

PLACING STUDENTS FIRST

**Recommendations for Ontario's next government
by the Canadian Federation of Students–Ontario**

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General inquiries regarding this document should be directed to:

Canadian Federation of Students–Ontario

180 Bloor Street West, Suite 900

Toronto, Ontario M5S 2V6

Tel 416.925.3825

Fax 416.925.6774

Email federation@cfsontario.ca

WWW cfsontario.ca

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INTRODUCTION

The province is at a crucial point in history where more Ontarians than ever are seeking access to the post-secondary education system. As average wages have stagnated over the past decade and thousands of jobs were lost during the recession, Ontarians are looking to expand their opportunities in the new economy by seeking education and upgrading their skills. During such a time, the Government of Ontario needs to develop a bold vision for post-secondary education that makes college and university education affordable for students, strengthens the sector's capacity for research and teaching and helps position the province in the knowledge-based economy.

As the 2011 provincial election approaches, students are listening closely to what all of the political parties are promising for the sector. After years of tuition fee increases under the *Reaching Higher* funding framework, Ontario is now the most expensive province in Canada in which to study. Instead of providing substantial financial relief, government policy has allowed students to accumulate record-high debt and forced students to work longer hours while studying. This generation of students is being asked to study more, work more and pay more than ever before.

Ontario students are calling for a newly elected government to be a strong voice for education and to invest in a system that has a widespread benefit to Ontario's economy and society. Citizens across the province share the same view, as consistently reflected in province-wide polls. The most recent poll conducted by the Canadian Federation of Students, Canadian Association of University Teachers and Harris-Decima in Spring 2011 reveals that 90 per cent of Ontarians believe that tuition fees should be lowered or frozen at current levels. Every four out of five Ontarians think that university and college students today have to borrow too much money to pay for their education, while 59 per cent of Ontarians would pay more in taxes for the government to invest more into universities and colleges.

This document outlines students' priorities and recommendations for the post-secondary education sector. There is no greater opportunity than now for any potential governing party to step up and establish these recommendations as central components of its post-secondary education policy if it truly wants to put students first.

90%
*of Ontarians think
tuition fees should
be reduced or frozen.*

79%
*of Ontarians think that
university and college
students have to borrow
too much money to pay
for their education.*

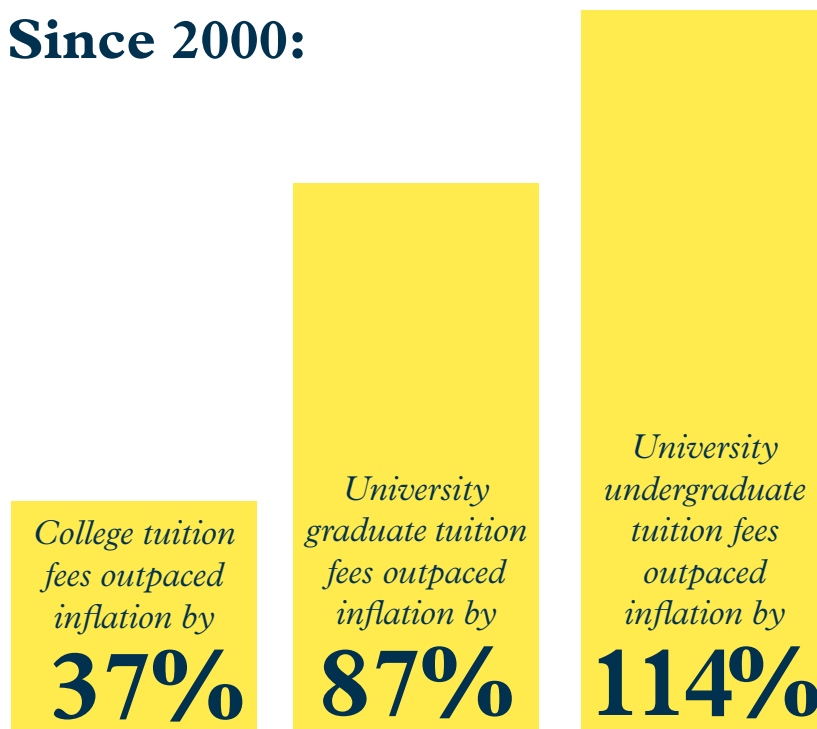
59%
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AFFORDABILITY

Ontarians overwhelmingly rank affordability as the most important issue in the post-secondary education sector. Students are forced to work longer hours outside the classroom and spend less time on their studies, while parents are finding it more difficult to help support their children through school, often making tough sacrifices to make it work. Tuition fees have remained the most significant barrier to accessing post-secondary education in the province. Since the *Reaching Higher* framework was introduced, fees have outpaced inflation by 370 per cent. As a result, students in Ontario have been forced to take on record-high debt. The average student with combined government and private loans graduates with \$37,000 in debt after a four-year degree. If the provincial government continues on the current track, middle- and low-income people will be saddled with even larger debt, limiting their economic mobility and preventing the economy from making a strong recovery.

The newly elected government in October has a real opportunity to make college and university more affordable for students and their families. A vital step is to immediately reduce tuition fees to 2007 levels and implement a tuition fee freeze thereafter. A significant portion of the freeze can be funded by redirecting funds from back-end grants like the Student Access Guarantee and Textbook and Technology Grant, as well as provincial education tax credits. Improvements to the Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP) should also be made to help students who need provincial loans to finance their education. This includes extending the payment-free and interest-free period for OSAP loans, reducing the maximum allowable OSAP debt, extending loan eligibility to part-time students and prohibiting institutions from charging deferral fees or interest on payments for students who receive OSAP loans to pay their tuition fees. In order to improve access to Aboriginal students in Ontario, the province should provide funding to First Nations Band Councils to compensate for the proportional loss in funding from the Post-Secondary Student Support Program since the tuition fee freeze was lifted in 2005.

Since 2000:



Immediately reduce tuition fees to 2007 levels and implement a province-wide tuition fee freeze. Redirect funding from the Student Access Guarantee, Textbook and Technology Grant, and provincial tax credits toward the freeze.

Cost: \$426 million, with \$236 million redirected from the Student Access Guarantee, Textbook and Technology Grant, and provincial tax credits.

Extend the payment-free and interest-free period for OSAP loans to one year after graduation.

Cost: \$6.2 million

Reduce the maximum allowable OSAP debt from \$29,200 to \$25,000.

Cost: To be determined

Extend OSAP loan eligibility to part-time students and full-time students who drop to part-time status.

Cost: \$1 million

Prohibit institutions from charging deferral fees or interest on payments for students who receive OSAP loans to pay their tuition fees.

Cost: No cost

Provide a refund to First Nations Band Councils to reimburse the funds that tuition fee increases since 2005 have eroded from the Post-Secondary Student Support Program.

Cost: \$7 million

Eliminate one-year program differential fees.

Cost: To be determined

FUNDING AND QUALITY

For Ontario's colleges and universities to provide high quality education, while maintaining affordability for students and meeting the increased demands of a changing economy, institutions must have stable and enhanced funding. In real dollars, Ontario spends less on post-secondary education per student than two decades ago and continues to provide the lowest per-student funding in the country, 24 per cent below the national average. Despite substantial funding from the *Reaching Higher* framework, there still exists a significant funding gap. The chronic underfunding of the system has resulted in students bearing more of the cost of post-secondary education, cuts to university and college programs and departments, increased reliance on sessional and part-time faculty, and larger class sizes.

The Government of Ontario's recent \$300 million injection into the sector for capital funding was a welcome investment for students, matching the recommendation made in the *2011 Submission to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs* by the Canadian Federation of Students-Ontario. To build on this recent investment, a newly elected government should take a system-wide approach and institute a multi-year funding framework that will increase per-student funding to two per cent above the national average. This multi-year framework would include hiring more tenure-track faculty in order to improve Ontario's student-to-faculty ratio, which is 37 per cent higher than the national average and well above institutional averages in the United States. As a way to redirect money within the system, university and college sector salaries should be capped – similar to proposals made with regard to the province's health care system.

Increase per-student funding to two per cent above the national average.

Cost: \$2.2 billion

Institute a multi-year funding framework for post-secondary education.

Cost: No cost

Improve the student-faculty ratio by hiring more tenure-track faculty.

Cost: \$120 million per year over four years to hire 6,000 new faculty

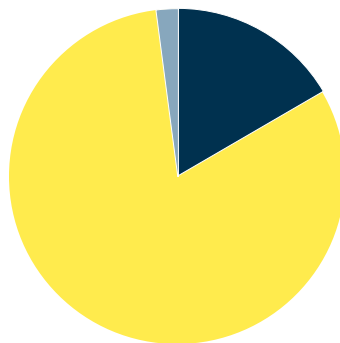
Cap university sector salaries at \$250,000 and college sector salaries at \$200,000.

Cost: Savings of \$15 million per year

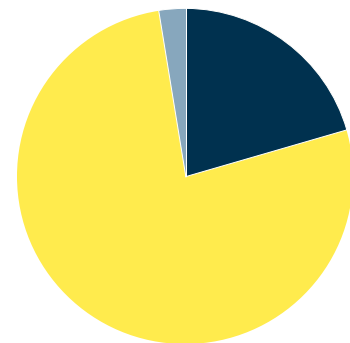
Tuition and government funding as a percentage of university operating revenue in Ontario

Canadian Association of University Teachers, 2008.

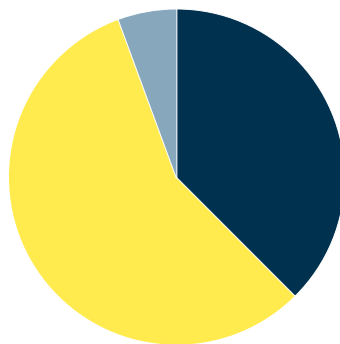
- Government funding
- Tuition fees
- Other private sources of funding



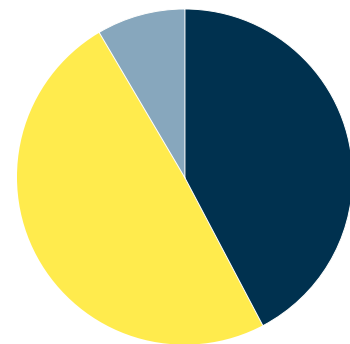
1978



1988



1998



2008

RESEARCH

The Government of Ontario has recognized the need to remain competitive in the knowledge-based economy and has taken steps to expand the research capacities of post-secondary institutions. However, graduate students in Ontario currently pay the highest tuition fees in the country and Ontario institutions are plagued by low completion rates in graduate programs. Ontario is one of the only provinces where graduate students generally do not pay continuing fees – reduced fees during the research and thesis writing stages of the degree – which reflect the reduced institutional resources that students utilize when finishing their studies independently. McMaster University is currently the only exception, which has continuing fees for PhD students.

With the increased influence of private industry over publicly-funded research, both faculty and students face additional pressure when the integrity of their research has been threatened. In the cases where there is inappropriate influence or research misconduct, students and faculty who want to speak out against such activities are not protected from retaliation from sponsors or university administrators. In general, the lagging support for graduate studies has meant that graduate students continue to have diminished access to research and funding opportunities, less time to devote to conducting high-quality research, less protection and fewer mentorship opportunities.

To bolster college and universities' capacity for research, investments by a newly elected government should be made to address the high cost of graduate programs. The reinstatement of continuing fees – which many graduate students paid until the early 1990s – would be a bold step, along with an increase in the number of Ontario Graduate Scholarships. To protect student researchers, the new round of Multi-Year Accountability Agreements should require institutions to establish whistleblower protection and safe disclosure policies. As a way to provide more funding directly to researchers, the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO) should be eliminated and the funds re-directed to the Ministry of Research and Innovation's Early Researcher Awards (ERA) and Post-Doctoral Fellowship (PDF) programs.

Reimplement continuing fees for graduate students.

Cost: \$57 million for a 25% reduction in continuing fees

Introduce 1,500 new Ontario Graduate Scholarships.

Cost: \$15 million

Require that institutions establish whistleblower protection and safe disclosure policies as part of Multi-Year Accountability Agreements.

Cost: No cost

Eliminate the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO) and redirect the funding to the Ministry of Research and Innovation's Early Researcher Awards (ERA) and Post-Doctoral Fellowship (PDF) programs.

Cost: No additional cost to redirect funding toward a 50 per cent increase in both the ERA and PDF programs.

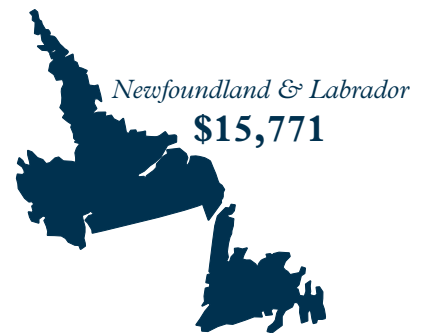
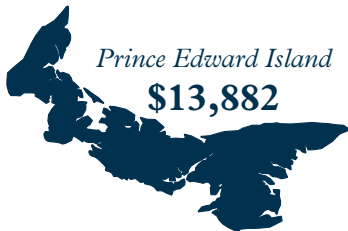
Number of Ontario Graduate Scholarships as a Proportion of Graduate Students in Ontario

Ministry of Colleges, Training and Universities, 2011

There are over 60,000 graduate students in Ontario, but only 3,000 Ontario Graduate Scholarships available.

Comparing provincial government transfers to institutions per FTE student

Canadian Association of University Teachers, 2010



STUDENT RIGHTS AND PROTECTION

Students lack important protections that can be addressed by various government ministries. The following recommendations reflect students' concerns about student rights and protection, public accountability and increased access to post-secondary education in the province.

STUDENTS' UNIONS RIGHT TO ORGANIZE

There currently exists nothing to formally protect the existence of students' unions aside from loose protection in the *Corporations Act* and case law. This includes protecting access to their membership fees and autonomy. This ambiguity has created a great deal of tension between some students' unions and college and university administrations. For example, in fall 2010, the administration at Carleton University arbitrarily withheld the membership fees of the Carleton University Students' Association and the Graduate Students' Association at Carleton. As a result, both students' unions had to lay off dozens of staff and cancel events and services on which their members rely. Students' union protection in the form of legislation successfully calmed relationships between students' unions and their administrations in British Columbia. In March 2011, *Bill 184: An Act respecting student associations at post-secondary institutions in Ontario*, was introduced as a Private Members' Bill and died as a result of the prorogation of Ontario's Legislative Assembly.

Reintroduce Bill 184: An Act respecting student associations at post-secondary institutions in Ontario, co-served by MPPs Yasir Naqvi and Rosario Marchese to enshrine students' union's right to exist in legislation.

Cost: \$0

STUDENT RESIDENCES

Tens of thousands of students live on campus for a portion of their post-secondary studies. This places university and college administrators in the role of landlord. Students who live in residence often face policies and procedures that would normally be forbidden under the Residential Tenancies Act. Students need protection from eviction and issues of privacy, as well as safeguards for when facilities fall into disrepair. The newly-elected government should draft a student "Bill of Rights" that is tailored for the unique relationship that characterizes college and university administrations as landlords.

Develop a "Bill of Rights" for students living in on-campus housing and who are currently exempt from the Residential Tenancies Act.

Cost: \$0

HEALTH CARE FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Currently, international students must pay private health insurance fees that amount to over \$800 per year and can pay more than \$3,000 in mandatory hospital fees if they have dependents. This health insurance plan provides very limited health coverage that is not accepted universally by physicians, hospitals and clinics in Ontario and international students can be denied emergency hospital services if they cannot afford to pay for them. International students make valuable contributions to research and the learning environment in Ontario's colleges and universities. They also contribute more than \$2 billion to the Ontario economy each year through spending on school, basic living expenses and other activities. Ontario should remain competitive with other provinces that cover international students through the public system, like Saskatchewan and Newfoundland and Labrador.

Extend the Ontario Health Insurance Plan (OHIP) to international students

Cost: \$54 million

THE OMBUDSMAN OF ONTARIO

On May 5, a Private Member's Bill was amended that would extend the oversight of the Ontario Ombudsman into the MUSH sector – municipalities, universities, school boards and hospitals. The Ombudsman currently has the power to investigate complaints related to Ontario's colleges and the Ontario Student Assistance Program. The bill introduced in May would have enabled the Ontario Ombudsman to investigate complaints they receive annually related to universities. In the Ombudsman's 2011 annual report, dozens of complaints related to universities were made – despite falling outside the Ombudsman's jurisdiction. In absence of this mechanism, students have no way to ensure that they are treated fairly. Including universities would ensure greater transparency and accountability.

Extend the purview of the Ontario Ombudsman to include university oversight.

Cost: \$0

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Travelling to and from campus poses a significant barrier to students. This is more severe when transit fares are increased and students must find ways to pay more to get to school. Unfortunately, Ontario does not have a strategy to ensure that public transit remains affordable and accessible to the province's students. Ontario can learn from other provinces like British Columbia, where the government has implemented a province-wide, student discount U-Pass program that was developed in partnership with local governments, transit providers, post-secondary institutions and students. A strategy could help bring coherence to the province's public transit systems, encourage hundreds of thousands to reduce emissions by relying less on cars and enhance affordability of post-secondary education.

Develop a strategy that provides funding to make public transit more accessible for post-secondary education students

Cost: Policy dependant

Canadian Federation of Students–Ontario

With more than 300,000 members at 37 students' unions and in all regions of the province, the Canadian Federation of Students is the voice of post-secondary students in Ontario. Founded in 1981, the Federation represents students at the college, undergraduate and graduate levels, including full and part-time students.

Algoma University Students' Union

Brock University Graduate Students' Association

Carleton University Students' Association

Carleton University Graduate Students' Association

Association étudiante de La Cité collégiale

Student Association of George Brown College

Glendon College Student Union

University of Guelph Central Student Association

University of Guelph Graduate Students' Association

Lakehead University Student Union

Laurentian Association of Mature and Part-time Students

Laurentian University Graduate Students' Association

Laurentian University Students' General Association

Association des étudiantes et étudiants francophones de l'Université Laurentienne

McMaster University Graduate Students' Association

Nipissing University Student Union

Ontario College of Art and Design Student Union

Student Federation of the University of Ottawa

Graduate Students' Association des étudiant(e)s diplômé(e)s de l'Université d'Ottawa

Queen's University Society of Graduate and Professional Students

Ryerson Students' Union

Continuing Education Students' Association of Ryerson

Saint Paul University Students' Association

University of Toronto at Scarborough Campus Students' Union

University of Toronto Graduate Students' Union

University of Toronto Students' Union

University of Toronto at Mississauga Students' Union

Association of Part-Time Undergraduate Students of the University of Toronto

Trent Central Student Association

Trent University Graduate Student Association

University of Western Ontario Society of Graduate Students

Wilfrid Laurier University Graduate Students' Association

University of Windsor Students' Alliance

University of Windsor Graduate Students' Society

University of Windsor Organization of Part-time University Students

York Federation of Students

York University Graduate Students' Association



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