



THE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' COUNCIL
WRITTEN SUBMISSION FOR THE

2021 PRE-BUDGET CONSULTATIONS



THE USC'S **RECOMMENDATIONS** FOR THE 2021 BUDGET

1

Incorporate key components of the Government of Canada's COVID-19 Student Support Package into a permanent strategy to support graduates' transition from university to the workforce.

- i. Invest \$1.8 billion dollars per year to implement a two-year grace period on all federal student loans for new graduates.
- ii. Increase Canada Student Grants by \$1200 per student from 2019 levels.

2

Contribute \$20 million dollars per year to increase opportunities created by the Student Work Placement Program for domestic and international students.

3

Invest an additional \$100 million in funding to support Indigenous reconciliation initiatives, with a focus on reconciliation efforts on university campuses through the Indigenous Languages and Cultures Program.

4

Ensure that all Canadians have access to affordable high-speed internet by 2030 and reduce the costs associated with cell and wireless services by 25 percent.



THE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' COUNCIL (USC)

The University Students' Council (USC) is a student-led organization that exists to advocate for and represent the interests of over 30,000 undergraduate students at Western University.

Since 1965, we have been one of the largest student governments in Canada and one of the largest not-for-profit organizations in London, Ontario.

Western University is situated on the traditional territories of the Anishinaabeg, Haudenosaunee, Lunaapeewak and Attawandaron peoples, who have long-standing relationships to the land and region of southwestern Ontario and the City of London. The local First Nation communities of this area include Chippewas of the Thames First Nation, Oneida Nation of the Thames, and Munsee Delaware Nation. In the region, there are eleven First Nation communities and a growing Indigenous urban population. Western University values the significant historical and contemporary contributions of local and regional First Nations and all of the Original peoples of Turtle Island.

EXTENSION OF THE COVID-19 STUDENT SUPPORT PACKAGE

1

Incorporate key components of the Government of Canada's COVID-19 Student Support Package into a permanent strategy to support graduates' transition from university to the workforce.

i. Invest \$1.8 billion dollars per year to implement a two-year grace period on all federal student loans for new graduates.

The financial consequences of COVID-19 have created short and long-term financial barriers for students. Nearly 3,400 Western students relied on emergency funds made available through Western University's Student Relief Fund to cover "urgent and pressing needs created by the COVID-19 pandemic", which indicates the financial strain that current Western students and recent graduates are facing.¹

As a result of the short-term financial strain, 73% of respondents in a recent Statistics Canada survey "indicated that they were very or extremely concerned about using up their savings", which will have immense impacts on students' long-term financial positions.²

The long-term financial consequences of COVID-19 are heightened by the alarmingly low employment

rate amongst students aged 20 to 24 as employment has dropped from 52.5% to 29.8% since February 2020.³ Due to the economic downturn, a recent Abacus Data survey showed that "close to 70% of students reported their summer employment plans were affected" by the pandemic.⁴ Additionally, 75% of students stated that the pandemic will change their employment situation beyond this year.⁵

In addition to long-term financial barriers created by COVID-19, graduating in the midst of financial uncertainty can have detrimental effects on students' careers, as this can lead to an initial earning loss of 30-40% which impacts students years into their careers.⁶ The implementation of a two-year grace period on federal student loans for all new graduates relieves a portion of the financial burden that students face, which will support students' transition into the workforce and make post-secondary education more accessible for all Canadians.

1 Jason Winders, "[Relief Fund Eases Pandemic Burden for Hundreds of Students](#)," Western News, May 19, 2020,

2 Statistics Canada, "[Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Postsecondary Students](#)," Government of Canada, May 12, 2020

3 Ibid

4 Canadian Alliance of Student Associations (Abacus Data), "[Students are Still Worried: COVID-19 and Post Secondary Education](#)," Canadian Alliance of Student Associations, June 15, 2020

5 Ibid

6 [National Bureau of Economic Research](#), 1050 Massachusetts Ave., Cambridge, MA 02138; 617-868-3900



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Statistics Canada outlines that 54% of students graduate with debt, and the average student takes on \$28,000 in debt while pursuing an undergraduate degree.⁷ Therefore, the USC urges the Government of Canada to invest in a two-year grace period on all new graduates' federal student loans, which will undoubtedly have a positive impact on a significant number of Canadians. This investment will reduce students' financial stress, allowing students to engage in the economy, achieve their goals, and join the middle class.

ii. Increase Canada Student Grants by \$1200 per student from 2019 levels.

Following the outbreak of COVID-19, the Government of Canada increased grants available for students to \$6000 for full time students and \$3600 for part time students. These measures have played an integral role in assisting Western students given that 75% of students have stated that COVID-19 will have a lasting impact on their financial situation beyond this year.⁸ Despite the financial toll caused by the pandemic, Western students are paying more than ever to attend university in Fall 2020.⁹

A degree or diploma has become a prerequisite to entering the workforce, with Universities Canada identifying that 80% of top jobs require a university degree.¹⁰ However, for many Canadians, financial barriers serve as a significant hurdle to accessing post-secondary education. Affordable access to post-secondary education can bolster our economy, support young Canadians' financial futures, and build the middle class.

The economic effects of COVID-19 have shaped students' financial positions, now and in the future. Therefore, to ensure the long-term success of Canadian students, the Government of Canada should increase funding for Canada Student Grants by \$1200 per student. This investment, as outlined in the Liberal Party of Canada's 2019 Election Platform, will help drive our economy and support the workforce of tomorrow.

7 Statistics Canada, "[National Graduates Survey \(NGS\), student debt from all sources, by province of study and level of study](#)," Government of Canada, July 14, 2020,

8 Ibid

9 Western University, "[Fee & Refund Schedules](#)," The Office of the Registrar, date accessed July 29, 2020

10 Universities Canada, "[80% of top jobs require a university degree](#)."

WORK INTEGRATED LEARNING FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

2

Contribute \$20 million dollars per year to increase the opportunities created by the Student Work Placement Program for domestic and international students.

Work integrated learning (WIL) provides students with invaluable personal and professional growth, as it creates opportunities to gain relevant work experience in students' desired fields.¹¹ Abacus Data conducted a survey wherein 88% of respondents identified that "students who graduate with degrees that offer WIL have an advantage when it comes to finding a job".¹²

International students are integral to the long-term success of Canadian post-secondary institutions and the Canadian economy as they contribute \$22 billion dollars annually to the Canadian economy.¹³ International students play a key role in addressing Canada's skilled labour shortage.¹⁴ The inclusion of international students in the Student Work Placement Program will support their applications for post-graduation work permits and support their professional and personal development. This investment will fund positions for up to 7,000 international students and engage diverse perspectives in the Canadian workforce.

An investment in the Student Work Placement Program ensures that students will develop integral professional skills, thus contributing to the growth of the Canadian economy. The USC urges the Government of Canada to invest an additional \$20 million dollars into the Student Work Placement Program to support economic prosperity for international students.



11 Western Science, "[Benefits](#)," Western University, date accessed: July 29, 2020

12 Abacus Data, "[Work-Integrated Learning and Post-Secondary Education: What Students Think](#)," Abacus Data, October 2016

13 Kareem El-Assalm, "[642,000 international students: Canada now ranks 3rd globally in foreign student attraction](#)," CIC News, February 20, 2020

14 Government of Canada, "[Addressing Labour Shortages](#)"

FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION

3

Invest an additional \$100 million in funding to support Indigenous reconciliation initiatives, with a focus on reconciliation efforts on university campuses through the Indigenous Languages and Cultures Program.

Indigenous students play a vital role in fostering communities in post-secondary environments. The Government of Canada's investment of \$334 million for the preservation and revitalization of Indigenous languages and cultures through Indigenous language programs serve as an important starting point for creating a more inclusive country. However, this investment is unavailable to the majority of post-secondary institutions, who also play a role in the preservation and revitalization of Indigenous cultures and languages.

The USC urges the Government of Canada to expand the eligibility requirements for the Indigenous Languages Component to ensure that Indigenous cohorts housed within non-Indigenous institutions, such as Western University's Indigenous Studies program, can apply for the funding.¹⁵

Following Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) Recommendation 61, the Government of Canada should develop an Indigenous Cultures Component of the Indigenous Languages and

Cultures Program. The investment will support culturally valuable activities, including arts and spirituality, which have been excluded under the Indigenous Languages Component. Post-secondary institutions, such as Western University, can play an important role in reconciliation and Indigenization initiatives to complement the work of Indigenous-led groups and ensure that post-secondary institutions prioritize Indigenous-led reconciliation initiatives.

Therefore, based on the TRC's Recommendation 14, the USC urges the Government of Canada to invest an additional \$100 million to support Indigenous reconciliation initiatives.¹⁶ We hope to see particular investments in the Indigenous Languages and Cultures Program as post-secondary institutions must take a leading role in long-term reconciliation initiatives.

¹⁵ Lakehead University, "[About our Indigenous Education Programs](#)," 2020

¹⁶ The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, "[Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada](#)," 2015

CONNECTIVITY FOR CANADIANS

4

Decrease the digital divide in Canada by ensuring that all Canadians have access to affordable high-speed internet by 2030 and reducing the costs associated with cell and wireless services by 25 percent.

A recent survey conducted by the USC, access to reliable internet services was identified as one of the primary barriers to education for students during the pandemic.¹⁷ Similarly, students across the country rely heavily upon high-speed internet for their studies. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need for increased investments in infrastructure to support largely online professional and academic environments as post-secondary institutions transition to largely online educational models.¹⁸ Without access to the internet, students will be significantly disadvantaged in new online learning models. Affordable access to high-speed internet plays a significant role in improving the accessibility of post-secondary education in Canada.

However, it is not enough to make high-speed internet accessible, it must be affordable for all Canadians. Financial barriers serve as a key obstacle to accessing high-speed internet. For instance, nearly half of Canadian households with an annual income of \$30,000 or less do not have access to high-speed internet.¹⁹ Students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, students living in rural areas, and students living on

reserves often face unreliable internet connections, which can adversely impact their academic success.²⁰ Therefore, in order to ensure that all Canadians have equitable access to post-secondary education, it is integral that the Government of Canada address the digital divide in Canada by ensuring that all Canadians have access to affordable high-speed internet by 2030 and reducing the costs associated with cell and wireless services by 25 percent.

17 The University Students' Council, "Students are Still Worried: COVID-19 and Post Secondary Education" (CASA), "COVID-19 Student Experience Survey," June 23, 2020.

18 University Affairs, "[COVID-19: Updates on Canada's Universities](#)," University Affairs, July 14, 2020

19 Ibid.

20 Andrew Lupton, "[In the time of COVID-19, slow Internet is more than an annoyance](#)," CBC News, Mar 27, 2020

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Ontario (UWO), 2020.

