



ENGAGING ALBERTA:

OPPORTUNITIES FOR DIVERSE,
SUSTAINABLE POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

ADVOCACY DOCUMENT 2017

RECOMMENDATIONS

Tuition

- Rolling back tuition to 1990/1991 levels and increasing by Consumer Price Index (CPI) for each subsequent year, up to 2017.
- Tying all future tuition increases to CPI.
- Placing tuition regulation back into the Post-Secondary Learning Act.
- Reducing the base rate of international student tuition, and tie any increases to the CPI.

Market Modifiers

- Striking Section 5.1 of the Tuition and Fees Regulation to eliminate the possibility of any future market modifiers.

Mandatory Non-Instructional Fees

- Placing limits, and developing policy, regarding Mandatory Non-Instructional Fees (MNIFs) within regulation.
- Clarifying that services and activities deemed essential, such as campus security and grounds keeping, shall not be covered on a cost-recovery basis by an MNIF.
- Approval of new MNIFs, and increases to existing MNIFs beyond CPI, be subject to a successful student referendum, alongside consultation with students no less than the consultation required for tuition increases.
- Mandating that each institution break down their 'basket of goods' MNIFs to offer students an itemized list of where those funds are being allocated.

Student Financial Aid

- Reallocating of all post-secondary tax credits into up-front non-repayable grants for low- and middle-income students based on a sliding scale.
- Increasing investment into Student Financial Aid through scholarships, bursaries, and grants.
- Increasing the repayment threshold to \$30, 000 in light of the increases to minimum wage.

Governance

- Increasing student representation throughout all administrative and academic committees participating in bicameral governance. These committees should be open to all students, incorporating valuable and diverse experience.

Campus Mental Health

- Providing ongoing support for student mental health in the form of per-student funding, based on FLE numbers, to all campus-based publicly funded Alberta universities. This funding should be allocated at the per-FLE levels that the University of Lethbridge saw in 2013.

Student Employment

- Reviewing and expanding the application process criteria to better match the skills students require for various employment opportunities with the skills they have acquired in their studies.
- Coordinate student placement to maximize the degree relevant experience.
- Introduce a hybrid-model application that would allow students to search and apply for specific jobs and the employers to approach candidates they feel meet their employment needs.
- Extend the Summer Temporary Employment Program (STEP) into a year-round program.
- Rename the Summer Temporary Employment Program (STEP) to the Student Temporary Employment Program.
- Revise the employer subsidy to reflect the increases in minimum wage.

TUITION

DID YOU KNOW ?

International post-secondary was introduced throughout Canada starting in 1976, typically as a way for universities and government to offset significant budget deficits and shrinking revenue ³.

a) Domestic Student Tuition

Since 1990, post-secondary students have seen unprecedented increases to tuition levels, with a nearly 350% increase from then to now ^{1 2}. This speaks to several points. First, tuition has risen higher than what anyone in preceding generations had to pay, and it has created an unfair burden on any person who wishes to attain higher education today. Second, it shows that there were not adequate regulatory supports in place to prevent such dramatic increases from occurring, and the current lack of regulations continues to allow for such increases. Third, it demonstrates the unpredictable increases that students have had to face over the past two decades. This has created massive financial obstacles to post-secondary, and has likely meant that some prospective and in-study students have had to reconsider their plans to obtain a degree.

As the Government of Alberta is currently undergoing a Tuition and Fee Review in the form of an External Stakeholder Advisory Group, CAUS calls to make tuition affordable and predictable. CAUS would like to see current tuition return to 1990/1991 levels and increase by Consumer Price Index (CPI) for each year thereafter. Additionally, CAUS calls upon the Government to place tuition regulation back into the Post-Secondary Learning Act to better regulate its increases, and for the Government to regulate that all future tuition increases be capped by CPI. These measures will ensure post-secondary education remains affordable, accessible, and predictable.

CAUS
recommends

- Rolling back tuition to 1990/1991 levels and increasing by Consumer Price Index (CPI) for each subsequent year, up to 2017.
- Tying all future tuition increases to CPI.
- Placing tuition regulation back into the Post-Secondary Learning Act.

b) International Student Tuition

With the changing economy affecting the budgetary considerations of all public institutions in Alberta, CAUS would like to continue to remind lawmakers and administrators that international students are not an appropriate way to balance budgets or meet financial requirements. By keeping international tuition extremely high, Canadian governments and policy makers are limiting our world-class post-secondary education system to only the most upper of classes and increasing the exclusivity of advanced education, opposing the principles of affordability and accessibility.

CAUS would like to see international tuition regulated in the same manner of domestic tuition, specifically tying any increase to CPI. While we realize that the Alberta tax payer should not be required to cover the entire cost of an international student, by providing predictability, affordability, and access through regulation we open the door to international students; therefore, allowing them to be terrific ambassadors for Alberta's post-secondary system, and eventual participants in Alberta's skilled economy.

CAUS
recommends

Reducing the base rate of international student tuition, and tie any increases to the Consumer Price Index (CPI).

DID YOU KNOW ?

International post-secondary students bring in an estimated \$8 billion in expenditures to the Canadian economy, and the jobs created to service these students' tops 86,000 across Canada ⁴.

From 1999-2000 to 2014 - 2015, domestic student enrolment increased by 48.5% while international increased by 278% ⁵.

MARKET MODIFIERS

In 2010, the Government of Alberta changed the *Public Post-Secondary Institutions' Tuition Fees Regulation* to allow for market modifications to certain program tuition. The rationale was that modifications could correct tuition discrepancies between programs in Alberta compared to the tuition of similar programs across Canada. Institutional boards found this adjustment necessary due to Alberta's past tuition freezes, including the freeze in 2005/06. Institutional boards thought the tuition freezes prompted a need to adjust the current levels of particular programs' tuition before all further increases were restricted to inflation.

At the time, students were assured that the approved modifiers would be a one-time correction; however Section 5.1, the enabling clause, remains in the regulation now. CAUS firmly believes market modifiers, and any other form of differential tuition, are a serious threat to affordability and accessibility of a post-secondary education.

The current regulation causes programs at the same institution to have widely varying tuition costs, and students potentially seeing unexpected tuition increases during their degree. These market modifiers deter some students from choosing their program of preference, and instead leave them to choose based on the relative costs of each program, with the negative impact on affordability that market modifiers impose on students.

CAUS
recommends

Striking Section 5.1 of the Tuition and Fees Regulation to eliminate the possibility of any future market modifiers.

MANDATORY NON- INSTRUCTIONAL FEES

The Public Post-Secondary Institutions' Tuition Fees Regulation defines 'tuition fees' as a fee for courses of a ministry-approved program or for materials that facilitate those courses' instruction. Mandatory Non-Instructional Fees (MNIFs) cover any other service provided by an institution, such as a registration fee. Students are concerned that these unclear definitions allow institutions too much leeway to introduce new costs, based on previously approved MNIFs.

For example, in 2010 the University of Alberta implemented the Common Student Space, Sustainability and Security Fee, costing students an additional \$290 per year. This MNIF was meant to cover budgetary shortfalls on existing non-instructional services, and did not support new services. Other institutions experienced similar fee implementations, leaving students concerned that they are being charged twice for institutional operating costs, through tuition and through MNIFs.

Students are concerned that the lack of provincial regulation on MNIFs means that institutions are being allowed to cover budgetary shortfalls by charging these fees to students. CAUS would like to see increased regulations around how MNIFs can be charged, and what they can be used for, along with the exclusion of essential campus services from their scope. Additionally, a successful student referendum should be necessary for the creation of any MNIF. These measures will ensure that students are not being unfairly used to balance the institutions' budgets.

CAUS recommends

- Placing limits, and developing policy, regarding Mandatory Non-Instructional Fees (MNIFs) within regulation.
- Clarifying that services and activities deemed essential, such as campus security and grounds keeping, shall not be covered on a cost-recovery basis by an MNIF.
- Approval of new MNIFs, and increases to existing MNIFs beyond CPI, be subject to a successful student referendum, alongside consultation with students no less than the consultation required for tuition increases.
- Mandating that each institution break down their 'basket of goods' MNIFs to offer students an itemized list of where those funds are being allocated.

STUDENT FINANCIAL AID

For years, the cost of education for post-secondary students in Alberta has continued to rise. The Government of Alberta began making significant cuts to non-repayable financial aid in the form of reduced debt relief, grants, and bursaries starting in 2010. A lack of affordability and likelihood of debt is a significant barrier to post-secondary education, deterring many Albertans from pursuing higher education or completing their programs.

The Government of Alberta currently holds \$200.6 million of foregone revenue to account for post-secondary tax credits, providing aid to students after they have already incurred expenses for their education ⁶. This is an indirect measure and does not address the accessibility of post-secondary. Upfront grants reduce barriers to access by supporting students entering higher education so they are able to cover a portion of their costs. As such, CAUS would like to see the entirety of the tax credit money moved into up-front, non-repayable grants for low- and middle-income students based on a sliding scale. This measure will increase accessibility to post-secondary education.

In addition, CAUS advocates for increased investment in targeted awards, grants and scholarships to support students throughout post-secondary. It is also crucial that the Government of Alberta raise the Repayment Assistance Program threshold for student loans to at least \$30,000. This increase would reflect increases to minimum wage, as \$30,000 would be the gross amount earned by an individual in Alberta working 40-hour week, for 50 weeks of the year.

DID YOU KNOW ?

Undergraduate borrowers in Alberta leave their studies with an average of about \$23,000 in student debt ⁷.

Students who leave post-secondary with the highest levels of debt are also those in demographics who have historically faced the greatest barriers to entry, such as those coming from rural areas, students with disabilities, as well as students coming from lower socioeconomic backgrounds ⁸.

CAUS recommends

- Reallocating of all post-secondary tax credits into up-front non-repayable grants for low- and middle-income students based on a sliding scale.
- Increasing investment into Student Financial Aid through scholarships, bursaries, and grants.
- Increasing the repayment threshold to \$30,000 in light of the increases to minimum wage.

GOVERNANCE

Student representation throughout university governance in Alberta remains inconsistent. Currently, both MacEwan University and Mount Royal University lack the student representation in high-level decision making that their counterparts hold. For example, the University of Alberta, University of Calgary, and University of Lethbridge currently have three students sitting on their respective Board of Governors, while Mount Royal and MacEwan have only one.

With students being the largest stakeholders within their institutions, it is only fair for them to have equitable representation within decision-making bodies, such as the Board of Governors and its related committees. This process should be centralized through the institution's respective students' associations and unions in appointing said representatives.

CAUS
recommends

Increasing student representation throughout all administrative and academic committees participating in bicameral governance. These committees should be open to all students, incorporating valuable and diverse experience.

CAMPUS MENTAL HEALTH

In January 2013, \$3 million per year over three years was allocated to the University of Alberta, the University of Calgary, and the University of Lethbridge.

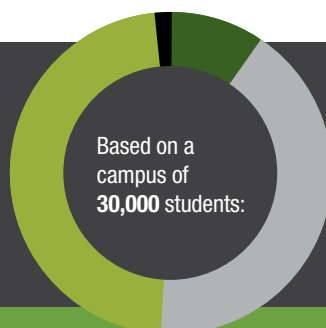
MacEwan University and Mount Royal University were granted funding in 2014, but at a significantly lower rate of \$250,000 per year over three years. With an expiry date of June 30th 2016, CAUS delegates fought hard for a continuation of the mental health grant so that our institutions' progress would not be reversed in the absence of funding.

Mental health funding has been an integral part of the post-secondary landscape in Alberta for the past four years. CAUS would like to see a more sustainable, predictable funding model that will maintain the services that were created, as well as allow long-term planning. CAUS proposes that funding for on-campus mental health supports be distributed to our universities through a per-student funding model at the same rate the University of Lethbridge received in 2013 – approximately \$148 per FLE. The University of Lethbridge was able to hire nine new positions and cut wait times for appointments nearly in half. By extending this funding model to all universities in Alberta, students will have access to exceptional mental health supports.

CAUS recommends

Providing ongoing support for student mental health in the form of per-student funding, based on FLE numbers, to all campus-based publicly funded Alberta universities. This funding should be allocated at the per-FLE levels that the University of Lethbridge saw in 2013.

In 2016, the National College Health Assessment Survey stated (in the last twelve months) ⁹:



65% 19,500 felt lonely

2.1% 630 attempted suicide

13.1% 3,930 seriously considered suicide

57.5% 17,250 students felt hopeless

STUDENT EMPLOYMENT

DID YOU KNOW ?

Youth unemployment rate is 13.5% in January 2017, up from 12.3% the previous year ¹².

71.6% of youth working part time say they do so because they are going to school ¹³.

Youth (15-24) with a university degree make 38% less than a non-youth Albertan with the same level of education ¹⁴.

Alberta is facing changing demographic of learners. From new high school graduates to returning learners affected by the slowed economy, the student experience is no longer a traditional one.

The Summer Temporary Employment Program (STEP) provided over 2,700 students with jobs during the summer of 2016 and has been a welcome addition to student employment in Alberta ¹⁰. However, many students are experiencing a new reality that does not allow for them to be able to work exclusively through the summer months. Expanding STEP into a year-wide program, and renaming it to Student Temporary Employment Program, would be instrumental in providing students the opportunity to support themselves outside of the summer months.

In addition to working throughout university, recent graduates face significant challenges in finding gainful employment due to a perceived 'skills gap' between their university experience and what employers believe is required in the workplace. 76.5% of youth are employed in service-producing industries, which often do not reflect their area of study or future career goals ¹¹. In order to bridge the gap between students and employers, student placements should be co-ordinated with employers related to their field of study to maximize their experience.

CAUS recommends

- Reviewing and expanding the application process criteria to better match the skills students require for various employment opportunities with the skills they have acquired in their studies.
- Coordinate student placement to maximize the degree relevant experience.
- Introduce a hybrid-model application that would allow students to search and apply for specific jobs and the employers to approach candidates they feel meet their employment needs.
- Extend the Summer Temporary Employment Program (STEP) into a year-round program.
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- ⁶. Government of Alberta. *Budget 2016: The Alberta Jobs Plan*. Ministry of Finance, Edmonton: President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance, 2016.
- ⁷. Berger, Joseph. "Student Debt in Canada." *The Price of Knowledge: Access and Student Finance in Canada*. 2009. https://library.carleton.ca/sites/default/files/find/data/surveys/pdf_files/Price-of-Knowledge_4th-edition_2009-11_chapter-7_en.pdf (accessed November 25, 2016).
- ⁸. Ibid.
- ⁹. American College Health Association. *American College Health Association-National College Health Assessment II: Alberta Canada Reference Group Executive Summary Spring 2016*. Hanover, MD: American College Health Association, 2016.
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- ¹². Ibid.
- ¹³. Ibid.
- ¹⁴. Ibid.

MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS



Students' Association of MacEwan University

Carley Casebeer, CAUS Vice-Chair and VP External

Danika McConnell, President

780-633-3763 / savpexternal@macewan.ca



Students' Association of Mount Royal University

Dexter Bruneau, CAUS Chair and VP External

Shifrah Gadamsetti, President

403-440-6404 / vpexternal@samru.ca



University of Alberta Students' Union

Fahim Rahman, President

Mike Sandare, VP External

780-492-4241 / vp.external@su.ualberta.ca



University of Calgary Students' Union

Stephan Guscott, President

Tristan Bray, VP External

403-220-3910 / suvpext@ucalgary.ca



University of Lethbridge Students' Union

Cam Howey, President

Cody Ciona, VP External

402-329-2780 / su.external@uleth.ca



CAUS Office

Joshua McKeown, Interim Executive Director

780-297-4531 / josh@caus.net