Student Financial Aid and Scholarships

Expires: April 30, 2028

Facts

1. University education is not only a benefit to individual graduates, but is also a public good due to positive impacts on economic productivity and government revenue. [1]
2. The University of Alberta, the Government of Alberta, and the Government of Canada have a responsibility to make post-secondary education accessible to qualified people of all backgrounds so that they may achieve their full potential. [2,3]
3. The opportunity cost of participating in post-secondary education is both the direct expenses students incur (tuition, fees, the cost of educational materials, and living expenses) as well as all potential income students lose when they choose to attend a post-secondary institution.
4. The cost of university education has increased rapidly in Canada in recent decades, with tuition for a bachelors in Canada rising over 190% in real terms since 1981. This resulted in 54% of Canadian bachelor graduates having owed debt at time of graduation, with 45% owing debts larger than $25 000. [5]
    a. 53% of Alberta post-secondary graduates owe debt at time o graduation, with 52% owing debts larger than $25 000.[6]
    b. The average bachelor debt owed at time of graduation is $28 000 for all Canadians,[5] with the average bachelor debt owed at time of graduation being $31 000 for Albertans.[6]
5. The high cost of university education is both a disincentive to beginning a university education and an obstacle to completing one.
6. Some students require either full or part-time employment while attending university to meet their financial needs, which can reduce their opportunities for academic achievement and extracurricular activity.
7. Both needs-based and merit-based awards, and both repayable and non-repayable aid, are integral parts of the student financial aid system, as they provide students with the support needed to complete their education.
    a. Bursaries are non-repayable funds that help with academic and basic living costs for students who find themselves in financial need. [7]
    b. Scholarships and awards are available for students as non-repayable funds based on different criteria that may include needs-based and/or merit-based considerations. [8]
    c. The Emergency Loan Program and student loans both constitute repayable financial aid. [9,10]
8. Needs-based aid plays an essential role in allowing students from less privileged socioeconomic backgrounds to access university education.
9. Merit-based awards are not sufficient on their own to ensure the accessibility of post-secondary education. [11]
10. Up-front, non-repayable, needs-based grants are the most effective student financial aid distribution mechanism for ensuring greater accessibility of post-secondary education. [12]
    a. Up-front, non-repayable, needs-based grants can focus on students who most need aid, as opposed to other methods, such as tax credits, which tend to primarily benefit more affluent families.[13]
11. 56.9% of surveyed University of Alberta students who sought needs-based financial aid reported the application being too difficult or opaque indicating inaccessibility, and hence, inefficiency in providing appropriate aid to students. [14]
12. Alberta Student Aid funded scholarships do not consider approved accommodations from students registered with Accessibility Resources for an approved reduced courseload.[14]
13. While the post-secondary system requires a strong student financial aid system, reducing the total cost of a university education is the best way to ensure the accessibility of post-secondary education.

Resolutions

1. The Students' Union shall advocate for a provincial financial aid system that:
    a. Includes increased relative and absolute amounts of non-repayable assistance, including but not limited to grants and bursaries;
    b. Recognizes the importance of needs-based student financial aid that increases the relative and absolute amounts and number of needs-based aid awards, based on students' financial need and/or involvement;
    c. Is accessible to all Alberta students attending not-for-profit post-secondary institutions;
    d. Recognizes the complete overhead costs of education to the learner including, but not limited to, rent and utility costs, textbook and materials costs, transportation costs, food, personal care, internet, and computer costs;
    e. Includes adjustments to all forms of financial assistance to reflect changes in market realities as they affect students; and catastrophic events
    f. Eases the growing burden of student debt to post-secondary graduates;
    g. Increases the number of awards targeted to traditionally barriered populations, including but not limited to, Aboriginal students, rural students, students with disabilities, and low-income students.
    h. Acknowledges the unique financial needs of students with dependents and students living with disabilities, and provides the necessary resources to ensure those needs are met;
    i. Does not discriminate against students with approved accommodations, such as reduced courseloads.
2. The Students' Union shall advocate for student financial assistance provided by the University of Alberta that:
    a. Increases the number and value of needs-based awards to continuing undergraduate students such that they are consistent with the number and value of entrance awards;
    b. Increases the monetary value of awards and bursaries in conjunction with any increase to the cost of higher education;
    c. Increases the number of available awards as enrolment of students increases;
    d. Annually discloses the ratio of needs to merit-based aid, and the distribution of aid between years of study;
    e. Has an efficient application process that connects more students to funding.
3. The Students' Union shall advocate that donors support students from diverse backgrounds and with diverse skills via scholarships and bursaries.
4. The Students' Union shall advocate the University of Alberta to increase the number and value of awards granted to continuing undergraduate students in order to be consistent with the number and value of entrance awards.
5. The Students' Union shall advocate the University of Alberta and the Government of Alberta to increase the relative and absolute amounts of scholarships and bursaries that are awarded based on the students' financial need and/or involvement.
6. The Students' Union shall work towards tailoring the SU Awards to a needs-based model to reward not only excellence in leadership and academics, but also to those who need financial support the most.
7. The Student's Union shall advocate that more of the merit-based awards provided by the University of Alberta and the Government of Alberta, consider financial need.
8. The Students' Union shall advocate that a significant portion of the merit-based awards provided by the University of Alberta and the Government of Alberta are on the basis of leadership and community involvement rather than academic performance.
9. The Students' Union shall advocate that the University of Alberta and the Government of Alberta publish detailed statistics regarding the demographic composition of student aid recipients, their sector of study, and other information that may be relevant to determine the impact of student financial aid on post-secondary participation rates.

[1.] Economic Impact Study, University of Alberta 2023. https://www.ualberta.ca/media-library/impact-report/u-of-a-economic-impact-study-report.pdf

[2.] United Nations Sustainable Developments Goals (Goal 4, Target 4.3) https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal4

3. Government of Canada (Sustainable Development Goal 4: Quality Education)
https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/agenda-2030/quality-education.html
4. Undergraduate Tuition Trends in Canada and Alberta
https://www.su.ualberta.ca/media/uploads/ 1143/Undergraduate%20Tuition%20Trends%
20in%20Canada%20and%20Alberta.pdf
5. Statistics Canada (Student debt from all sources, by province of study and level of study)
https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv. action?pid=3710003601&pickMembers%5B
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7. University of Alberta (Financial Support & Advising) https://www.ualberta.ca/admissions/underg
raduate/tuition-and-scholarships/financial-s upport.html?
8. University of Alberta (Awards by Faculty) https://www.ualberta.ca/registrar/scholarships-awards-financial-
support/undergraduate-awards/awards-by-faculty/index.html
9. University of Alberta (Emergency Loan) https://www.ualberta.ca/registrar/scholarships-awards-financial-
support/bursaries-emergency-funding/emergency-loan.html
10. University of Alberta (Student Loans) https://www.ualberta.ca/registrar/scholarships-awards-financial-
support/student-loans/index.html
11. Heller, D. (March 2006). Merit aid and college access. In Symposium on the consequences of
merit-based student aid. Madison: University of Wisconsin
https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.544.2863&rep=rep1&type=pdf
12. Up-Front Grants: An Efficient Choice for Students and Families
https://www.su.ualberta.ca/media/uploads/1143/UpFrontGrants.pdf
13. Accessing Needs-Based Financial Aid
https://www.su.ualberta.ca/media/uploads/1143/Accessing%20Needs-Based%20Financial%20Aid.pdf
14. University of Alberta (Additional Scholarship Information)
https://www.ualberta.ca/registrar/scholarships-awards-financial-support/undergraduate-awards/additional-
scholarship-information.html

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