July 13, 2020

RE: Post-COVID-19 Funding for Advanced Education

Minister Nicolaides,

COVID-19 has caused world-wide disruptions to post-secondary education. Here in Alberta, the challenge of pivoting to remote learning has been exacerbated by two consecutive cuts to provincial funding for advanced education. These cuts have resulted in thousands of jobs lost at post-secondary institutions across the province, with more job losses projected across the sector in the coming years.

Amid this global economic crisis, students in Alberta have been asked to shoulder a greater proportion of the cost of their education. Many students have struggled to find employment, including internships or co-op placements, this summer. While students understand there is a cost to their education and are willing to pay their share of this cost, allowing tuition to increase by up to 7% per year for the next three years places an undue financial hardship on students. De-regulating tuition increases for international students has resulted in a planned increase of 10% at the University of Calgary for the 2020-21 academic year.

Returning to in-person classes, even incrementally with a small proportion of students on campus at any given time, comes at an increased cost as well. Students are expected to supply their own masks and other personal protective equipment, and institutions must install plexiglass shields and increase the frequency of cleaning. Furthermore, the deferred infrastructure maintenance burden at the University of Calgary has surpassed $550 million. These additional expenses come at a time when the University of Calgary reports its provincial funding has been reduced to 2010 levels, when there were over 3,100 fewer students on campus.

Given the increased financial burdens on both students and the institutions that support their education and safety, we ask that the Government of Alberta:

- Rescind the amendment to the Tuition Regulation which raises the annual tuition increase cap from the consumer price index (CPI) to 7% per year and re-regulate international student tuition increases, directing institutions that have approved tuition increases above CPI for both domestic and international students to cap these increases at CPI for 2020/21 and all following academic years.

- Provide emergency financial aid directly to students to supplement the additional costs of accessing technology required for remote learning and personal protective equipment required for in-person experiential learning, like the recent student-directed support provided by the Government of British Columbia.¹

• Reverse the cuts to Campus Alberta Grants as outlined in Budget 2020, like the recent reversal of budgetary cuts for post-secondary institutions in Manitoba\(^2\), and provide emergency funding to institutions to reduce the cost of tuition for students.

• Given that deferred maintenance at the University of Calgary currently sits at $556 million, direct a portion of the $10 billion infrastructure investment included in Alberta’s economic recovery plan to specifically address the growing deferred maintenance burden at the University of Calgary\(^3\), similar to the recent $16 million investment in UAlberta infrastructure restoration.

The federal government has increased financial aid for students, recognizing the hardships they faced this summer due to loss of employment opportunities. Post-secondary institutions in Alberta have pivoted to remote learning and offered increased student hardship funding to help compensate for unexpected expenses and ensure continuity of education to the best of their ability.

We expect the Government of Alberta to provide aid to post-secondary students as well, and we are disappointed that more has not yet been done to support current and future students in our province. We would like to arrange a meeting with you and your team to discuss our asks further before students return to class in September.

Economic recovery will require an innovative, adaptable, and highly skilled workforce. Post-secondary students in Alberta must be supported by the government to realize this outcome. We are calling on the province to support students and the institutions they attend, so that they may drive the economy forward and emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic stronger than ever.

Respectfully submitted,

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President  
Students’ Union, University of Calgary

CC: MLA David Eggen, Advanced Education Critic  
Dr. Ed McCauley, President, University of Calgary  
Dr. Dru Marshall, Provost, University of Calgary  
Geeta Sankappanavar, Chair, University of Calgary Board of Governors