



# FUNDING our FUTURE

long-term investment in Alberta through improving  
post-secondary education

The 2015 provincial election ushered in the first change in government that Alberta has seen in 43 years. With this change comes the opportunity to evaluate how our post-secondary system has grown and changed, and ensure that Alberta's higher education system serves the needs of people from all backgrounds. Sustaining an affordable, high-quality post-secondary education system is critical to creating opportunities and ensuring fairness for all Albertans.

## WHO WE ARE

The Council of Alberta University Students (CAUS) represents over 100,000 undergraduate students at MacEwan University, Mount Royal University, the University of Alberta, the University of Calgary and the University of Lethbridge.

As elected student leaders from all five institutions, we advocate on behalf of our students to university administrations, the government, and the greater community. We also govern our individual students' unions in order to improve the services and the student experience at our own institutions.

Our students elected us on platforms advocating for a consistent, affordable, and predictable post-secondary education system. Our priorities reflect those mandates.

## 2014/15 PRIORITIES

### Tuition & Mandatory Non-Instructional Fees

Students saw the passing of Bill 3 during the first session of the 29th legislature as a strong signal of the government's commitment to post-secondary education. In addition to reversing the 1.4% cut to institutions proposed in the 2015 PC budget and increasing funding for institutions by 2%, Bill 3 freezes tuition for two years and effectively cancels all market modifiers approved in 2014. Students are also encouraged to hear that institutions were directed to freeze mandatory non-instructional fees for two years.

During the time that tuition is frozen, CAUS believes that post-secondary stakeholders and the

government should thoroughly discuss how the system is funded, including: the post-secondary funding framework, the tuition and fees regulation, and the rules for mandatory non-instructional fees. Important policy changes to increase the stability and predictability of post-secondary funding for institutions, and tuition costs for students and the families that support them, should be made at the end of the tuition freeze period. The scope of these changes means that discussions and consultation with key stakeholders should begin immediately.

Since the removal of the tuition cap from legislation in 2006, CAUS has been advocating for tuition to be placed back into the Post-Secondary Learning Act. We hope this topic will be part of the discussion moving forward.

### Campus Mental Health

In January 2013, the University of Alberta, the University of Calgary, and the University of Lethbridge each received 3 million dollars over 3 years in student mental health funding. This trial program has made a huge difference in the lives of many students, but funding is scheduled to run out on June 30, 2016, and the ground that has been gained will not be maintained without its renewal.

CAUS calls on the government to make a commitment to dedicated mental health funding for all Alberta universities. MacEwan University and Mount Royal University were not part of the initial mental health funding, but were brought in to the program part way through with partial funding. CAUS would like to see the pilot project extended and expanded to include Mount Royal University and MacEwan University.

Additionally, the government should continue to work with students and mental health professionals to finish developing a post-secondary mental health strategy. Post-secondary institutions are important players in ensuring healthy citizens in our province but require the resources to deal with the huge volume of individuals seeking assistance.

## **Student Financial Aid**

A review of student aid in Alberta needs to be undertaken in concert with a review of tuition and the funding framework. The impacts of changing student aid and the tuition model are closely linked, with one affecting the other directly.

Not that many years ago, Alberta boasted the best student aid system in the country. However, while our student loan default rates may be among the lowest across the country, much of what the system used to offer in terms of non-repayable assistance - grants, bursaries, and debt relief - has been gutted.

CAUS calls for an increase in grants, a decrease in overall student debt, a better system for loan forgiveness, and targeted up-front grants to increase rural and aboriginal access to post-secondary.

## **Student Employment Program**

In the recent election, the NDP platform promised to bring back the Student Temporary Employment Program (STEP), which was cancelled in the 2013 budget. CAUS has been advocating for the replacement of STEP since it was cut and has spent the intervening time developing a set of recommendations for how the program could best be revised and newly implemented.

CAUS is excited to hear that the new government will be working to bring back what can be an incredibly valuable program for students; facilitating the jump from university to a meaningful career more quickly and easily.

## **Research**

A unique opportunity exists to establish a data collection project for post-secondary education unlike anything that has been done in our province to date. Over the past decade, access to information at both the provincial and federal levels has become more and more limited. Federally, the end of the long form census has had a large impact on the data that is available and provincially, the Campus Alberta Planning Resource has cut available information that can be used to gauge whether changes to our system are having a real and measurable impact for students, the government, and all Albertans.

Alberta can look to examples of what exists elsewhere, such as the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario and nationally at the now ended Canadian Millennium Scholarship Foundation. By creating an arms-length research organization this year, in four years time there will be clear data to determine how new directions for system changes compare to what has been done in the past. It would also provide clear and transparent information for Albertans and students to see the successes in the system over the next four years.

## **PSLA Governance**

Introducing consistency within the Post-Secondary Learning Act for all six public Alberta universities is a proposal coming forward from both institutions and students. Currently, MacEwan University and Mount Royal University are established in the section of the act that governs colleges and technical institutes. By moving these institutions to Part 1, which governs universities, we will: establish more student representation within university governance, create university senates increase the institutions' links to their community, and ensure proper transfer and recognition of credentials by other universities outside of Alberta.

## **HOW YOU CAN HELP**

CAUS has already begun advocating on these priorities, but we need your help to make them a reality for our public post-secondary system. We encourage decision-makers from across Alberta to bring up post-secondary education when considering our province's priorities. Investing in post-secondary education is the single best way to ensure a bright future for our province.

## **CONTACT US**

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