

# SETTING a FOUNDATION for FAIRNESS and ACCESS

investing in Alberta's future by improving  
our post-secondary system

ADVOCACY DOCUMENT | APRIL 2016



CELEBRATING  
30 YEARS  
of STUDENT  
ADVOCACY

# recommendations

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## tuition and fees

- Delivering on the promise of an adult learning review made in June 2015.
- Returning tuition to legislation.
- Closing the loopholes that allow for market modifiers.
- Creating regulation for mandatory non-instructional fees.

## campus mental health

- Renewing mental health funding set to expire in June 2016.
- Providing mental health funding to all publicly funded Alberta universities based on a per-student calculation.

## student financial assistance

- Investing in targeted, up-front, needs-based grants for low-income students.
- Re-instating the Alberta Student Finance Board.

## post-secondary governance

- Moving MacEwan University and Mount Royal University into Part 1 of the Post-Secondary Learning Act (PSLA).

## data and research

- Collecting and publishing more data about post-secondary in Alberta, especially as our system compares to other provinces across Canada.
- Conducting a feasibility study on the establishment of an arms-length agency to develop research on our post-secondary system to better understand our unique opportunities and challenges.

## student employment program

- Extending program support for STEP beyond the summer months.
- Tracking the newly revised program in its first year and expanding it in future years based on analysis of the areas with most potential.

for more information visit us at:  
[www.caus.net/publications](http://www.caus.net/publications)

# tuition and fees

On June 17, 2015 the Government of Alberta introduced Bill 3 - Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2015 (No. 2). When this bill received Royal Assent on June 29, 2015 tuition and mandatory non-instructional fees were frozen for a period of two years and the 25 market modifier proposals that received approval by the previous government in December 2014 were rescinded.

In addition to freezing tuition and mandatory non-instructional fees, the government committed to conducting a two-year review of the adult learning system, including post-secondary tuition and fees.

## WHAT IS THIS "FUNDING MODEL REVIEW" THAT'S BEEN ANNOUNCED?

GOVERNMENT INTENDS TO SPEND THE NEXT TWO YEARS REVIEWING HOW POST-SECONDARY INSTITUTIONS ARE FUNDED. THIS INCLUDES TAXPAYER FUNDING AS WELL AS TUITION, FEES, AND OTHER REVENUE SOURCES. FUNDING FOR INSTITUTIONS WILL BE STABLE AND PREDICTABLE AND TUITION WILL REMAIN FROZEN FOR THE TWO YEARS THAT THIS REVIEW IS UNDERWAY TO ENSURE STABILITY ACROSS THE SYSTEM. MORE DETAILS WILL BE ANNOUNCED SOON.

FROM: [IAE.ALBERTA.CA/MINISTRY/NEWS/2015/TUITION-AND-FEES-FROZEN.ASPX](http://IAE.ALBERTA.CA/MINISTRY/NEWS/2015/TUITION-AND-FEES-FROZEN.ASPX)

With tuition and fees frozen for the 2015/16 and 2016/17 academic years, students were excited to be part of a comprehensive discussion on how tuition and fees, student aid, and the funding framework can be aligned to create a more affordable, accessible, quality post-secondary education system in Alberta. CAUS believes that a strong, affordable post-secondary system is even more critical during this economic downturn to help diversify our economy by ensuring Albertans have the right skills for the future.

Reviewing the way the public and students fund the post-secondary system also provides an important opportunity to assess the goals and objectives of the system to address long-standing issues. Alberta has the lowest post-secondary participation rate among 18-34 year olds of any Canadian province and some of the highest costs for students when both tuition and fees are taken into account.

Unfortunately, it seems like the review has yet to get off the ground.

## DID YOU KNOW?

When the government allowed for the first market modifiers in 2010, the Tuition and Fee Regulation (TFR) was changed to allow institutions to charge differential tuition beyond the tuition cap. The TFR has not been changed back to close this loophole.

## DID YOU KNOW?

Institutions first introduced "basket of goods" mandatory non-instructional fees (MNIFs) in 2010 in order to make up gaps in their budgets from a loss of provincial funding. Since then they have provided ever-changing lists of what these fees pay for.

## CAUS recommends:



- Delivering on the promise of an adult learning review made in June 2015.
- Returning tuition to legislation.
- Closing the loopholes that allow for market modifiers.
- Creating regulation for mandatory non-instructional fees.

CAUS has written much more about tuition, market modifiers, and mandatory non-instructional fees. If you are interested in further information please give us a call, send us an email, or check out our website.

# campus mental health

Campus mental health funding announced by the previous government in January 2013 came as welcome news to post-secondary institutions and students alike. Over the past three years this funding made a considerable impact on our university campuses. Wait times to see counsellors have decreased, additional mental health professionals have been hired, and students are beginning to feel like they are able to access the kind of supports they need when and how they need them.

However, the funding initiative was only put in place for a trial period of three years. These three years come to a close in June 2016. Without a renewal of this program students will be worse off than where they started, as the availability of additional supports has served to increase the number of students that have overcome the stigma of seeking professional help for mental health issues.

Current Funding for Campus Mental Health Initiative Compared to CAUS Proposals for Future Funding

|                                    | 2012/13 FLEs | Current Funding | FLE Weighted Distribution of \$5M | Funding at Current U of L Rate |
|------------------------------------|--------------|-----------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| MacEwan University                 | 11,838       | \$ 0.25M        | \$ 0.64M                          | \$ 1.75M                       |
| Mount Royal University             | 9,837        | \$ 0.25M        | \$ 0.53M                          | \$ 1.45M                       |
| University of Alberta              | 36,299       | \$ 1.00M        | \$ 1.95M                          | \$ 5.36M                       |
| University of Calgary              | 28,341       | \$ 1.00M        | \$ 1.52M                          | \$ 4.19M                       |
| University of Lethbridge           | 6,772        | \$ 1.00M        | \$ 0.37M                          | \$ 1.00M                       |
| <b>TOTAL PROGRAM COST PER YEAR</b> |              | <b>\$ 3.50M</b> | <b>\$ 5.00M</b>                   | <b>\$ 13.75M</b>               |



on a campus of  
**30,000 STUDENTS**

Source: NCHA Survey

**16,200** felt HOPELESS

**19,200** felt LONELY

**390** ATTEMPTED SUICIDE

## DID YOU KNOW?

In 2013 student advocacy contributed to the government's decision to fund the mental health initiative. However, as CAUS and ASEC had been asking for funding to be distributed to their member institutions differently, the schools represented by our two organizations received different levels of funding distributed in different ways.

## ON OUR CAMPUSES:

### MacEwan University

- 3 additional full-time registered psychologists
- Wait times did not change (between 3-4 weeks) as more students began seeking assistance

### Mount Royal University

- Additional part-time counsellors hired
- 107 more hours during high-demand periods

### University of Alberta

- Created the Community Social Work Team, the first of its kind in North America, that delivers training across campus to students and staff

### University of Calgary

- 2 new counsellors, 2 provisional psychologists
- 44 additional direct client hours per week

### University of Lethbridge

- Wait times cut in half - from 6 weeks to 3 weeks
- 2 counsellors, a mental health physician, 2 part-time admin support staff, a mental health clinician, and a dietitian

## CAUS recommends:

- Renewing mental health funding set to expire in June 2016.
- Providing mental health funding to all publicly funded Alberta universities based on a per-student calculation.

# student financial assistance

## DID YOU KNOW?

The Student Finance Board (SFB) was composed of members of the public, student representatives, and student aid professionals. It provided a venue to discuss beneficial changes to Alberta's student aid system, but was dissolved in 2012 when the previous government began moving towards a competency based model for boards, rather than a representative-based model.

Since 2010 Alberta's student financial aid system has not addressed rising debt levels associated with increasing costs of education. This debt is quickly becoming too much for many students to bear, and is deterring many Albertans from attending post-secondary.

The Government of Alberta began making significant cuts to non-repayable financial aid in the form of debt relief, grants, and bursaries starting in 2010. As the system became much more focused on loans, there was a dramatic increase in the amount of student debt in Alberta.

Undergraduate borrowers in Alberta leave their studies with about \$23,000 in student debt. However, this average is made up of many students with small loans, and many with very large loans. The majority of students with large loans are from groups who are underrepresented in the post-secondary system, such as those coming from rural Alberta, students with disabilities, and those with a lower socioeconomic statuses.

CAUS believes that we can and must do a better job of balancing the aid we provide by increasing the amount of grants and bursaries available. CAUS has long advocated for creating and increasing the amount of targeted, up-front, needs-based grants as the ideal way to do this. Up-front aid, rather than back-end debt remission or tax credits, tends to increase participation rates and completion rates.

Consider a 17 year old Albertan just finishing high school and the impact of being told a \$3,000 grant is available for those considering attending university - a university education can go from being a dream to being a possibility.



## DID YOU KNOW?

Between 2010 and 2015 the Government of Alberta cut over \$136 million in non-repayable student aid, including \$78 million in debt remission, \$19 million by ending the Alberta Opportunities Bursary, \$35 million by eliminating the Alberta Completion Incentive Grant, and over \$4 million in other bursaries and grants.

ALBERTA in 2013/14

**\$1.1 BILLION**

TOTAL TUITION PAID BY STUDENTS

**\$23,000**

AVERAGE STUDENT DEBT

**\$5,730**

AVERAGE TUITION

Alberta students took on

**\$775 Million**

Source: Campus Alberta Planning Resource 2014

in STUDENT LOANS in 2013/14.

Most Alberta students can take out

**\$75,000**

in debt prior to graduation.

Much of the conversation about student aid over the past six years has been stifled, and student leaders cannot help but see a link between the demise of the Student Finance Board (SFB) and the decrease in non-repayable aid. The dissolution of the SFB led to an increased politicization of aid and decreased consultation. CAUS believes it is time to bring back a public Student Finance Board to conduct meaningful conversations with stakeholders like students, institutions, parents, and the public.

## CAUS recommends:

- Investing in targeted, up-front, needs-based grants for low-income students.
- Re-instating the Alberta Student Finance Board.

# post-secondary governance

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Introducing consistency within the Post-Secondary Learning Act (PSLA) 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.

## DID YOU KNOW?

MacEwan and Mount Royal were granted the ability to use the title 'University' through an Order in Council. While they are allowed to use the name University, they are still governed by the section of the PSLA that deals with 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 which increase the institutions' links to their community, and ensure proper transfer and recognition of credentials by other universities outside of Alberta.

Moving MacEwan and Mount Royal into Part 1 of the act does not mean moving them into the Comprehensive Academic and Research Institution (CARI) sector in the Campus Alberta Six Sector Model.



## CAUS recommends:

- Moving MacEwan University and Mount Royal University into Part 1 of the Post-Secondary Learning Act (PSLA).

# data and research

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Strong public policy needs to be shaped by evidence and evaluation. Unfortunately, in Alberta, evaluating the performance of our post-secondary system is hampered by a lack of publicly available data and research. As a result, the public is left without the basic tools to understand how our system is performing on basic measures of accessibility, affordability, and quality. This leaves post-secondary policy - from funding frameworks to student fees and financial aid - to be guided by guesswork and ideology.

As significant changes to Alberta's post-secondary system are contemplated through the review of adult learning, CAUS believes we must establish a baseline of publicly available data. We must evaluate changes and measure successes to inform future policy making to generate the greatest possible impact for students and our province with the limited public dollars available.

While the Campus Alberta Planning Resource (CAPR) does provide a decent overview of the Alberta post-secondary system, it is not always published in a timely manner and over the past couple of years has failed to provide comparator data for other provinces.



## CAUS recommends:

- Collecting and publishing more data about post-secondary in Alberta, especially as our system compares to other provinces across Canada.
- Conducting a feasibility study on the establishment of an arms-length agency to develop research on our post-secondary system to better understand our unique opportunities and challenges.

# student employment program

Students were excited to see the return of the Student Temporary Employment Program (STEP) in November 2015. The newly revised STEP will provide a wage subsidy of \$7 an hour to employers who hire students for summer work between May and August and is expected to provide more than 3,000 jobs for students.

The budget for STEP in 2016-17 is \$10 million - up almost \$3 million from when the program was cancelled in 2013.

FOR THE FIRST TIME, STEP WILL BE AVAILABLE TO SMALL BUSINESSES. THIS IS AN IMPORTANT EXPANSION OF THE PROGRAM AT A TIME WHEN HAVING A JOB IS TOP OF MIND FOR SO MANY ALBERTANS. STEP WILL ALSO BE OPEN TO PARTICIPATION FROM MUNICIPALITIES, NOT-FOR-PROFIT GROUPS, SCHOOL BOARDS AND PUBLICLY-FUNDED POST-SECONDARY INSTITUTIONS.

FROM: GOVERNMENT OF ALBERTA PRESS RELEASE, NOV 3, 2015

CAUS expects that the government will closely monitor the new Student Temporary Employment Program to determine which program changes are the most successful and which areas show the most potential for expansion.

The student population is no longer as homogenous a demographic as it once was, and instead encompasses a wide range of individuals from various stages of life. From students straight out of high school to married or single students with young children, Alberta's learners are a diverse population looking for more flexibility in their studies and the employment opportunities that support them through school. Expanding support for STEP beyond the traditionally thought-of "working months" of summer would allow students the flexibility they require to fulfill their many obligations, while also opening up temporary employment opportunities to a greater number of students.

*"Students hold the future in their hands. Their success is Alberta's success, and we need to provide every opportunity to succeed. That's why our government is following through on our promise to reinstate STEP. We are helping open doors for students to gain the skills and on-the-job experience they need to enter the workforce and be successful."*

*Rachel Notley, Premier  
Government of Alberta Press Release, Nov 3, 2013*

## DID YOU KNOW?

STEP was originally introduced in 1972 and ran continuously until its cancellation in 2013. Now that STEP has been reinstated, Alberta is no longer the only province without a student employment program.

## CAUS recommends:

- Extending program support for STEP beyond the summer months.
- Tracking the newly revised program in its first year and expanding it in future years based on analysis of the areas with most potential.

CAUS published a paper in 2015 containing our recommendations on the best way to implement the new STEP program. To read our paper, check out *A Student Employment Program for Alberta* at: [caus.net/publications](http://caus.net/publications)



# COUNCIL of ALBERTA UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

CAUS represents the interests of over 100,000 university students across Alberta. We represent undergraduate students from MacEwan University, Mount Royal University, the University of Alberta, the University of Calgary, and the University of Lethbridge to the public, government and other post-secondary education stakeholders.

