



Council of Alberta University Students
#2, 9908 – 109 Street NW
Edmonton, Alberta T5K 1H5
780-297-4531
www.caus.net

For immediate release

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Tuition freeze helps protect students from budget cuts

Edmonton, Alberta – Alberta's post-secondary institutions and student organizations were told Thursday that tuition for the 2013/14 academic year will be frozen at current levels, supplemented by \$16 million in additional funding. Alberta's universities, colleges, and technical institutions are being challenged by the Government of Alberta to find financial efficiencies without resorting to student tuition or fees and today's announcement is a part of that plan.

"We are happy to see today's announcement and the government making it clear to Albertans that these cuts are not to be put onto the shoulders of students and their families," said Raphael Jacob, chair of the Council of Alberta University Students (CAUS) and VP External at the University of Calgary Students' Union. "Tuition and student debt is already well above the national average in Alberta and has more than tripled since the 1990s so any move to keep that cost down is welcome."

Currently Alberta undergraduates pay on average \$5,883 per year in tuition which is \$300 more than the national average along with the highest non-instructional fees in Canada. Alberta also has the lowest post-secondary participation rate in Canada, with only 17.5% of Albertans between 18-34 years old in post-secondary education compared to 23.8% nationally.

The controversial letters of expectation, now called memorandums of understanding between institutions and government, will be delayed until September following a period of consultation with stakeholders. CAUS provided its initial thoughts to Alberta Enterprise and Advanced Education and is available for download at <http://caus.net/letterofexpectation/>

The tuition announcement comes following a 7% cut to institutional operating funds from the Government of Alberta, the largest such cut in 20 years in the March 7 provincial budget. Student debt is also slated to go up in Alberta, with provincial student loans budgeted to go up from \$268 million in 2011/12 to \$425 million to students next year.

CAUS has been advocating that the costs of post-secondary education should be predictable for students in the long run and a predictable model would include both provincial regulation on tuition and fees. In Alberta, fees other than tuition remain unregulated and are a major loophole for post-secondary institutions to circumvent the tuition freeze.

"Today's announcement is an important step to protecting Alberta students from the painful cuts in the provincial budget," said Jacob. "But we have to start working on what the next steps for a long term plan to invest in our system and what our tuition and fees policy will be, not just next year, but for years to come."

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The Council of Alberta University Students (CAUS) represents the interests of students at the University of Alberta, the University of Calgary and the University of Lethbridge.

For more information contact:

Duncan Wojtaszek, Executive Director
cell: 780-297-4531
e-mail: duncan@caus.net

Raphael Jacob, Chair
cell: 403-809-7751
e-mail: suvpext@ucalgary.ca