

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.

2019/20 PRIORITIES

Institutional Funding

In May 2015 the Government of Alberta announced a complete review of the province's adult learning system. This was to include a review of the institutional funding format. However, the findings of this review were never made public.

Alberta's per-student funding for post-secondary students is among the highest in the country[1]. While this funding is important, the impact is not being felt by students. Inefficient spending by post-secondary institutions can be seen inside and outside of classrooms and threatens the safety and reputation of institutions. Ensuring institutional funding is being used appropriately and is supporting front line education is of the utmost importance to students.

Institutions must also be proactive and strategic in addressing deferred maintenance liabilities; the safety of students, their ability to learn and the reputation of our world-class institutions are at risk. CAUS has identified gaps in funding that, if left unaddressed, will negatively impact the quality and

efficacy of the post-secondary experience and limit research capacity, instructional environments, and physical capacity.

CAUS calls on the Government of Alberta to ensure transparency in post-secondary operating grants calculations and with spending, especially spending for central administration. We further call on the government to work with institutions to proactively address the increasing deferred maintenance liability on campuses across the province with a combination of public and private funding to ensure that it does not continue to grow and negatively impact students.

[1] <http://higheredstrategy.com/comparing-provincial-expenditures-on-post-secondary-education/>

Affordability & Student Financial Aid

Alberta has consistently had one of the lowest post-secondary participation rates in Canada. [2] One way to address this is through needs-based, up-front grants. CAUS recommends that the over \$200 million currently spent on tuition and education tax credits be redirected towards up-front needs-based grants. Such a shift would simultaneously increase economic efficiency as up-front grants are easier to internalize and make post-secondary education more affordable while requiring no additional government expenditures. These grants should be provided based on a student's level of academic success and their financial need in order to ensure that the grants are providing the largest possible benefit to students.

Furthermore, international students lack the same protections as domestic students and face unique hurdles when it comes to affordability of education. CAUS recommends that the Government of Alberta mandate that Boards of Governors keep international student tuition increases tied to no more than CPI.

[2] 2019 Ministry of Advanced Education Business Plan, Government of Alberta

Mental Health

The need for high quality, student-focused, on-campus mental health services is still present across the province. Alberta students are concerned about the uncertainty of funding and the disparity of available services between institutions. CAUS believes that funding levels should be based in part on a per-student basis, with additional consideration accounting for higher needs regions like Northern Alberta. It has been found that many mental health issues emerge in the years that individuals traditionally attend post-secondary, and the number of students with complex and pre-existing mental health issues attending post-secondary in Alberta is increasing.[3] Having on-campus mental health supports for every student to access can keep students engaged with their studies and campus life, rather than relying on costly and inaccessible alternatives.

This funding and its strategic spending, is vital to support students to access their full potential, cope with the stresses of higher education, and focus on making a positive impact with their newfound skills and knowledge. CAUS recommends that the Government of Alberta continues to fund mental health services on campus, and ensure funding is determined on an equitable basis through transparent criteria.

[3] Alberta Advanced Education, Advisory Panel on Post-Secondary Mental Health Final Recommendations Report (2017)

Sexual Violence Policy and Funding

Sexual violence is a prevalent issue on our campuses across Alberta. Its impact on victims can be 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 and indecent exposure and verbal harassment. Students deserve to be safe while obtaining an education and the threat of sexual violence hinders this.

CAUS believes the safety and success of all students is paramount, and calls for increased funding from the Government of Alberta for sexual

violence prevention and response. This funding would support a proactive approach to addressing sexual violence on campus including awareness campaigns, inclusivity initiatives, consent education, training students and faculty members to be responders to sexual violence, as well as allowing for more counselors to be available for people who have been affected by sexual violence.

Student Employment / Work-integrated Learning

Access to meaningful work experience opportunities continues to be among the most pressing concerns for students at Alberta universities as they eye the difficult job market that awaits them upon graduation. When students are given the opportunity to gain degree-relevant work experience during their studies, their post-graduation chances of finding work in their chosen fields are greatly improved.

CAUS calls on the Government of Alberta to enhance its support for work-integrated learning opportunities by expanding the Summer Temporary Employment Program (STEP) to operate year-round. CAUS further recommends that the government work to reduce barriers to work-integrated learning that are faced by international students, by ensuring that participation in a co-op or work experience will not impact a student's tuition guarantee, and work with the federal government to remove the weekly cap on the number of hours that students are allowed to work under a study permit.

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