



EDUCATION FOR ALL



Education For All: Creating an Accessible Campus with a Holistic Lens

**Guidelines and Recommendations for the University of Toronto
Scarborough - 2020/2021**

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Preamble

Tuition fees, digital access, and underlying social issues have been consistent barriers that impact students' education. Throughout decades, Ontario students have been met with discriminatory and elite practices that have prevented students from pursuing higher education and have immensely hindered their learning capacity.

The COVID-19 climate has exacerbated these issues to exponential heights. The financial and physical challenges students face have become far more extreme, and have drastically reduced the quality of education that post-secondary institutions provide. The lack of support for new graduates and depleting job opportunities have left little room for professional development. International students face greater barriers now more than ever, and digital access is an expensive commodity that has been set as a *requirement* for online education.

The University of Toronto Scarborough attempts to commit to creating an environment that is inclusive of all persons and treats all members of the community in an equitable manner. Even though we know, that it is ultimately not the institution that brings about these changes, it is the Student Union and the student body at large who are often at the forefront of creating these changes due to the university's inaction. However, the continued increase in tuition costs and lack of support for students during a global pandemic at an institutional level clearly shows a disconnect between the University's statements and their actions. During the Winter 2020 semester, the University of Toronto introduced an emergency CR/NCR policy that allowed students temporary flexibility in the new emergency climate. Through the university's commitment and their reactivity towards CR/NCR policies, we see that the University has an understanding of student's academic struggles. The institution's governing bodies understand the need for change, particularly within the COVID climate. However, though this understanding is recognized, the action they must take to truly support students' academic success is incomplete and lacking. Students are demanding these changes once again, indicating there is still work to be done.

Students are complex people, leading nuanced lives. A student is not merely a pupil, but also an entrepreneur, caregiver, advocate, community change-maker, and essential worker. Students both choose to but are also often pushed to wear many hats, being spread thin in what they take on and set to accomplish. A student's life is incredibly intersectional, and their academic supports should reflect a thorough understanding of this.

With unemployment, food insecurity, and housing insecurity on a rampant rise, students continue to face prolonged health concerns that stem from COVID-19 and beyond. The social determinants of health cannot be ignored, and the least that can be done is to reduce the barriers to knowledge translation and education. Giving students a healthy and encouraging platform to specialize their learning, refine their skills, and become the leaders we need today and tomorrow - the



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epidemiologists, the mental health experts, the scientists, and the healthcare professionals we couldn't survive without, let alone during the era of COVID-19.

In order to address the intersectional lives of UofT students, the SCSU has formulated **5 key demands** to make post-secondary education accessible for all learners. Subsidizing tuition costs, improving digital access, and providing adequate supports are only the first steps to creating an education system that is truly accessible for all. We have launched our *Education For All Campaign* to persuade the University of Toronto, Scarborough Campus administration and political leaders of this city and country, to understand the intersecting realities of being a UTSC student and make access to education a priority. The students have been voicing their concerns, the Union representing them has done the same, it is time for them to be listened to and heard!

This Lobby Document aims to reimagine a new education system that reduces challenges and eliminates barriers students may face in their academic journey at The University of Toronto, Scarborough Campus with 5 key demands for the University of Toronto Administration:

Below, you will find the list of all our demands:

Demand 1: Immediate reduction/ cancellation of tuition fees for all students for the 2020-2021 academic year by increasing public funding

Demand 2: Cancel the international tuition fee increase planned for 2020-2021, and make the necessary adjustments to reduce tuition for classes operating remotely.

Demand 3: A two-year freeze on all interest on public student loans for all undergraduate students and new graduates

Demand 4: Providing more grants and not loans for all undergraduate students

Demand 5: Support learners accessing their education remotely by investing in public access to the internet and necessary technology/equipment



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Demand #1: Immediate reduction/ cancellation of tuition fees for all students for the 2020-2021 academic year by increasing public funding

DEMAND 1:

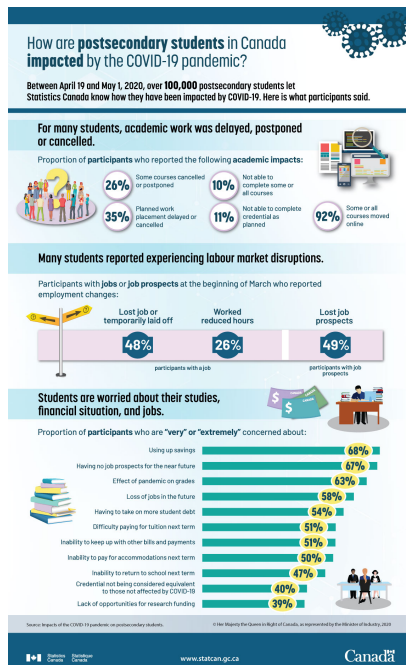
Immediate Reduction of Tuition fees for all students for 2020-2021 academic year by increasing public funding

What does an immediate reduction of tuition look like?

The University of Toronto has become a global leader in post-secondary education. Every year, thousands of students enrol to receive ‘world-class’, ‘high-tier education’, but, at what cost?

High tuition fees have detrimental impacts on students as the cost of post-secondary education in Canada continues to rise and the COVID-19 crisis intensifies students’ financial hardships.

UTSC students are heavily impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Below, you will see some of the impacts students have faced during the COVID-19 pandemic. Most students are worried about their financial situation, studies, health, and jobs. It is a turbulent and unprecedented time that the world is facing, but in particular, with a lack of support or inaccessible ones, the strains become more difficult on young people and students in particular. All of these factors continue to add to the mental health and domestic concerns that have and had already existed in the past- these concerns are literally tied to the livelihood and survival of the students.



Additionally, the tuition fees are still high, particularly for International Students. International Students already face difficulties working, receiving adequate healthcare and face many additional unique challenges and barriers. Displayed below are how much current UTSC students are paying for the 2020-2021 school year. The cost of tuition continues to increase from last year’s tuition fees, while students are getting an objectively lower quality of education. In addition to these concerns, the pandemic has only been exacerbating all of these existing hurdles.

2020-21 Tuition Fees

- **Computer Science domestic:** \$6,100
- **International:** \$61,330
- **Management domestic:** \$6,100
- **International:** \$67,400



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- **All other program domestic:** \$6,100
- **International:** \$59,300

Additional Academic Fees

- **Co-op Programs:** \$970-\$1,368
- **Incidental/Ancillary Fees:** \$1,830.98
- **Residence Housing:** \$6,321-\$10,640
- **Books & School Supplies:** \$1,500 *Approximate cost of books and supplies for classes*
- **University Health Insurance (UHIP):** \$720 *Approximate 12-month annual cost. Mandatory for international students*

This is why public funding is needed for students to get an acceptable quality of education without having to spend more or worry about loans and expenses. These are barriers that make learning difficult, the focus and the trajectory are shifted all over the place, except where they should be. How are students expected to soundly attend to their studies?

Recommendations: *Lobby the government to increase public funding to reduce tuition for all UTSC undergraduate students by 25% in the 2021-2022 academic year.*

Recommendations: *Freeze the student tuition increases until the end of the COVID-19 pandemic and when students go back to school normally.*

Recommendations: *Working with the provincial government to create a funding strategy that allows for the cancellation of student tuition fee payments for the 2021-2022 academic year.*



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Demand #2: Cancel the international tuition fee increase planned for 2020-2021, and make the necessary adjustments to reduce tuition for classes operating remotely.

DEMAND 2:
Cancel the international tuition fee increase planned for 2020-2021, and make the necessary adjustments to reduce tuition for classes operating remotely

The Ontario government announced a 10% cut to domestic tuition in January 2019 and announced at the same time that tuition would be frozen for the 2020–2021 and 2021–2022 academic years. However, International fees are unaffected by the cuts and will rise by an average of 5.3% in the next year. The provincial government reduced operational grants by \$750 for every international student enrolled in an undergraduate or master’s program. This brings a lot of pressure to International Students, especially during the context of a pandemic.

University	Undergraduate - Canadian Students	Undergraduate - Foreign Students
Wilfrid Laurier University	\$5,663 - \$7,081	\$25,320 - \$25,320
Carleton University	\$6,067 - \$9,614	\$25,503 - \$33,757
Ryerson University	\$6,081 - \$6,110	\$25,680 - \$26,000
Brock University	\$5,917 - \$6,089	\$26,558 - \$26,558
McMaster University	\$5,955 - \$6,043	\$26,981 - \$30,744
Western University (excludes colleges)	\$6,050 - \$6,050	\$27,719 - \$31,042
York University	\$6,118 - \$6,118	\$28,633 - \$28,633
University of Waterloo	\$6,128 - \$7,611	\$28,744 - \$35,251
University of Toronto	\$6,100 - \$11,420	\$35,890 - \$55,110
University of Ottawa	\$6,088 - \$6,088	\$36,161 - \$36,161
Queen's University	\$6,083 - \$6,083	\$39,098 - \$46,191
University of Guelph	\$5,893 - \$6,091	\$9,730 - \$24,300

- It is important to be noted that the University of Toronto has one of the highest international fees amongst all universities in Ontario! But why is this?

(UofT has the highest maximum and third-highest minimum international student tuition among all Ontario Universities.)

Geography	Level of study	2016 / 2017	2017 / 2018	2018 / 2019	2019 / 2020	2020 / 2021
		Current dollars				
Canada(map)	Canadian undergraduate	6,375	6,618	6,822	6,468	6,580
	Canadian graduate	6,784	6,920	7,388	7,186	7,304
	International undergraduate	23,677	25,549	27,613	29,883	32,019
	International graduate	15,422	16,326	16,995	17,934	19,252



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(Tuition of international students in Canada is 4.62 times higher than that of domestic students in 2019/2020 and 4.86 times higher in 2020/2021; the increase would be even more in 2021/2022!)

During the pandemic, a number of currencies in various countries have been devaluating. Many International Students' families are experiencing job loss and business shutdowns and thus, not generating positive cash flow to support their students who live abroad. Further, students who rely on part-time jobs to assist in the expensive international funding are no longer able to support themselves due to business closures in Canada and many already face difficulties finding jobs. With all these concerns arising across the globe, in the summer of 2020, International Students took to creating a petition with a number of demands that reflected the urgency of the issue. Regardless of the immense efforts made by students, the action, or lack thereof, has not reflected an understanding of the dire circumstances that students are facing.

Recommendations: Lobby the provincial government to promise to increase the operational grants by an extra \$750 for every international student enrolled in an undergraduate or master's program for 2021-2022.



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Demand #3: A two-year freeze on all interest on public student loans for all undergraduate students and new graduates

DEMAND 3:

A two-year freeze on all interest on public student loans for all undergraduate students new graduates



The tuition debt itself is already high for students, and the piling interest on public student loans makes it even more complex and straining for students to pay off their loans. The pandemic has made paying tuition fees harder than usual as there is an extensive decline in students' job opportunities, to illustrate entry-level job postings are down 68% due to the pandemic.

This is why we are demanding a two-year freeze on all the interest on public student loans for all undergraduates and new graduates. The 2018 survey released by Statistics

Canada reports that, on average, University bachelor's graduates have a debt of around \$28,000. To illustrate the students' increasing/urgent needs, just between Oct.1.2020 to late November, there were 169,000 applications for repayment assistance. A repayment assistance plan protects borrowers from having to repay their student loans until they make at least \$25,000 per year.

Now more than ever, students need assistance and are in dire need of help. The Canadian Government introduced a freeze on a federal student loan payment and interest from March 30th to September 30th due to the current situation of the pandemic. However, it is essential to note that the payment freeze overlapped with the pre-existing six-month non-payment period, which offers no additional benefits to post-secondary students graduating during the pandemic. Students should not be debating between meeting their basic needs in these unique times, such as paying rent, food, healthcare, mental wellness, or paying loans for their public debt.

Due to the Pandemic, the entry-level jobs have gone down by 68%, and recent graduates have been affected enormously because of the decline in the job market. There is a rise in the unemployment rate for youth in Canada, from 10.3% in February 2020 to a historical high of 29.4% as of May 2020. It is time that the Government prioritizes the needs of young people and students and assists in easing their difficult situation, making it less daunting by introducing a 2-year freeze on student loans for all undergraduates and recent graduates. The government needs to consider the COVID-19 conditions and the heavy impacts in which it has impacted Canada's youth with a gradual increase in the loss of summer jobs and internships.

Recommendations: Lobby the Government to increase funding to support students to create more job opportunities

Recommendations: Develop a career-building strategy to help students with employment.



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Demand #4: Providing more grants and not loans for all undergraduate students

DEMAND 4:
 Providing more grants and fewer loans for all undergraduate

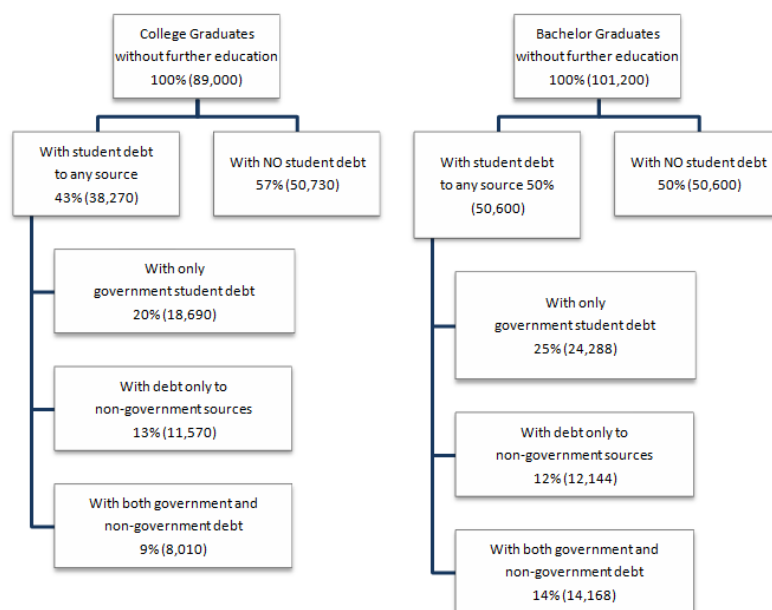
The skyrocketing tuition fees are a heavy burden that has only increased over the years, and these costs have led to greater barriers amid the COVID-19 pandemic. What students need, now more than ever, are more grants and not loans. It is crucial to note that the barriers affiliated with student debt repayment are intersectional and nuanced. There are many factors that can cause adversities with paying back student loans, such as graduating at an older age, having a disability, financial hardships, dependents to care for, and other responsibilities.

The current climate of the pandemic has added increased challenges with student loan repayment due to the increase of joblessness and economic repercussions. These factors continue to worsen the many burdens that students experience, especially with regards to mental health. While there is government financial aid available, many students, such as international students, are not eligible for the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB), and the Canada Emergency Student Benefit (CESB) fails to be a truly effective solution for *all* students. CESB serves as a band-aid solution as opposed to addressing the core issues rooted in student debt. These performative acts have failed to solve the underlying systemic issues that have been in place way before the pandemic and have yet to go away.

Student loans are a growing problem, and with at least 50% of undergraduate students being riddled with debt upon graduating prior to the pandemic, this is a problem that has only worsened in today's climate and needs to be addressed immediately. Research shows that student debt at the

Bachelor's level has only shifted upwards, with total debt upon graduation shifting from \$19,400 in 2005 to \$24,000 in 2015. The percentage of students in Ontario who owed debt upon graduation also shifted from 40% in 2005 to 51% in 2015, displaying a starkly increasing trend of student debt in Ontario. At its current rate, student debt is projected to continue increasing, turning post-secondary education into a pocket bank for the administration, and a luxury

Figure 4.1.1
 Profile of student debt at graduation for college and bachelor graduates. Class of 2009-2010.



Source: Statistics Canada, National Graduates Survey, 2013 (Class of 2009-2010).



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for the privileged instead of a right for *everyone*.

Students have continuously been neglected by the government, and the pandemic has greatly highlighted the pre-existing disparities set in today's post-secondary education system. In Canada's \$100 billion recovery plan, the Federal and Provincial government has once again failed to prioritize students who are the future. Today's students will shape tomorrow's future, hence these groups need to be supported and prioritized.

We demand immediate forgiveness of all student loans to support students during the COVID-19 pandemic. What students really need is free education, and investing in students is beneficial for the long-term economic success of the nation and province of Ontario as a whole. Student loans need to be reduced and replaced with increased grants to make post-secondary education more affordable, accessible, and attainable for all students.

Recommendation: Lobby the Provincial and Federal governments to increase grants for post-secondary education institutions to ensure institutions have adequate funding; and

Recommendations: Lobby the Provincial Government to increase public funding and create a Provincial Debt-Forgiveness Strategy.



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Demand #5: Support learners accessing their education remotely by investing in public access to the internet and necessary technology/equipment

DEMAND 5:

Making remote online learning more accessible and equitable



We have the right to acquire quality education, but COVID-19 has allowed us to pinpoint multiple barriers as to why students are not receiving the quality education that they deserve and need. Two of the main digital barriers are the ability to access high-speed internet and obtaining the necessary technology and equipment needed- considering the sudden shift from an in-person learning environment to a completely remote online learning experience.

The University of Toronto Scarborough has a five year plan on “Inspiring Inclusive Excellence”, yet UTSC has failed to provide an academic support plan for students to navigate through the

pandemic. Not prioritizing the needs of your students, and having the students advocate for themselves for an education that is accessible for all shows how little to no interest or consideration the university has in improving the quality of education for their students who are currently struggling to get by.

What the university fails to recognize is that students need internet access now more than ever- especially after losing their reliable sources of connection from schools or public libraries as a result of the pandemic. This digital divide creates unequal access for students who simply are unable to afford high-quality and stable internet connections. Students who are already dealing with financial barriers have to now invest in purchasing high-quality internet connections just to be able to use BB Collaborate or other platforms that require stable internet to function.

Access to the Internet and digital technologies has become essential for most of us in our everyday lives. Technology enables us to access our education considering our learning experiences are restricted. Further barriers include a lack of the necessary technological equipment to actually complete their education. As this pandemic crisis continues to unfold, access to a working computer, a webcam and a microphone is a requirement in order to do school but not everyone has the necessary technological equipment to complete their studies. The SCSU recognized that technology is one of the biggest barriers that our students are facing, and we prioritized having one of our service centres provide laptops that students can rent out for free because once again student unions take action to address the gaps before our institution’s inaction. Making sure that your students have the necessary technological support especially if remote online learning is the only way students can complete their studies.

Recommendation: Create a support fund for students to afford technology and equipment to continue pursuing their education; and

Recommendation: Establish a COVID-19 Academic Strategy plan to identify and address students’ digital access needs and encompass all academic needs presented by the implications of the pandemic.



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Closing Remarks



To summarize, our demands reflect the holistic needs of all students, encompassing financial and academic barriers, related but not limited to tuition fees, digital access, and mental health implications, in accordance with the following recommendations:

- *Lobby the provincial government to increase operational grants by an extra \$750 for every international student enrolled in an undergraduate or master's program for the 2021-22 academic year; and*
- *Establish a support fund for students to afford technology and equipment to continue pursuing their education; and*
- *Collaborate with fellow UofT Campuses to create a Tri-Campus COVID-19 Academic Strategy plan to identify and address students' digital access needs and encompass all academic needs presented by the implications of the pandemic; and*
- *Lobby the Provincial government to increase public funding to reduce tuition for all UTSC undergraduate students by 25% in the 2021-2022 academic year; and*
- *Freeze the student tuition cost increases until the end of the COVID-19 pandemic; and*
- *Cancel student tuition fee payments for the 2021-2022 academic year.*

All in all, it is no secret that students need better support from post-secondary institutions. Both before and during the pandemic, students have been faced with immense debt loads, social and racial inequities, countless mental health implications, and now, many face incredible hardships navigating digital access needs. The University of Toronto is a leader in academia, innovation, and governance, Now, more than ever, students need these demands met and we look to the University of Toronto to set a precedent for not only all post-secondary institutions, but the future generation of youth and their academic aspirations to pursue higher education. The time to act is now, and it is time to sow the seeds for the future generation; **the same barriers that we face as students today, cannot be the same barriers that students face 5 to 10 years from now.**



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Appendix

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