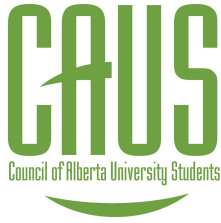


Council of Alberta University Students 2020-21 Priorities

SUPPORTING STUDENTS, SUPPORTING THE ECONOMY





Supporting Students, Supporting the Economy

Who We Are

The Council of Alberta University Students (CAUS) represents over 120,000 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.

2020/21 PRIORITIES

Funding Institutions, Supporting Affordability

Since Budget 2018, the Government of Alberta has cut base funding to post-secondary institutions by 10% overall, approximately \$230 million from rural colleges and urban institutions. Universities and colleges in Alberta are funded through tuition, fees, and government grants. With base grants comprising the lion's share of an institution's funding, reductions in government funding can be difficult to recoup from other sources, aside from

students via tuition. These cuts are significantly reducing the ability of institutions to provide modern and effective teaching and support.

In order to allow institutions to fill their funding cap on the backs of students, the Government of Alberta has removed the pre-existing freeze on tuition and allowed a potential increase of 7% over the next three years. This compounded tuition increase of 22.5% over three years and other fee increases will increase the cost of the average bachelor's degree by \$10,000 by the 2022/23 academic year. Affordability is a growing concern as tuition tax credits have also been scrapped.

CAUS has long called for tuition increases to be capped at the Alberta Consumer Price Index (CPI) as this enables students and their families to budget and financially plan for their education and provides students with predictability. Students and their families simply cannot afford annual increases of three or four times the rate of inflation for a post-secondary education.

CAUS Recommends:

- The Government of Alberta should stop the cuts to Alberta's post-secondary institutions.
- The Government of Alberta should restrict increases to tuition to the Alberta CPI, as reported by Statistics Canada.

Supporting Students; Supporting the Economy

Recession Response

Albertans have been hit by the current pandemic and resulting economic recession. As we reopen and restart the economy, measures must be taken to ensure post-secondary students are not left behind. Young adults have an unemployment rate that is higher than that of the general public at the best of times, and is staggeringly higher at the worst of times. Despite federal support, restrictions on business operations have greatly limited the number of available positions students typically fill during the summer and during the academic year. Student employment is also an investment in the future, as it allows new graduates to enter the workforce with more job-ready practical skills, strengthening the economy.

At the same time, ongoing supports must be in place to ensure that students feel safe to return to in-person course delivery. Issues of accessibility must be taken into consideration. Given that the burden of these additional measures must be taken on by individuals, many of whom face barriers to accessing available Personal Protective Equipment, the Government of Alberta must provide support to students and institutions directly.

CAUS Recommends:

- The Government of Alberta to provide support, including a wage-subsidy program, to encourage small businesses to hire post-secondary students in degree-relevant jobs.
- The Government of Alberta provides pandemic-specific grants to ensure post-secondary institutions are able to adapt to the pandemic changes, such as costs associated with program delivery changes, installation of protective barriers, and enhanced cleaning protocols.
- The Government of Alberta provide health and safety supports to students so that they feel safe returning to campus.

Supporting Students; Supporting the Economy

Supporting Healthy and Safe Campuses

Campus mental health has been an important focus of students, and the Government has responded with annual funding. CAUS calls on the government to demonstrate its commitment to mental health by going beyond annual promises and committing to multi-year funding agreements. Students should not have to worry from year to year if funding for their mental health services is going to disappear.

As university enrolment in Alberta is poised to surge in coming years, demand on these services will only grow. It is crucial that predictable funding be allocated on a per-student basis, to stop the resources per student from eroding. In 2013 the University of Lethbridge was granted \$147 per Full Load Equivalent (FLE) and was able to drastically reduce the waiting lists for their services. CAUS calls on the Government of Alberta to fund on campus mental health services at \$165 per FLE, the 2013 rate adjusted for inflation.

At the same time, sexual violence is an increasingly prevalent issue on our campuses. Its impact on students is detrimental to their physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, and academic well-being, and affects the overall community. Sexual violence encompasses a broad range of non-consenting sexual instances, including rape, assault, indecent exposure, among many others. Students deserve to be safe in their studies and lives, and sexual violence hinders their ability to do so.

CAUS worked for two years to compile a first-of-its-kind, research-informed white paper on the prevalence of sexual violence

on university campuses. This paper, released in early 2020, includes 5 recommendations that CAUS has provided to the Government of Alberta and expects them to be implemented immediately and meaningfully to address campus sexual violence. This includes both policy and funding asks and programs to be implemented at post-secondary institutions with an in-depth analysis and specific recommendations previously outlined in the paper.

CAUS advocates for the safety and success of all students, and in order to put this advocacy into action, calls for increased funding and attention from the provincial government for sexual violence prevention and response. This would be accomplished through awareness campaigns, inclusivity, teaching consent education, training students and faculty members to be responders to sexual violence, as well as allowing for more counselors available for people who have been affected by sexual violence during their time at university. Funding would also allow for more diverse and inclusive methods to address sexual violence, as it would allow for more accommodation for diverse backgrounds of students including culturally relevant counseling and training in the diverse needs of the LGBTQ2S+ community.

CAUS Recommends:

- The Government of Alberta to move to multi-year mental health funding commitments and provide \$165 per FLE at each institution.
- The Government of Alberta to immediately implement all the recommendations within the CAUS Sexual Violence on Campus report.

Supporting Students; Supporting the Economy

Institutional Autonomy and Student Experience

Modern, well-funded, and high-quality post-secondary education creates a beneficial experience for students, and a strong economy for Alberta. While the Government of Alberta has repeatedly expressed a desire to cut down on unnecessary regulatory burdens in industry and other public services, they have moved to add unprecedented levels of red tape to already heavily regulated post-secondary finances through performance-based funding and expense regulation. This red tape on public post-secondary institutions restricts their ability to provide world-class student experience and education that students in Alberta expect.

Post-secondary institutions are being banned from using their limited reserve funds, even though those funds could help them support students through COVID-19. The government has indicated a desire to limit institutional expenses despite encouraging them to increase own-source revenue and research grants. Additionally, the government is considering imposing burdensome new financial reporting requirements on universities through performance-based funding, creating a large administrative workload. This proposed system would also put up to 40% of an institution's funding at risk of being cut if they fall short of government-imposed targets. This ultimately leaves institutions with fewer resources, fewer opportunities to generate revenue, and less freedom to spend more on enhancing student experience in ways unique to their campus and student population.

Students' Associations have a legislated seat at the table in their respective

institutions' governance processes, where they are able to provide input in the decisions made to enhance student experience on their campuses. Students are the ones who will feel the consequences through further funding cuts, and less attention and money available to fund important services, teaching supports, and essential programming. University boards and students are the experts on their own institutions, and the government of Alberta should give them flexibility to manage their funds in responsive and innovative ways.

CAUS Recommends:

- The Government of Alberta to remove red-tape restrictions on post-secondary expenses, allowing the use of financial reserves and own-source revenue or research grants without penalty to ensure institutional autonomy.
- The Government of Alberta to permanently halt the implementation of performance-based funding metrics that limit institutions' ability to innovatively help rebuild Alberta's economy.

Contact Us

Rowan Ley, Chair
chair@caus.net

Marley Gillies, Vice-Chair
vicechair@caus.net

Jon Mastel, Executive Director
780.297.4531 / ed@caus.net

#1, 9908 - 109 Street NW
Edmonton AB T5K 1H5
www.caus.net