

On average international undergraduate tuition in Alberta is 3.6x more expensive than that of domestic students,⁵² and without cost controls international students may look elsewhere once the advantage of relative affordability is gone. That being said, averages don't tell the whole story, with most visa students in Alberta being enrolled in higher cost programs. In 2014-15, 40.2% were enrolled in physical, natural, and applied sciences, and a higher

percentage of visa students studied business than domestic students (16.7% vs. 13.6%).⁵³

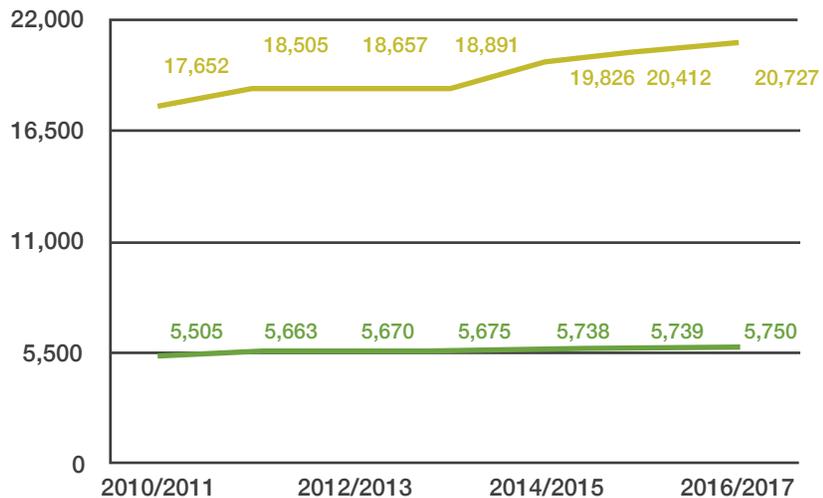
International students are an important demographic within the province. Alberta leads the provinces in population growth and two-thirds of that growth comes from immigration. Alberta has one of the lowest post-secondary participation rates in Canada (a result of economic prosperity and early work force entry), with only 38% of high school students transitioning to post-secondary after they graduate.⁵⁴ Welcoming more international students also serves to counteract low post-secondary participation rates.

Affordability

Recent scholarship tells us that “financial crises are driving profit-seeking policies of internationalization in higher education”, which places international students at risk of becoming “cash cows” for institutions in troublesome economic times.⁵⁵ The average international undergraduate student in Alberta is now paying over \$3,075 more in tuition per year than they did in 2010/11, an increase of over 17% that exceeds common inflationary measures.⁵⁶

International and Canadian tuition in Alberta, 2010 to present

- Canadian
- International



Source: Statistics Canada Table 477-0077 Canadian and international tuition fees by level of study.

Recent tuition increases have made Alberta a standout among the provinces. While Mount Royal University in Calgary seeks to increase the amount of international students studying there from its current 1.9% to 5% by 2024-25,⁵⁷ it has increased the cost of taking five courses per year from \$16,942 in 2016-17 to \$21,000 in 2017-18, an increase of 15.8% that amounts to \$4,057.⁵⁸ MacEwan University in Edmonton is on a similar trajectory. In December 2016, the Board of Governors approved a 15% tuition increase for international students to be implemented over the ensuing two years. This particular increase was justified by comments from the Provost and Vice President Academic who claimed that lower-cost institutions are not attractive to international students, and that “in some cultures, price and quality are linked very strongly.”⁵⁹ Artificially separating the link between price and quality for international students as they decide which school to attend is a tactic to create support for future tuition increases, and therefore brings internationalizing Canadian universities into comparable cost with institutions outside the country.

International students at the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology saw their tuition rise by 24% in 2017 and the response of the institution is a telling reminder of why regulation is needed. NAIT spokesperson justified the increase by pointing out “international tuition hadn’t increased in three years.”⁶⁰ Without increases that are predictable and linked to inflation, institutions are free to abruptly change the calculations of international students and their families, which places an undue financial burden on students.

The University of Alberta has taken a different approach. It has created a formula separate from traditional modes of measuring inflation to justify annual increases: API, or the Academic Price Index. In 2016 this measure allowed for an increase that doubled that year’s CPI of 1.5% by “reflect[ing] costs specifically driving the university’s budget pressures”⁶¹ including salaries and bonuses, utilities and maintenance, and other specific academic costs. Before the University of Alberta installed a \$4,000 “sticker price” to their international graduate tuition, the Provost justified the price by linking higher costs to higher prestige institutions. In this argument, the university cannot

“look like a low-cost, bargain-basement operation”⁶² or else they risk turning away prospective international students with money to spend.

Many domestic students can adapt to higher tuition rates by applying for scholarships, grants, student loans, or opening lines of credit. International students face barriers from most of these options. They “do not qualify for many domestic scholarships or for provincial student loans, and without a credit history they often cannot obtain bank loans or lines of credit.”⁶³

It is critical to keep the voices of international students within conversations regarding post-secondary financing. The University of Alberta’s student newspaper, *The Gateway*, conducted an interview series with international students in 2016-17. One petroleum-engineering student estimated that by the end of his degree his family would have to spend \$200,000 for him to complete it.⁶⁴ Another University of Alberta student from Tunisia was without housing for one week, needed to take fewer courses while working a part-time job, and regretted not studying in Australia.⁶⁵

Policy decisions do not just impact the bottom line of a university or a government, but the everyday lives of future Albertans or friends abroad as well. Regardless of whether international students choose to live in the province after graduation or not, they may become “future allies, collaborators, or business partners with Canadian academics, governments, or industry.”⁶⁶ Treating international students as a disposable resource presents a threat to the prestigious reputation of Albertan universities, future diplomatic efforts, or potential foreign partnerships.

Without stable and viable public funding institutions will argue that it is reasonable for universities in Alberta to increase costs to students to make up for revenue shortfalls. International students exist within an unregulated policy area that turns them into a much-needed revenue generation tool. Without regulation, these short-sighted tuition increases may price out students, create an over-reliance on international tuition, and ultimately allows for an unsustainable funding model for public universities.

Housing

International undergraduates face unique challenges when securing housing for their studies. While on-campus housing presents an opportunity to interact daily with domestic students, become active in campus life, and practice English language skills, the high-cost of renting and unregulated rent increases force many to look elsewhere, and 40% of international students in a recent survey described this search as “a big problem.”⁶⁷

The first housing experience international students will most likely have in Canada is temporary housing, beginning their studies by living in hotels or hostels.⁶⁸ There are clear difficulties in finding suitable housing while abroad, and that process provides space for more institutional support. While on-campus housing features direct supports and community programming that can be a great benefit to the international student experience, off-campus housing needs to be equally attended to. Of the 1.7 million post-secondary students in Canada, 80% of them live off-campus.⁶⁹ In the instances where universities cultivate off-campus housing registries, they have not conducted audits of the listings to ensure their suitability for incoming international students, which has the effect of “making it difficult for international students to rent from their home country.”⁷⁰

A 2016 study conducted at a university in Western Canada highlights the communication gap that is adversely affecting international students when they arrive. While universities have many outreach efforts that are effective to recruit students, there are clear areas that are lacking attention, including tenants’ rights, resources to settle housing disputes, and the realistic cost of living projections.⁷¹ Of the 75 students surveyed, more than half reported having housing issues within the past year, and 45 knew around five other students who had similar accommodation issues. 32 of the students surveyed spent over 30% of their income on their accommodations, and 15 reported experiencing overcrowding or substandard housing.⁷²

Universities need to more accurately communicate the cost of living to incoming international students, and steps must be taken to educate newcomers on tenancy rights. By focusing myopically on international recruitment and some orientation programming, institutions are opening the door to serious housing issues that have serious impacts on the quality of life for new students.

Employment

In 2014, Alberta had the second-highest employment rate for immigrants behind Saskatchewan at 66%. Since the economic slump this advantage has been lost. Employment opportunities for international students are constrained by federal policy, but there is significant policy room to create substantial and relevant positions that will keep international graduates in Alberta. Through employment during their degree, graduates can continue to build social connections in the province that 51% wish to call home, and to have increased financial security during their studies.

Employment opportunities both on and off campus are limited for international students. Federal legislation prevents part-time international students, students who study so-called “general interest” programs such as open studies and continuing education, as well as students studying English as a second language, from working while studying in Canada.⁷³ There are two general areas of work that international students may undertake while studying in Alberta: off-campus and on-campus. As of June 1, 2014, with the change in federal policy, neither of them requires permits as long as a student is enrolled full-time at a designated learning institution. This means that international students not engaged in full-time studies face barriers to employment that negatively impact their financial solvency, as well as their ability to continue their studies in Alberta.

Once international undergraduates have completed their degrees, they may apply through the Alberta Immigrant Nominee Program (AINP) to begin their careers here. The AINP, a system of provincial nomination for newcomers, has a Post-Graduate Worker category within the Strategic Recruitment Stream that requires applicants to have a job offer from positions that fall into the National Occupational Classification (NOC) levels of O, A, B, or C after completing their degrees in Alberta. This system excludes positions that many graduates may find themselves working in immediately upon completing their degree, which are labelled class D jobs. These include cashiers, sales positions, kitchen staff, cleaners, trades helpers and labourers, and labourers in textiles, manufacturing, and

processing.⁷⁴ Applicants working in class D jobs may apply through the Semi-Skilled Worker category, but only select class D jobs are accepted and this category does not recognize an applicant’s status as a graduate from an Albertan post-secondary institution. Allowing post-graduate international students to settle their immigration status without discrimination based on occupation type can bring in more newcomers who already have experienced life in Alberta and are prepared to work in many skilled occupations, but have not received a job offer immediately upon graduation.

A recent survey at a university in the north-eastern United States has shown that “most students worked in physically demanding work in the university dining facility,” and that few of the students surveyed were working in a position related to their field of study.⁷⁵ International students need to compete with domestic students in order to secure employment, and with limited options on and off-campus this search can be frustrating. Universities provide a logical centre for international undergraduate employment, as they provide a setting for work in their academic field while also engaging with domestic students and faculty.

Alberta has the “sole and non-transferable ability” to nominate immigrants that they believe will be of economic benefit to the province,⁷⁶ therefore the provincial government is well within its rights to examine why many post-graduate workers face the barrier of working in class D jobs, which represent a broad coalition of sectors that benefit from the work of post-graduate workers.

Analysis and Recommendations

University of Alberta President David Turpin revealed the sad truth behind the continued exploitation of international students in Alberta. In discussing the provincial government's extension of the domestic tuition freeze and the lack of back-funding his university would receive to recoup from those losses, he said "The public policy to freeze tuition, that's fine, but there's cost and ... someone has to pay for it." ⁷⁷ The people who are paying for it are clearly international students. One month after making that statement, the University of Alberta proposed raising international student tuition to amounts that would bring in \$2.4 million annually after experiencing their estimated \$3.9 million loss from a lack of backfill funding. ⁷⁸

The largest drivers of increasing international student tuition are a combination of economic downturn and decreasing public funding for universities, specifically provincial funding. While the initial gutting of federal funding from public universities in the 1990s by the Chretien government has led to ballooning tuition rates, the federal share of funding for universities in Canada has remained static since 2000.

Between 1995-96 and 1997-98, massive rollbacks to provincial transfers of 24% resulted in a state of play wherein universities need to cover their budgetary shortfalls by becoming increasingly reliant on increasing student tuition, especially the tuition of international students. ⁷⁹ These cutbacks were not done in a vacuum. Guo and Guo tell us that "the principle driving force of internationalization has shifted from political to economic" ⁸⁰ and that universities across the developed world have used the increasing numbers of international students primarily as a source of revenue generation.

With the evidence presented throughout this research in consideration, a number of recommendations both large and small follow:

1

Immediately freeze tuition for international undergraduate students and regulate any future increases to the Consumer Price Index.

If the current course is maintained, international students in Alberta should expect to pay exponentially higher tuition before any government action is taken. Recent increases in tuition will not be the last, as university budgets require continually higher revenues. Placing a freeze on international differential fees and working with students and other stakeholders to bring international tuition to a more affordable level across the province is necessary to prevent the future exploitation of these students.

2

Restore provincial post-secondary education funding to 1992-1993 levels and adjusting tuition to the Consumer Price Index each year thereafter.

This specific year is critical because it represents the year before defunding policies hit Albertan post-secondary institutions with a loss of “core government funding . . . by 24 per cent between 1993 and 2003.”⁸¹ This change in framing of how public universities ought to be funded has placed an undue onus on students, particularly foreign students, to replace the funds that governments withdrew from these institutions. Reshaping public universities as sites that both provide and are powered by the public good is critical to sustainable and equitable post-secondary financing.

3

Bring international differential fees under provincial regulation, and tie future increases to the Consumer Price Index.

It is evident that universities will, in order to recoup lost revenues in a financial downturn, increase revenues wherever possible. Drastic increases across multiple Albertan post-secondary institutions have placed international undergraduates on the hook for providing financial stability, and that is an unsustainable funding scheme. In order to give long-term certainty for students and their families, international differential fees must be regulated so that these students are not at risk of becoming ‘cash cows’ again.

4

Open access for international students to financial assistance programs.

International students do not have the same level of access to financial assistance as domestic students do, and like any other student they are likely to encounter financial hardship during their studies. Without a solid credit history in Canada, and by being blocked from many of the scholarships and loans Canadian students can receive, international students can be faced with very difficult financial circumstances that have been created by policy choices. The provincial government should work to open access for international student to financial assistance to provide funding in times of crisis so they may continue their studies with financial security.

5

Strengthen communications between universities and prospective students on housing options, tenancy rights, and accurate cost of living estimates.

Making all possible efforts to inform international students about the cost of living in Alberta before they travel here will likely serve to mitigate some financial preparedness issues. Other points that ought to be communicated are the layout of the communities that students will be living in, transit options, weather preparedness for Alberta's winters, and other local necessities. As well, it is incumbent on universities to work with incoming international students to educate them on their rights as tenants in Alberta to ensure that their stay is not marked by preventable tenancy disputes that may taint their educational experience. More steps need to be taken to provide accurate information on housing registries curated by universities so that international students can choose to live in decent housing before they arrive in Alberta.



6

Create a provincial strategy between employers, universities, and the province to hire more international undergraduates in meaningful positions to keep them living in Alberta for years to come.

This is a two-pronged recommendation: by creating more positions for international undergraduates on the campuses they study on, the educational experience they receive in Alberta will be enriched, and the chances of them staying in the province because of the bonds they create will be enhanced. By fostering discussion between student leaders, government, universities, and industry it is possible to improve the living and working conditions of international students in Alberta. The second prong is providing more resources to employers to educate them on the unique immigration needs that international students face, including LMIA's and navigating the AINP.

7

Review the current International Graduate Category ineligible occupations list under the Alberta Immigrant Nominee Program to open more pathways to careers and citizenship.

The barring of international graduates working in class D occupations from the Post-Graduate Worker Category is an anachronism that doesn't recognize the nature of work for recent graduates in Alberta. If the most important aspect of this AINP stream is the fact that these newcomers have graduated from Albertan post-secondary, then the occupation they currently find themselves in ought not determine their immigration status for the years to come. Giving these post-graduate workers more pathways towards settling in Alberta will benefit the economy as well as our society.

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