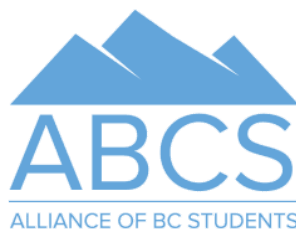


ALLIANCE OF
BC STUDENTS



LOBBY DAYS SPRING
2021
BACKGROUND

FEBRUARY, 2021



Overview of Recommendations

Investing in Post-Secondary Education

The Alliance of BC Students recommends that the Province of British Columbia conduct a funding review of provincial post-secondary institutions' operating grants, ensuring that students, faculty, and staff associations are fully integrated throughout the review process

The Alliance of BC Students further recommends that the Province of British Columbia develop an International Student Education Strategy that ensures that international students' cost of education is predictable, and reduces institutions' reliance on international student tuition.

Building Capacity of Mental Health Services

The Alliance of BC Students recommends that the Province of British Columbia ensure that students are able to access free- to low-cost, multi-session counselling through new investments in e-health and other remote technologies, either through investments in the existing Here2Talk service, or through newly developed programs.

Ensuring Graduate Student Access to Non-Repayable Aid

The Alliance of BC Students recommends that the Province of British Columbia permanently establish the BC Graduate Scholarship fund, and expand the eligibility criteria to include students in non-STEM disciplines at a total annual cost of \$8 million.

The Alliance of BC Students further recommends that the Province of British Columbia expand the eligibility criteria for the BC Access Grant to include graduate students.

Supporting Students with Disabilities

The Alliance of BC Students recommends that the Province of British Columbia conduct a province-wide survey on the experiences of students with disabilities in post-secondary education.

Fighting Sexualized Violence

The Alliance of BC Students recommends that the Province of British Columbia renew the \$760 000 to address campus sexualized violence on an annual basis.

The Alliance of BC Students further recommends that the Province of British Columbia adopt into regulation the 11 minimum standards identified by Students For Consent Culture under the Sexual Violence and Misconduct Policy Act.

Investing in Post-Secondary Education

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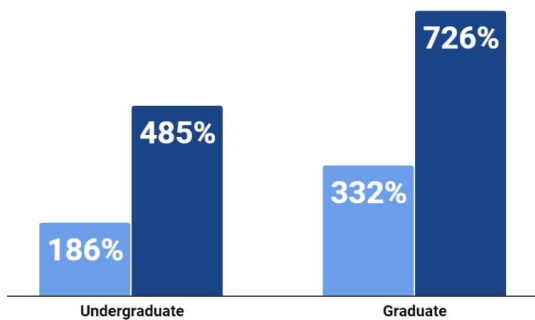
The Alliance of BC Students further recommends that the Province of British Columbia Develop an International Student Education Strategy that ensures that international students' cost of education is predictable, and reduces institutions' reliance on international student tuition

BC in Historical and Geographic Context

Post-secondary education is going to be one of the keys to BC's economic recovery - research has shown that high rates of post-secondary education in a population lead to greater economic prosperity for everyone.¹ Recovering from COVID-19 is going to take innovation, and ensuring that education is a priority will put BC in a strong position for long term recovery after the pandemic is over. Unfortunately, investments in post-secondary education have been in steady decline over the past few decades - in 1979, government funding made up almost 90% of an institution's funding,² but today, that number is dramatically lower. BC's post-secondary institutions currently receive only 33.63% of their funding from the province - the rest of their funding is made up through tuition, fees, and federal funding opportunities.³ However, it should be noted that federal funding is provided through research granting agencies and contracts and is directed almost entirely to the major research universities in BC.⁴ With so little of their

operating budgets being covered by provincial funding, post-secondary institutions in BC have been passing on the costs to students. As a result, tuition has skyrocketed far past regular increases to account for inflation. From 1991 to 2018:

■ Domestic ■ International



Tuition Increases since 1991

- Domestic undergraduate tuition rose 185%⁵
- Domestic graduate tuition rose 332%⁶
- International undergraduate tuition rose 485%⁷
- International graduate tuition rose 726%⁸

These tuition hikes have had devastating impacts on student financial wellbeing. The most recently available

data from the National Graduates Survey indicates that 40% of BC graduates owe debt at their time of graduation, with an average debt load of \$26,000.⁹ Of these graduates with debt, 32% had debt loads higher than \$30,000.⁹ These impacts are also gendered - despite making up only 55% of post-secondary enrolments,¹⁰ female students in BC make up 62% of students accessing financial aid.¹¹

In terms of funding per full-time-equivalent student, BC ranks in the bottom 3 lowest-spending provinces, and also ranks second lowest in government post-secondary expenditures as a percentage of provincial GDP.¹² As Higher Education Strategies Associates noted in their 2019 report on the state of post-secondary in Canada, “we are transitioning from a six-decade period where PSE was publicly-funded, into a new era where it can be better described as ‘publicly-aided’ ... declining provincial governments’ funding of institutions is the main cause of this change” (p. 9).⁴

Impact of Reduced Funding on Education Quality

This gap in provincial funding cannot be fully recovered through tuition alone. In addition to tuition hikes, the transition to ‘publicly-aided’ from ‘publicly-funded’ has meant that post-secondary institutions have had to adapt to a series of belt-tightening measures that have weakened the quality of education provided. One key way that this has been articulated is by cutting labour costs through increasing the amount of “Contract Academic Staff” hired into teaching positions, embracing what the Canadian Association of University Teachers calls “a corporate management model that relies on a poorly paid contingent workforce” (p. 6).¹³ Census data indicates there has been a 10% decline in full-time, full-year teaching positions from 2005 to 2015, but an increase of 79% in part-time, part-year positions within the same time frame.¹³

“the transition to ‘publicly-aided’ from ‘publicly-funded’ has meant that post-secondary institutions have had to adapt to a series of belt-tightening measures that have weakened the quality of education provided”

Unfortunately the experiences of contract staff make it very difficult for them to provide the same quality of education that they could if they were in permanent, secure positions. The precarity they experience due to their job and financial insecurity is well-documented as leading to “poor mental, physical, and work-related wellbeing; poor job attitudes; and decrements in performance, creativity, and adaptability” (p. 1912).¹⁴ These stresses are passed directly on to students - quality education cannot be provided by faculty who are rightfully pre-occupied by a constant struggle to make ends meet. As public investment in post-secondary institutions has

decreased, institutions have moved further away from their mandate of providing quality and accessible education, leaving students and faculty to bear an increasingly inequitable burden to make up for the loss.

International Tuition - the Importance of Predictability for Students and Institutions

As referenced above, the result of declining provincial funding is increases to tuition costs. However, it is important to note that the impacts of rising tuition have been disproportionate. Domestic students are currently protected by BC's Tuition Limit Policy, but no such protections exist for international students. Increases on international student tuition are currently unlimited by the provincial government, which has led to the tuition fees international students pay increasing at a much higher rate year over year than the tuition fees of their domestic counterparts.

Case Study: The average international student tuition fee rate for a bachelor of arts degree at the University of British Columbia in 2017/18 was \$28,007, but by 2020/21 had risen to \$38,816.¹⁵
This is an increase of 39% over 4 years.

These dramatic increases compound the stress that international students already experience due to discrimination and exclusion while they study in Canada.¹⁶ Unregulated tuition costs make estimating tuition year-to-year impossible. Though international students are required to prove that they have access to enough funding from their home country to finance their education in full before they are granted a study visa,¹⁷ when tuition cannot accurately be predicted from one year to the next, there is no way for them to adequately ensure that they have enough funding set aside for their entire education before

they come to Canada. To add to this, international students face federal limits on how much they are allowed to work in Canada while on a study visa,¹⁸ and many face discrimination in hiring practices or experience language barriers which make finding work more challenging.¹⁹ This makes it even harder to keep up with tuition and living costs that just keep rising.

Post-secondary institutions across Canada have become dependent on international student tuition to make up budget shortfalls, with Statistics Canada noting that international tuition fees accounted for over one-third of the tuition fees received by Canadian universities in 2018/2019.²⁰ Buoyed by the federal government's international education strategy announced in 2014, post-secondary institutions have been aggressively recruiting international students as their government funding has fallen.¹² At the University of British Columbia, for example, the budget tabled in April 2020 forecast 56% of the university's total tuition revenue for 2019/2020 to come from international tuition, despite international students making up only 26% of the

university's full-time equivalent enrolment. This translated into 22% of UBC's total budget being derived from international tuition.²¹

With such a large chunk of post-secondary budgets dependent on international student enrolment, the risks of this model become evident when enrolment is unexpectedly threatened. In other countries where there have been similar levels of dependence on international student tuition, when international student enrolment rates suddenly declined, it resulted in largely negative economic impacts which took years to recover from.²²

“Ensuring predictability is integral to student success, institutional resilience, and provincial economic well-being.”

As the pandemic has shown, the impacts of COVID-19 on a precarious funding model that depends on non-guaranteed revenue streams are obvious - though it is not yet known what the lasting impact of the global health emergency will be on international student enrolment, modelling by Statistics Canada indicates it could be severe:

“projection scenarios, built on trends in student permit holders, show that Canadian universities could possibly lose between \$377 million (or 0.8% of projected revenues) and \$3.4 billion (or 7.5% of projected revenues) in 2020/2021, depending on the size of the reduction in international student enrolments and the subsequent loss in tuition fees (unadjusted for inflation)” (sec. 3).²⁰

International students aren't just important to the post-secondary sector, they are important to BC's economy overall. In 2018, international students contributed \$3,988,723 to the provincial GDP, creating 45,164 jobs with \$2,454,329 in income revenue.²³ Ensuring predictability is integral to student success, institutional resilience, and provincial economic well-being. It is in everyone's best interest to create an international education strategy which promotes international student success and reduces institutional reliance on international student tuition.

Building Capacity of Mental Health Services

The Alliance of BC Students recommends that the Province of British Columbia ensure that students are able to access free- to low-cost, multi-session counselling through new investments in e-health and other remote technologies, either through investments in the existing Here2Talk service, or through newly developed programs.

Student Mental Health - A Pre-Existing Crisis Exacerbated by COVID-19

Financial strain, job loss, health concerns, and isolation have all had significant mental health impacts on British Columbians. This has only compounded the ongoing mental health conditions that students were facing pre-pandemic. In 2019, students reported that within the last twelve

In 2019, students reported that within the last twelve months:

- 63.6% felt hopeless,
- 51.6% felt so depressed it was difficult to function, and
- 68.9% felt overwhelming anxiety.¹

months: 63.6% felt hopeless, 51.6% felt so depressed it was difficult to function, and 68.9% felt overwhelming anxiety.¹ Female participants responded positively at higher rates in each category than male respondents.¹ Since the pandemic began, these challenges have been heightened significantly. In June, 70% of students reported feeling stressed, anxious, or isolated due to the pandemic, and 82% reported feeling worried about their futures following the pandemic, from health, to employment, to personal finances.²

In November of 2020, the University of Victoria ran a student and faculty survey on the experiences of navigating online learning during the fall semester of the pandemic.³ The results were telling:

- Students and faculty alike reported high degrees of stress, difficulties managing their workload, and an overall decline in mental wellbeing and satisfaction stemming from isolation.³
- When asked in what areas students required additional support, mental health resources were the most requested type of support by returning undergraduate students, with over 50% stating that this needed to be a priority.³
- Students also provided personal comments on how online learning was affecting their physical and mental wellbeing, pointing to worsening of pre-existing conditions such as ADHD, anxiety, depression and other disabilities, inability to escape tumultuous family situations, and financial difficulties due to a lack of work opportunities.³

Several students also raised specific concerns with the lack of ongoing access to mental health and counselling services. One student stated that:

“the lack of connection has arguably been the main factor that has caused so many students' mental health to deteriorate this term...[the university] needs to do more to prioritize students' mental health, especially while we are online, because right now students feel abandoned, unmotivated, and mentally broken” (p. 19).³

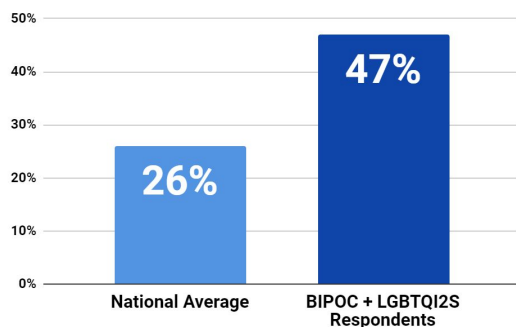
The Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC) estimates that the annual cost to the Canadian economy due to under-treated mental health concerns exceeds \$50 billion.⁴ Investing in mental health care is an essential part of building a prosperous province, both socially and economically. There were 180,669 full-time equivalent students enrolled in BC public post-secondary in the 2019/2020 academic year,⁵ representing a substantial portion of the BC population. Investing in the wellbeing of students will be essential to students' academic success and future prosperity, as well as that of the province.

“the annual cost to the Canadian economy due to under-treated mental health concerns exceeds \$50 billion.”⁴

Social Identity Factors and Mental Health Outcomes

Members of equity-seeking communities are experiencing even higher rates of mental distress than the national average. A study conducted in 2013 found that Indigenous students experienced

Likelihood of Reporting Significant Negative Mental Health Impacts Due to the Pandemic



higher rates of negative mental health indicators than the general student population, with Indigenous students being 11% more likely to report symptoms of depression that impaired functioning.⁶ Students who identify as a sexual minority are more likely to have unmet mental health needs, and are more likely to seek support.⁷

The COVID-19 pandemic has also had more negative impacts on certain equity-seeking communities. Gender and ethnicity play a significant role in understanding the mental health impacts of the pandemic on British Columbians.⁸ In British Columbia, half of women

reported worsened mental health compared to only 40.3% of men.⁹ Nationally, Black, Indigenous and people of colour (BIPOC) who were also members of the LGBTQ2SI+ community were twice as likely to report significant negative mental health impacts due to the pandemic than the national average (47% versus 26%).⁹ Mental health disparities can also be found between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations, and within Indigenous communities between men and women. 60% of Indigenous respondents reported “somewhat worse” or “much worse” mental health since the beginning of physical distancing measures, compared to 52% of non-Indigenous

respondents. Meanwhile, Indigenous women described their experiences being “quite a bit” to “extremely” stressful, compared to 32% of Indigenous men.¹⁰

Accessing Care

In order to combat high reported wait times for post-secondary counselling services, the Province introduced the Here2Talk 24/7 mental health service for BC post-secondary students in April 2020, which offers vital crisis and referral services.¹¹ While these investments were welcomed by student advocates, given the degree of mental distress that students are experiencing, these services need to be expanded to provide ongoing care. Here2Talk was designed to help get immediate single-session support to students outside of the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the status of student mental health has significantly declined since it was first announced.

“By providing accessible and ongoing mental health support to students, we will be able to continue preparing ourselves for the challenges that lay ahead.”

On June 26, 2019, the Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions released A Pathway to Hope, a multi-year strategy to comprehensively address the mental health needs of British Columbians. This strategy outlines a path for the government to take meaningful action to address these issues in a way that is primarily focused on preventative care, rather than crisis response. The 10-year strategy is based around four “priority actions”:

- supporting the wellness of children, youth and young adults,
- supporting Indigenous-led solutions,
- improving access and quality of care, and
- substance use: better care, saving lives.”¹²

Unmet mental health needs not only cost the BC and Canadian economies¹³, but also present significant barriers to accessing and thriving in post-secondary education. Ensuring that students are able to access and succeed in their education will be an integral part of BC’s ongoing response to the pandemic and its economic recovery moving forward.

The BC NDP made several commitments in their 2020 election platform to better support the mental health needs of British Columbians, including a specific focus on youth and young adults in the form of additional funding for Foundry services, which provide support to people under the age of 24.¹⁴ Unfortunately, these vital supports are not accessible to mature students. The BC NDP also committed to expanding access to counselling services by investing in e-health and other technologies as part of their 2020 election platform.¹⁴ Students are facing enormous challenges and experiencing some of the most significant mental health impacts due to the pandemic, and require additional ongoing support as they navigate an uncertain future.

Ensuring Graduate Student Access to Non-Repayable Aid

The Alliance of BC Students recommends that the Province of British Columbia permanently establish the BC Graduate Scholarship fund, and expand the eligibility criteria to include students in non-STEM disciplines at a total annual cost of \$8 million.

The Alliance of BC Students further recommends that the Province of British Columbia expand the eligibility criteria for the BC Access Grant to include graduate students.

Graduate Students: Integral to BC's Economic Future through Innovation

Graduate students are the key drivers of the research and innovation in the province. They play an outsized role in the research output of almost all research institutions in BC, first by conducting research in their time as graduate students and later as highly skilled researchers in the public and private sector. On average, a PhD student publishes 4 peer-reviewed journal or book chapter publications in the span of their studies.¹ In 2018, 7,488 master's and 972 doctoral degrees were conferred across the province.² Among UBC PhD Graduates from 2005-2013, 51% are now in careers in higher education, with the majority employed in research stream positions.³ Graduate students make an immense contribution to advancing and developing our economic future, both in their time as students and beyond.

"From 2005 to 2015, graduate student enrollment in Ontario, Quebec and Alberta increased by approximately 50%, where enrollment in BC increased by only 15%."⁴

Historically, BC has lagged behind other provinces in supporting graduate education. Unlike other provinces, BC did not have a provincial scholarship program to support graduate education until 2018. The consequences of this lack of investment are apparent in comparisons of graduate enrolment numbers between provinces. From 2005 to 2015, graduate student enrolment in Ontario, Quebec and Alberta increased by approximately 50%, where enrolment in BC increased by only 15%.⁴ To address this issue, the province introduced the first BC Graduate Scholarship Fund in 2018. This one-time \$12-million investment was meant to support 800 awards of \$15,000 each, providing graduate students in BC with scholarships to conduct research in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) disciplines.⁵

Graduate Research Funding: A Key Part of BC's COVID-19 Response

In recent months, the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the power of the Province's researchers to address a major issue urgently and effectively. Many of those researchers are graduate students and many more have received their training in graduate programs in the Province. At UBC, there are currently over 40 Covid-19 research projects, ranging from successful development potential treatments to investigating the pandemic's social impact.⁶ The University of Victoria has been leading Canadian health research in developing accessible and affordable

COVID-19 test kits,⁷ while SFU researchers and graduate students are developing AI tools for speeding up diagnosis.⁸ Graduate education is critical to developing skilled experts that can provide solutions to strengthen our healthcare system.

The Importance of Funding Non-STEM Research

While the BC Graduate Scholarship program has been a great success in supporting graduate education, the program can be significantly improved to expand its impact. Currently, the scholarship is only available to students studying in STEM disciplines - students in social sciences and humanities are excluded from accessing provincial funding, leaving a significant portion of the graduate student population without access to resources required to support their studies. In 2018/2019, there were 20,526 BHASE (Business, Humanities, Health, Arts, Social Science, and Education) graduate students studying in BC.²

The advancement of disciplines in the social sciences and humanities are essential in tackling the most pressing issues of our day from facilitating and managing access to health care to developing policies to address climate change, to managing an equitable recovery from the global pandemic.⁹ The future growth and development of the Canadian economy will require a balanced approach between STEM and non-STEM skill sets.¹⁰ Without this balance, the innovations of STEM research and innovation are under-utilized, making our innovation sector less competitive in the global economy.¹⁰ BHASE students are just as devoted to their research and education as their peers in STEM, and therefore should be eligible for similar funding. Properly funding humanities, education, business and social sciences research will be essential to BC's economic recovery and future prosperity.

“The future growth and development of the Canadian economy will require a balanced approach between STEM and non-STEM skill sets. Without this balance, the innovations of STEM research and innovation are under-utilized”¹⁰

Affordability and Access to Graduate Education

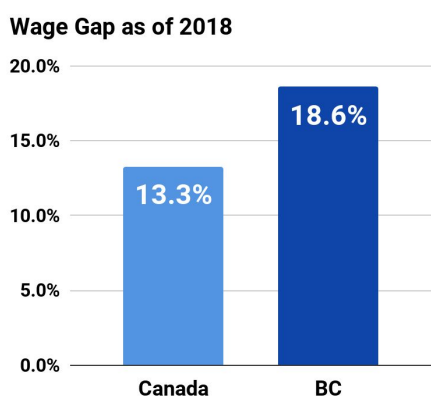
For everyone in the province to properly benefit from its world class graduate programs, graduate education must be made accessible and affordable to all British Columbians. According to the most recent data in BC, the average Master's degree holder will graduate with \$36,000 in debt, which is \$8,000 higher than the national average.¹¹ Between 1991 and 2018, the average tuition costs for a domestic graduate student rose by 332%.¹² To put these increases into perspective, the rate of inflation in Canada during the same time period was only 70.29%.¹³ Graduate students face increased financial pressures particularly due to the greater burden of student debt they incur because of a longer education path. The 2019 Alma Mater Society Academic Experience Survey found:

- 68% of graduate students experienced financial hardship related to housing
- 48% report financial hardship related to tuition and other expenses

- 42% of graduate students work part-time
- 35% rely on financial support from family
- 45% of graduate students report experiencing food insecurity in the last year
- 30% of students report having difficulty managing basic expenses.¹⁴

Gender Inequity, Student Debt, and the Pursuit of Graduate Education

The impact of student debt does not affect everyone equally, and this is especially important to consider in the context of post-graduate studies, which place even greater financial burdens on students. This burden is unfortunately magnified for female students both before and after graduation due to the gender pay gap and discriminatory hiring practices. The gender pay gap accounts for Canadian women earning approximately 13% less than men on average at the national level, and even women with the highest levels of educational attainment still earn on average 10% less than men.¹⁵ However, British Columbia has the worst provincial gender pay gap, with women making an average of almost 20% less than men in hourly wages.¹⁶ This income inequity makes it far more difficult for women graduates to repay any debt they may incur through their studies.^{17,}



¹⁸

Not only is the gender pay gap an issue in the private sector, but it is also prevalent within post-secondary institutions.¹⁹ A study by the Globe and Mail found that the average annual salary of a woman working in academia is \$14,437 less than a man's, and that men are more likely to be hired as permanent faculty than women.¹⁹

With 20% of PhD graduates finding full-time teaching employment in post-secondary institutions,²⁰ and holding an average of \$33,000 of debt in BC,¹¹ this persistent pay inequity undoubtedly has a substantial impact on women PhD holders.

Spotlight on BC:

At BC post-secondary institutions:

- women working at UBC earn **11% less** than men,
- women working at UVic earn **6% less** than men,
- women working at UNBC earn **8% less** than men.¹⁹

Supporting Students with Disabilities

The Alliance of BC Students recommends that the Province of British Columbia conduct a province-wide survey on the experiences of students with disabilities in post-secondary education.

Understanding the Experiences of Students with Disabilities in Post-Secondary Education

The current state of data on the experiences of students with disabilities in BC is considerably lacking. While organizations such as the National Educational Association of Disabled Students (NEADS) help to fill this information gap, their research focuses on the national level. Having data and a clear picture of the experiences of students with disabilities specifically in BC, especially during the COVID-19 public health emergency is essential to developing proper measures to address the unique challenges that this student population faces.¹ According to information compiled by Statistics in 2017, one in 5 (22%) Canadians aged 15 years and over - or about 6.2 million individuals - reported having one or more disabilities.² Reviewing the past surveys from the last 8 years, there has not been a province-wide survey conducted for BC on this matter.³

“Having data and a clear picture of the experiences of students with disabilities specifically in BC is essential to developing proper measures to address the unique challenges that this student population faces.”

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted the experiences of students with disabilities, both negatively and positively. The move to remote learning has increased access to education for some, while creating new barriers for others. For example, students who had difficulty attending in-person classes due to chronic pain and fatigue are now able to access classes from their homes, improving attendance and learning outcomes. Meanwhile, the pandemic has taken a toll on the student’s mental health and wellbeing.⁴ Mental illness represents the most common type of disability amongst young people in Canada,² creating significant challenges for students who were already struggling with their mental health. BC needs to gain a better understanding of how the pandemic and the move to online learning has impacted students with disabilities, so that the challenges created can be mitigated and the lessons learned from newfound accessibility are not lost when classes eventually return to an in-person primary model.

Having a clearer understanding of the specific barriers that this population faces in accessing post-secondary education and employment will enable the Province, post-secondary institutions, community services, and industry to better address these challenges.

Financial Barriers to Education

Access to advanced education is essential to rebuilding BC's economy, and it must be ensured that no British Columbians are left behind as the province moves forward. People with a disability who had post-secondary credentials are more likely to be employed than those with a high school diploma or who did not graduate high school.² Despite the importance of post-secondary education for employment outcomes, students with disabilities face barriers to accessing post-secondary education. Many students with disabilities face significant disruptions to their education due to financial, health, and accessibility constraints.

Students with disabilities often incur significant costs in order to treat or manage their disability while pursuing their education. While some federal financial aid is available to specifically assist students with disabilities in covering the additional costs that are directly related to their

“Covering the cost of their required educational services or equipment out of pocket may mean diverting funds from other sources of financial aid that are meant to cover the cost of tuition and regular living expenses.”

education, students with disabilities consistently report that this funding is insufficient. Grants such as the *Canada Student Grant for Services and Equipment for Students with Permanent Disabilities (CSG-PDSE)*⁶ do not reflect the actual cost of managing and treating one's disability. The CSG-PDSE only covers the cost of services and equipment directly related to one's education, such as tutors, e-readers, or interpreters.⁶ Costs such as medication, specialist medical treatments, seeking diagnoses, and more are not covered by this grant, and many students have to pay for these out of

pocket if they are not covered by MSP or insurance.

Unfortunately, covering the cost of their required educational services or equipment out of pocket may mean diverting funds from other sources of financial aid that are meant to cover the cost of tuition and regular living expenses. While there are a number of programs that provide additional access to funding for students with disabilities in BC, including the *B.C. Access Grant for Students with a Permanent Disability (BCAG)* and *B.C. Supplemental Bursary for Students with Disabilities (SBSD)*,⁶ students report that existing programs are insufficient and do not properly address their exceptional non-educational related costs.

Barriers to Employment

Students with disabilities often struggle to gain relevant work experience while in school.⁷

Persons with disabilities are less likely to be employed, with 49% of Canadians with a disability aged 25 to 64 being employed, compared to 79% of those without a disability.² Students with disabilities often face challenges in accessing non-academic experiences leading to

employment, including various types of part-time or full-time employment.² In addition to difficulties accessing employment support services, employment discrimination against people with disabilities is a persistent issue in Canada.⁸ A Statistics Canada study found that 12% of respondents reported having been refused a job on the basis of their disability at one point within the past five years, however, this went up to 33% amongst people with a severe disability.⁸

Graduate students with disabilities face particular challenges gaining additional employment experience during their graduate education, given the exceptional time and financial costs associated with these programs in comparison to undergraduate studies.

Many students with disabilities elect to pursue their education on a part-time basis in order to better manage their studies alongside their disability. A NEADS study on the differences in experience between full-time and part-time graduate students with disabilities indicates that students enrolled in part-time studies had fewer opportunities to participate in the research stream, and had more difficulty accessing services.⁹ 39% of part-time graduate students and 21% of full-time graduate students with disabilities indicated they were away from campus during the course of their studies due to a

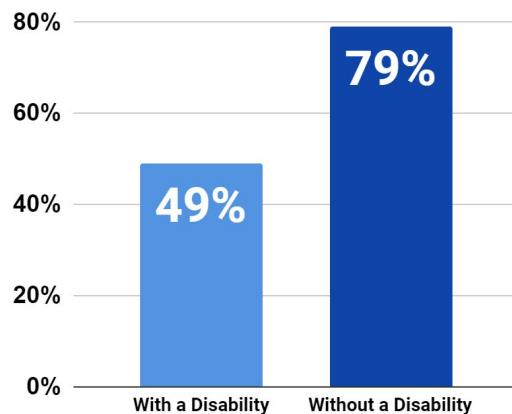
“It is estimated that by improving workforce accessibility for people with disabilities, Canada could see an increase of \$16.8 billion to the country’s GDP by 2030.”

lack of support and resulting challenges,⁹ 41% of full-time and 50% part-time graduate students with disabilities reported that the greatest obstacle they faced was related to work/ financial commitments.⁹

Statistics Canada estimates that there are approximately 645,000 people with disabilities in Canada who are currently unemployed but who have potential for employment in an accessible and inclusive work environment,² representing an enormous amount of labour potential. In a survey conducted

by the Conference Board of Canada, 60% of people with a disability responded that they were unable to find employment that appropriately utilized their training, education and abilities.¹⁰ It is estimated that by improving workforce accessibility for people with disabilities, Canada could see an increase of \$16.8 billion to the country’s GDP by 2030.¹⁰ Statistics Canada has stated that in order to properly address this issue further research on the employment and accessibility needs of people with disabilities in Canada is required.² The Province of British Columbia can

Persons Aged 24-64 Employed



make an important contribution to this by conducting a survey on the needs and experiences of students with disabilities.

Disruptions to Education

Completion of education for students with disabilities is often longer due to unmet accessibility needs, illness, flare-ups of symptoms, or additional costs incurred. Some students are unable to reach their academic potential due to sudden worsening of their condition, but are often unable to get the accommodations they need because they need to be registered with accessibility services at their institution early on in the semester to receive support from the department.¹¹ Furthermore, accessibility services often remain siloed within specific university departments, making it challenging to fully incorporate the support a student may need throughout the university. Without proper integration measures, including education to faculty and departments, students often do not receive the proper support, or have to extensively advocate for themselves to get the accommodations they are entitled to.⁵

Important information to include in the survey

In developing a survey on the experiences of students with disabilities in BC, the Province is encouraged to ensure those with lived experience are included in the survey development process. The following areas should be included in the survey, subject to further input by students and recent graduates with disabilities:

- Disruptions to education and dropout rates
- Experiences accessing accommodations and accessibility services
- Accessibility of work-integrated learning opportunities
- Financial need
- Ongoing impact of COVID-19, specifically including:
 - Transitions to online learning
 - Accessing support services while online
 - Accessing post-secondary campuses and community services, such as public transit
 - Financial impacts of the pandemic

The Province is further encouraged to collect and report disaggregated data on other social identity factors reported by respondents, including gender, sexual orientation, racialized identity, Indigeneity, and immigration status. As part of the government's commitment to GBA+ planning and analysis, understanding intersecting impacts of various identity factors is critical to building sustainable and inclusive solutions.

Fighting Sexualized Violence

The Alliance of BC Students recommends that the Province of British Columbia renew the \$760 000 to address campus sexualized violence on an annual basis

The Alliance of BC Students further recommends that the Province of British Columbia adopt into regulation the 11 minimum standards identified by Students For Consent Culture under the Sexual Violence and Misconduct Policy Act.

Sexualized Violence by the Numbers

Sexualized violence is an extremely prevalent issue, experienced disproportionately by people who are younger, who identify as women, people who are 2SLGBTQIA+,¹ people with disabilities,² people who are also Indigenous,³ and those who are post-secondary students.⁴ While the provincial government has taken a number of measures since 2016 to address campus sexualized violence, much more needs to be done to address both its scale and deep-rooted nature of the problem. According to an extensive Statistics Canada study assessing the “prevalence, characteristics, and attitudes surrounding unwanted sexualized behaviours and sexual assault”

71% of students had either experienced or witnessed unwanted sexualized behaviours in a post-secondary setting ⁴

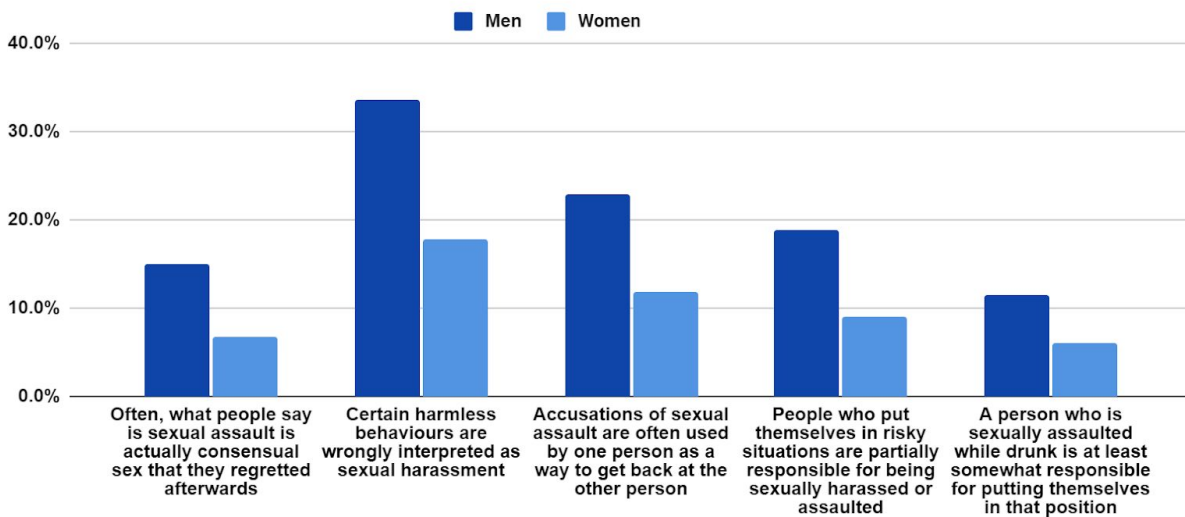
- 71% of students had either experienced or witnessed unwanted sexualized behaviours in a post-secondary setting;
 - among them, 45% of women and 32% of men had personally experienced at least one instance of unwanted sexualized behaviour in a post-secondary environment;
- 11% of women reported having experienced a sexual assault within the past year in a post-secondary setting (approximately 110,000 women);
- 15% of women had been sexually assaulted at one point during their time in a post-secondary setting (approximately 197,000 women).⁴

The Roots of Sexualized Violence

Sexualized violence is an assertion of power over another person, and is based within attitudes and beliefs that devalue others based on their sex, gender, sexual orientation, or gender presentation. It is further upheld by belief systems that oppress others, including ableism, racism, and ageism.⁵ Acts of sexualized violence are often dismissed through victim-blaming beliefs and practices. Survey respondents who identified as men twice as likely to hold beliefs that uphold victim blaming, such as “Accusations of sexual assault are often used by one person as a way to get back at the other person.”⁴ In reality, not only is sexual assault the most

under-reported violent crime in Canada,⁵ but the false reporting rate is only between 2% to 8%,⁶ which is comparable to false reports of any other violent crime.⁷

Beliefs and Attitudes about Unwanted Sexual Behavior and Consent



Pandemic Isolation and Domestic Violence

While students are generally not spending much time on campuses right now due to the pandemic, sexualized and gender-based violence continues to occur at high rates. A Statistics Canada report released in November 2020 found that 10% of women were very or extremely concerned about violence in the home.⁸ The health measures put in place in BC to prevent the spread of COVID-19 are an essential part of public safety, however, these restrictions have caused many people to become further isolated and effectively trapped in abusive home environments. In BC, the Battered Women’s Support Services saw an increase of 400% in calls to their crisis line after the initial pandemic restrictions were lifted and women were better able to leave their homes to make calls.⁹

Fighting Campus Sexualized Violence in BC

Students have been calling for increased provincial action to address campus sexualized violence in BC for decades, and have seen several important actions taken since 2015, including the passage of the *Sexual Violence and Misconduct Policy Act (Act 23)*, a provincial information-sharing and capacity-building forum in 2019, and an investment of \$760,000 in

2019 to support a number of ongoing initiatives. The \$760,000 has funded projects such as developing plain language sexualized violence policies for post-secondary institutions, the initial development of a provincial student survey, an evaluation rubric for sexualized violence education resources, the initial stages of a resource-sharing hub, and a number of other initiatives. These projects are still ongoing, and far more work still needs to be done. However, this funding has not been renewed since 2019 and there is no guarantee that further investments will be made. There is still far too much work to be done for this investment not to be renewed. Providing ongoing and consistent support to these projects will allow those involved to develop longer-term plans and improve on existing work.

“There is still far too much work to be done for this investment not to be renewed.”

Act 23 - Sexual Violence and Misconduct Policy Act

The Sexual Violence and Misconduct Policy Act (Act 23) requires that each publicly-funded post-secondary institution in BC develop a sexual violence and misconduct policy in accordance with the Act, that it consult students in its development and its required 3-year review process, and annually report to its governing body on its implementation.¹⁰

The passage of Act 23 was a significant step forward in properly addressing and preventing campus sexualized violence. However, while institutions are now required to develop and implement a policy on campus sexual violence and misconduct, there is little direction provided

“there is little direction provided within the Act itself on what specifically needs to be included in these policies.”

within the Act itself on what specifically needs to be included in these policies. This led to institutions taking vastly different approaches in the development, scope and implementation of their respective policies. In some cases, these policies include provisions that cause significant harm to survivors. Similar concerns have also been raised by student organizations in provinces with comparable legislation.¹¹ The Ontario government passed Bill 123 in 2016, with a comparable lack of clear guidelines to Act 23 for institutional policy development.

In Ontario, this has led to significant variation in institutional policy responses, the implementation of harmful practices, and ineffective responses to preventing campus sexualized violence.¹²

The Minimum Standards

In 2017, Students for Consent Culture Canada (SFCC) released the Our Turn: National Action Plan, which outlines 45 criteria for survivor-centric and trauma-informed campus sexualized violence policies. These criteria were developed in consultation with 40 student unions and community organizations in 8 provinces, and a review of over 60 institutional sexualized violence policies.¹³ In 2019 SFCC released the follow-up One Year Later Report, which distilled the 45 criteria into 11 absolutely essential requirements for provincial governments to include in legislation regarding campus sexualized violence policies.¹⁴ They are:

1. A defined standalone sexual violence policy

A policy is stand-alone if it is a separate document from other policies and has its own set of procedures that do not refer to the procedures of other policies, including the student Code of Conduct.

2. The right to both criminal and institutional processes

The ability to report experiences to both their institution and the police without risk of having a complaint suspended due to the other process.

3. Mandatory sexual violence training for decision-makers

A mandate of quality and expert-informed sexualized violence sensitivity training on trauma-informed approaches for those involved in hearing the sexualized violence complaint and deciding the outcomes.

4. Rape shield protections

Whereby a complainant cannot be asked questions about their sexual history at any point of the informal or formal complaint process.

5. Protections from face-to-face encounters

A complainant should not be required to be present at the same time as a respondent.

6. Timelines

Timelines for a complaint process that do not exceed 45 days for a complaint process and 48 hours for immediate accommodations.

7. Protections from gag orders

Protections from institutions imposing a gag order on complainants through a broadly defined confidentiality requirement.

8. Broader scope

Campus sexualized violence policies must explicitly create a procedure for students to report sexualized violence while participating in a work placement, internship, or co-op.

9. Informing of sanctions

A mandate that institutions must inform both the complainant and respondent of all sanctions ordered by the review committee. This includes making appropriate adjustments to provincial privacy and labour law.

10. Student representation on committees

A mandate for the creation of a Sexual Violence Prevention and Support Taskforce, with meaningful student representation of at least 30% at each institution.

11. A review process of every two (2) years

While *Act 23* currently requires institutions to review their policies every three years, our knowledge of best practices for these policies are constantly improving, changing almost completely every four years.¹⁵

The requirement of these minimum standards is largely a response to the impacts of “institutional betrayal” and the damaging impacts that this can have on the wellbeing of survivors.¹⁴ Institutional betrayal is “the failure of post-secondary institutions to prevent sexual violence and respond to sexual assault in an effective and supportive manner, which can further harm victims/survivors and exacerbate trauma responses following a sexual assault”.¹⁶ Institutional betrayal not only exacerbates the initial impacts of traumatic events, but can have more damaging impacts to the long-term wellbeing of those who have experienced this trauma.¹⁷

“Assault is one thing. Having to relive it every week for those last five months was a whole different ball game.”¹⁸

Students rely on their institutions to provide a safe learning and living environment in order to fulfill their academic goals and career ambitions. A case arising from the University of Ontario Institute of Technology (UOIT) highlights the need for clear policy guidelines, particularly regarding the need for reasonable timelines. The student who was sexually assaulted “was traumatized over the course of the half-year investigation,” as the university consistently engaged in victim-blaming practices and followed the student code of conduct policy, rather than its sexualized violence policy.¹⁸ The student involved remarked, “Assault is one thing. Having to relive it every week for those last five months was a whole different ball game.”¹⁸

Furthermore, many institutional policies are limited in scope, preventing students from seeking support services or bringing forward a formal complaint, especially if they are pursuing co-op or work-integrated learning placements.¹⁵ Without the ability to report and seek justice through postsecondary institutional policies, these students are left without meaningful options. The limited scope of many campus sexualized violence policies also restricts students from bringing a case forward where an incident did not occur on campus property or at an institutionally-sanctioned event. The majority of policies in BC cover these areas,¹⁹ but exclude

cases where an incident occurred outside of this scope, even if the case involves two students living on campus. The harmful impacts of this limitation are exemplified by a case from the University of Victoria where a student was sexually assaulted off-campus by a fellow student who was living in the same on-campus residence as them. The constant re-traumatization from regularly seeing the perpetrator led the student to stop leaving their dorm room out of fear, reduce class attendance, and eventually drop out.²⁰

Interactions with Privacy Legislation

Informing both the complainant(s) and respondent(s) involved in a sexualized violence case on whether or not any sanctions have been applied as well as what those sanctions are is absolutely critical in supporting the recovery of survivors. However, due to a lack of clarity within BC's Personal Information Protection Act (PIPA), many institutions have interpreted the legislation to mean that complainants are not entitled to information regarding outcomes of investigations and complaints processes due to potential privacy violations.¹⁵ Lack of clarity around the interaction between provincial privacy legislation and the rights of complainants/survivors is an issue across Canada where similar legislation on campus sexualized violence policies has been passed.²¹

Informing victims of sanctions against perpetrators is rooted in the principles of human rights law within Canada, specifically within the Canadian Victims Bill of Rights, which includes "the right to information, protection, participation, and restitution".¹⁶ While this Bill specifically refers to proceedings under the criminal justice system, the importance of the basic principle behind it should not be limited to formal criminal proceedings. In maintaining the lack of clarity within PIPA, institutions will continue to "disregard well-established principles under human rights legislation... [and] deprive complainants of validation as well as of a sense of safety".²¹ For these reasons, comprehensive steps should be taken by the provincial government to clarify PIPA as it relates to informing those involved in cases of sexualized violence at post-secondary institutions.

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