

FAIRNESS *for* INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

International Students in Ontario

Fact Sheet | August 2015

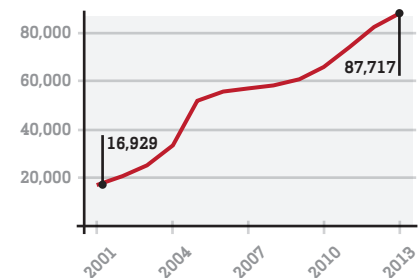
Recognizing International Students

Over the past 15 years, the provincial government has placed a greater importance on attracting international students to college and university campuses. Between 2000 and 2012, the number of international students at Ontario colleges increased five-fold, while the number of international students at Ontario universities has tripled.¹ In the 2011 Ontario budget, the provincial government set a goal of expanding international student enrolment by 50 per cent above the 82,500 international students studying in the province at the time.² The Government of Ontario has prioritized international students as a key group of potential immigrants to meet the goals of building an educated, prosperous and skilled society. This is why, in 2013, international students constituted

75 per cent of the Ontario provincial nominees immigration program.³ Indeed, immigrants make up 30 per cent of Ontario's labour force and the push to attract more international students reflects the province's desire to attract a highly skilled and educated labour force.⁴

International students are an integral part of college and university campuses in Ontario. They make our institutions more diverse and make valuable contributions to the academic community. International students have a large economic impact – they contribute almost \$3 billion annually to the province's economy through paying tuition fees, spending on basic living expenses and consumer spending.⁵ Such spending results in

Number of International Students Studying in Ontario¹



an annual tax contribution of a quarter of a billion dollars and has contributed to the creation of 30,000 jobs in Ontario's labour market.⁶ Despite these significant contributions, international students have to contend with various challenges accessing post-secondary education, universal health care and the process to immigrate to Canada.

Tuition Fees

While students in Ontario are faced with the highest tuition fees in the country, the financial burden for international students studying in the province is even greater. Tuition fees for undergraduate and graduate international students are triple and double, respectively \$23,868 and \$18,192, compared to tuition fees for undergraduate and graduate domestic students, respectively \$7,747 and \$8,149.⁷ For some technical and professional programs, international students are expected to pay over \$40,000 in tuition fees per year.

The difference in tuition fees for domestic and international students

is referred to as differential fees. Increases in tuition fees are the result of successive provincial governments divesting resources from public post-secondary education. One outcome has been that institutions are turning to differential fees as a strategy to generate revenue. International students are seen as guaranteed and low risk revenue sources for institutions and government because they are perceived as having less direct political influence in Canada.

The provincial government regulates tuition fees in Ontario. In March 2013, the government introduced a tuition fee framework that would allow tuition

fees for domestic students to increase by three to five per cent annually. Unfortunately, international tuition fees are not regulated under this framework. International tuition fees have been unregulated since 1996 when the provincial government discontinued institutional funding for international students.⁸ Institutions are free to raise international tuition fees as they see fit, in some cases, leading to fee increases of up to 50 per cent in a single year.⁹

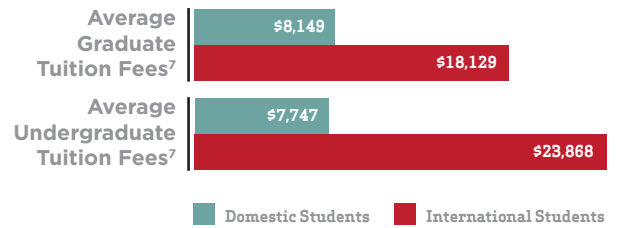
Differential Fees: Unfair and Short-Sighted

High tuition fees have put college or university education out of reach for many international students who want to study in Ontario, particularly those from low- and middle-income families. In many cases, international tuition fees alone at Ontario universities are more than the average annual wage of families in particular countries. Continued tuition fee increases have created a system where only the wealthiest who can afford to pay such high fees and a limited number of low- and middle-income students who are able to receive financial assistance can pursue post-secondary education in the province. In many cases, international students must rely on large private loans to finance their college or university program since they are ineligible for most forms of government financial assistance. International students also have more difficulty planning their finances from one year to the next due to currency fluctuations and the uncertainty of how

high their fees will increase each year.

Differential tuition fees endanger the intellectual, cultural and social benefits that international students contribute to campuses. With skyrocketing tuition fees, the province is sending the message that institutions only want the wealthiest students, as opposed to the best and brightest students and researchers who want to study and live in Ontario. International undergraduate students in Ontario pay more compared to all other provinces, with the exception of Prince Edward Island. At the graduate level, international students in Ontario pay the highest – almost four times more than what international students pay in Saskatchewan and six times more than those in Newfoundland and Labrador.¹⁰

Until recently, the negative impact of high tuition fees on international



students was further compounded by federal restrictions on working while studying in Canada. The Canadian Federation of Students successfully lobbied for the removal of such restrictions, including the introduction of the Student Work Permit program in 2007 that allows international students to apply for off-campus work permits. In 2014, the federal government announced further measures to give international students attending public post-secondary institutions more flexibility to work off-campus, including removing the requirement for the Student Work Permit.¹¹

Health Care

In 1994, the Ontario government eliminated coverage for international students from the Ontario Health Insurance Program (OHIP). Now international students studying at universities must enrol in a private health insurance program – the University Health Insurance Plan (UHIP) – which costs between \$700 and \$2,000 per year.¹² This for-profit health insurance plan provides limited health coverage that is not accepted universally by physicians, hospitals and clinics in Ontario. International college students are also required to pay for a mandatory private health insurance plan – College Health Insurance Plan (C-HIP), that is not universally accepted by health care providers and normally cost between \$500 and \$700 per year.¹³

International students not only have an incentive to study elsewhere based on lower tuition fees, but other provinces including British Columbia, Manitoba, and Nova Scotia currently include international students in their provincial health insurance programs.

Towards Full and Equal Access for International Students

Restoring funding for public post-secondary education to Ontario would reduce the incentive for colleges and universities to rely on international tuition fees as a means of generating revenue for the institution. Reducing international tuition fees would improve access and attract a greater diversity of international students to Ontario colleges and universities. Removing other barriers faced by international students such as allowing better off campus work flexibility and providing better access to health care should also be an important component of post-secondary education and immigration policy. By taking all of these steps, Ontario would become more equitable for international students and increase and diversify its skilled labour force for a better and stronger economy.

1. Statistics Canada. Postsecondary enrolments, by immigration status (Table 477-0031).
 2. Government of Ontario. 2011 Ontario Budget.
 3. Government of Ontario. Ministry of Citizenship, Immigration and International Trade. A Progress Report on Ontario's Immigration Strategy (2014).
 4. Government of Ontario. Ministry of Citizenship, Immigration and International Trade. A New Direction - Ontario's Immigration Strategy (2012).
 5. Government of Canada. Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade. Economic Impact of International Education in Canada (2012).
 6. Government of Canada. Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade. Canada's International Education Strategy (2014).
 7. Statistics Canada. Weighted average tuition fee for: full-time foreign undergraduate students (Table 477-0023); full-time foreign graduate students (Table 477-0024); full-time Canadian undergraduate students (Table 477-0021); full-time Canadian graduate students (Table 477-0022). Figures do not include tuition fees for Dentistry, Medicine, Pharmacy & Masters of Business Administration programs.
 8. Government of Ontario. Ministry of Education and Training. Future Goals for Ontario Colleges and Universities (1996).
 9. York University Graduate Students' Association. Close the Gap on Differential Tuition Fees (2014).
 10. Statistics Canada. Weighted average tuition fee for: full-time foreign undergraduate students (Table 477-0023); full-time foreign graduate students (Table 477-0024); full-time Canadian undergraduate students (Table 477-0021); full-time Canadian graduate students (Table 477-0022).
 11. Government of Canada. Notice - New regulations for international students finalized (2014).
 12. Universal Health Insurance Plan. UHIP Premium Table Effective September 1st, 2015 to August 31st, 2016.
 13. College Health Insurance Plan. C-HIP Premium Table Effective September 1st, 2015 to August 31st, 2016.