



# UNLOCKING STUDENT POTENTIAL

*The Key to Ontario's Success*

*2013 Ontario Budget Submission  
March 2013*

**OUS**A

Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance

# ABOUT OUSA

*OUSA represents the interests of over 155,000 professional and undergraduate, full-time and part-time university students at eight institutions across Ontario. Our vision is for an accessible, affordable, accountable and high quality post-secondary education in Ontario. To achieve this vision we've come together to develop solutions to challenges facing higher education, build broad consensus for our policy options, and lobby government to implement them.*



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This year, students recommend that the budget represents a commitment to increasing affordability, supporting student health and employment, and expanding student mobility.

To achieve these ends, the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance, representing over 155,000 professional and undergraduate university students, submits the following recommendations for the 2013 Provincial Budget to improve the accessibility, affordability and quality of Ontario's post-secondary education system.

## TUITION INCREASES: COSTLY FOR STUDENTS AND THE GOVERNMENT

Ontario's current tuition framework is not a financially viable option for a government looking to balance the province's budget by 2018. Increased student contributions via tuition have not been met with increases in quality, and have required the government to substantially increase its contributions to Ontario's financial assistance programs. To address concerns related to the accessibility and affordability of Ontario's postsecondary system, students recommend that the government:

- 1. Freeze tuition fees for at least one year and increase per-student funding to post-secondary institutions at the rate of inflation to partially compensate.*
- 2. Should tuition increase in any future year, it must be no more than the rate of inflation as measured by the Ontario Consumer Price Index.*

## MORE SUPPORT FOR CAMPUS MENTAL HEALTH

Students are very supportive of the \$21 million investment over three years made by the provincial government into the Mental Health Innovation Fund in 2012, but they believe more can be done to address issues of mental health across university campuses in Ontario. Post-secondary students are particularly susceptible to mental illness and currently experience resource shortages and long wait times at

campus mental health services. Therefore, students recommend that:

- 3. The government should provide funding to hire up to two additional mental health counselors at every post-secondary institution in Ontario.*

## SUPPORTING STUDENT EMPLOYMENT

Following the 2008 recession, students have become increasingly concerned with their ability to find meaningful employment to finance their education. Building on the Premier's commitment to address the increased challenges faced by youth when seeking employment, the government should:

- 4. Develop and invest in a youth employment strategy that addresses students' need for employment during the summer, in-study, and upon graduation.*

## IMPROVING STUDENT MOBILITY

Improvements to the province's credit transfer system represent a cost-neutral means of reducing costs to the government of Ontario, while also increasing the affordability and accessibility of a degree for students. As such, OUSA recommends that:

- 5. The government should require first- and second-year university credits to be transferable system-wide.*
- 6. The government should mandate that all per-course minimum grade requirements be set at the passing grade.*

# THE SECTOR THIS YEAR

It has been a busy fiscal year for Ontario's post-secondary sector. When we last submitted a budget submission in June 2012, we argued for the need for a reform strategy to improve teaching quality and ensure the fiscal sustainability of Ontario's post-secondary sector. In July, the sector began a sweeping discussion on how Ontario's post-secondary system can be transformed to address internal fiscal pressures and adapt to the changing international higher education environment. We discussed a number of topics, including: how we might improve teaching quality; how we could improve the productivity of Ontario's post-secondary sector; how we could improve student mobility; whether new credentials were necessary to improve labour market outcomes; and other topics. Students appreciate that this conversation took place, as it is students who have been taking on an ever-increasing responsibility for funding our post-secondary sector.

As our province moves into another fiscal year, many of the same challenges remain, and new challenges require attention. In recognition of the province's fiscal constraints and commitment to reduce the deficit, this submission's recommendations either aim to reduce future costs or focus on opportunities where small investments can have significant impact.

This submission's first area of concern is the continued rapid increase in costs at post-secondary institutions, and in particular, the expectation that students will fund these rising costs through substantial annual increases in tuition fees, increases which continue to decrease the affordability of a post-secondary education in this province. Furthermore, students are concerned about the substantial costs to government of tuition increases in the form of increased costs for delivering financial assistance.

This submission's second focus is the need to further invest in student mental health. The province made investments to support mental health on Ontario's post-secondary campuses this past year, but there are still needs that must be addressed. To continue

to improve the provision of mental health services on Ontario's post-secondary campuses, students recommend that this budget make a small, but significant new investment in post-secondary students' mental health.

The issue of rising youth unemployment in Ontario is also of concern for students as this budget is being discussed. Students recommend that the government develop a youth employment strategy to improve summer employment, in-study work opportunities, experiential learning opportunities, and post-graduate employment outcomes.

The final area of focus for this submission is the need to improve credit transfer. Improvements in credit transfer will improve the accessibility and affordability of Ontario's post-secondary sector while reducing costs for government. Furthermore, substantial progress on credit transfer can be made at no cost to the government.

Students remain hopeful that the discussions that took place last summer, and since, will lead to changes that put Ontario's post-secondary sector on a path to sustainability, a path that recognizes that Ontario students and their families cannot and should not be continually expected to cover runaway cost growth.

# TUITION INCREASES

6 / Tuition has been a top priority for students for the past few years due to the multiple extensions that were made to the existing tuition framework, extending it for an additional three years. Students have asked for a substantial change of track on tuition this year because of concerns regarding the impact the existing tuition framework has on affordability, accessibility, and costs to government of providing student financial assistance, but moreover, because of future impacts in these areas if the existing framework is extended.

The existing framework allows tuition at Ontario's post-secondary institutions to rise at 5 per cent annually. Average tuition in Ontario is currently the highest in the country, at \$7,180. Furthermore, Ontario's existing regulations allow the highest annual increases in the country. If the current framework is extended, Ontario will become an increasingly more expensive study destination relative to other provinces, which will make it more difficult for Ontario to both attract and retain the talent we need to grow our economy and move our society forward.

## A LESS AFFORDABLE POST-SECONDARY SYSTEM

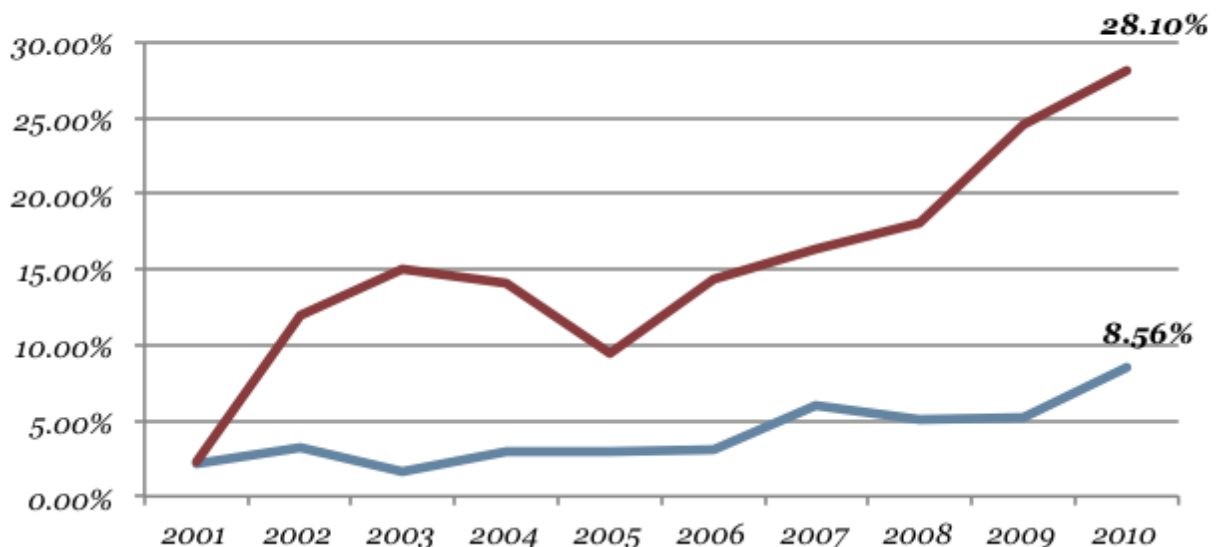
There are a number of indicators that Ontario's post-secondary system has become less affordable under the current tuition framework, and will become increasingly so if the existing framework is continued.

The first indicator is tuition in comparison to median family income. Between 2001 and 2010, tuition increased by 28.10 per cent in constant dollars, while after-tax median family income in Ontario only increased by 8.56 per cent. On an annualized basis, median family income has risen by 0.86 per cent per year on average,<sup>1</sup> while tuition has averaged increases of approximately 5 per cent.<sup>2</sup> This has meant that a higher and higher percentage of family income is going towards covering tuition costs.

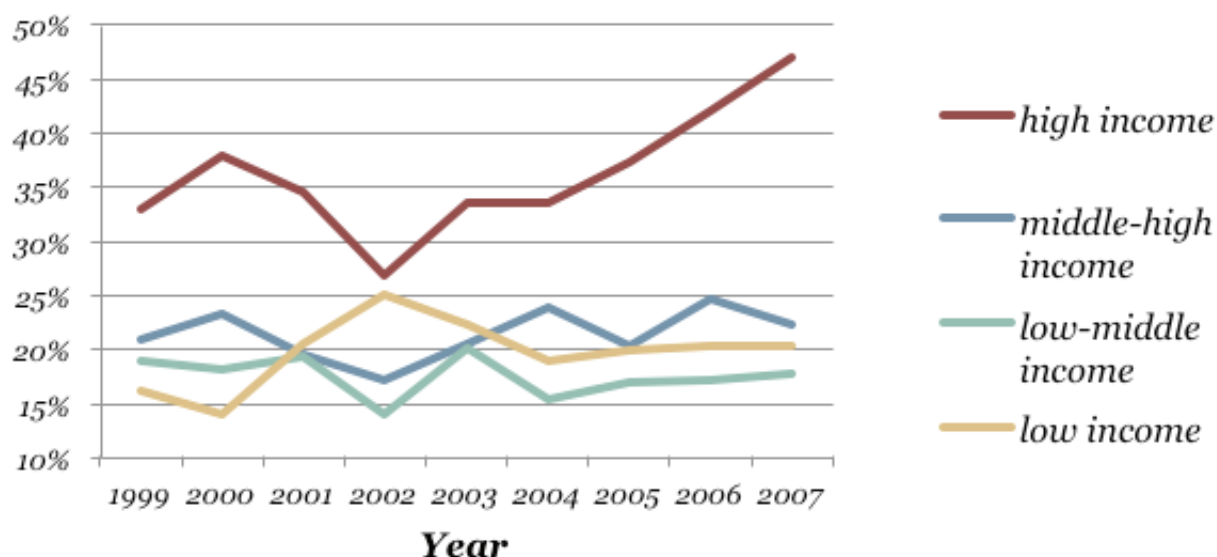
Tuition cannot continue to grow far faster than Ontario families' ability to pay tuition costs. This is the very definition of unsustainable cost growth, and of increasing unaffordability.

The second indicator that Ontario's post-secondary system is becoming less affordable is Ontario's

**FIGURE 1: REAL GROWTH IN MEDIAN INCOME & AVERAGE TUITION**



**FIGURE 2: FULL TIME UNIVERSITY PARTICIPATION  
AMONG ONTARIO YOUTH, 1999-2007**



post-secondary participation rate by family income. Ontario has increased its enrolment rate substantially over the last decade, but not access all income groups. Most of the growth came from the highest income bracket: between 1999 and 2007 high-income students' participation rate increased from 32 to 46 per cent. Low-income students, by comparison, saw their participation rate remain fairly constant, increasing from 14 per cent to only 17 per cent.<sup>3</sup>

Students recognize that student financial assistance mechanisms have led to a reduction in many low-income students' tuition bills. However, the persistence of a participation gap by income suggests that despite generous student financial assistance, many low-income students are still choosing not to attend a post-secondary institution. Our in-depth exploration of the reasons that contribute to this can be found in our tuition submission, *Ontario's Next Tuition Framework: Part One*, but it is worth noting that low-income students' price sensitivity to tuition costs can be explained in part because tuition in Ontario is, in fact, expensive.

The third indicator is rising student debt, which has increased in incidence and in the average amount owed after Ontario students graduate. In 2009, the average total undergraduate student debt in Ontario was approximately \$26,700, with 64 per cent of students reporting that they had debt.<sup>4</sup> This is the highest magnitude and incidence of debt in Ontario in the last 20 years.<sup>5</sup>

#### A STUDENT FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE SYSTEM THAT IS UNNECESSARILY MORE COSTLY FOR GOVERNMENT

Students recognize the importance of financial aid for ensuring any student is supported in attaining a post-secondary credential. Investments in non-repayable financial assistance are particularly important to ensure that student debt does not grow even more rapidly, and to help debt-averse students access a post-secondary education.

However, student financial assistance is a costly investment. It is also an investment that rises in cost as tuition prices rise, due to increased proportions of

students requiring financial assistance, and increased costs per-student of providing financial assistance.

Over the past four years, Ontario has seen a substantial increase in the number of students accessing OSAP. Between 2008 and 2012, the proportion of students accessing OSAP increased from approximately 40 per cent to 47 per cent.<sup>6</sup> This substantial increase in such a short time frame contributes to students' concern that increasing costs will make a post-secondary education out of reach for many students without incurring significant student debt. As this trend continues, we can expect to see the costs of delivering financial assistance increase.

If the existing tuition framework is continued, the cost per-student of delivering financial assistance will also increase. Two programs in particular will see their costs increase substantially.

The first program is the Ontario Student Opportunities Grant (OSOG), which caps students' debt to government at \$7,300 per year, per student, by forgiving student loan funding over \$7,300. Students strongly support this program, as without it, student debt in Ontario would undoubtedly be significantly higher than it is today. However, students question the need for costs associated with this program to substantially increase because of tuition. If tuition continues to increase at 5 per cent annually, and current increases in the proportion of students accessing OSOG continue, annual OSOG spending could increase by as much as \$180 million by 2018, an increase that could be substantially reduced through a reduction in the allowable tuition increase.<sup>7</sup>

The second program that will see cost increases associated with tuition cost growth is the Ontario Tuition Grant (OTG), Ontario's newest investment in non-repayable financial assistance. As the government has committed to ensuring that OTG increases along with average tuition, increasing tuition will directly increase the government's costs

for delivering this program. If we assume no growth in the application rates to the program (which is likely a false assumption), OUSA has estimated that OTG costs will increase by \$80.5 million by 2017-18, from \$291.2 million in 2012-13 to \$371.7 million in 2017-18.<sup>8</sup>

These cost increases are of particular concern when one considers that they will not buy further improvements to the affordability of Ontario's post-secondary system. At best, this additional funding will help to maintain the status quo. In fact, in the case of the OTG, the value of the grant will be eroded in only nine years if the existing framework is allowed to continue, and students who qualify then will be paying the same amount of tuition as they would without the grant today.<sup>9</sup>

#### A LESS PUBLIC POST-SECONDARY SYSTEM

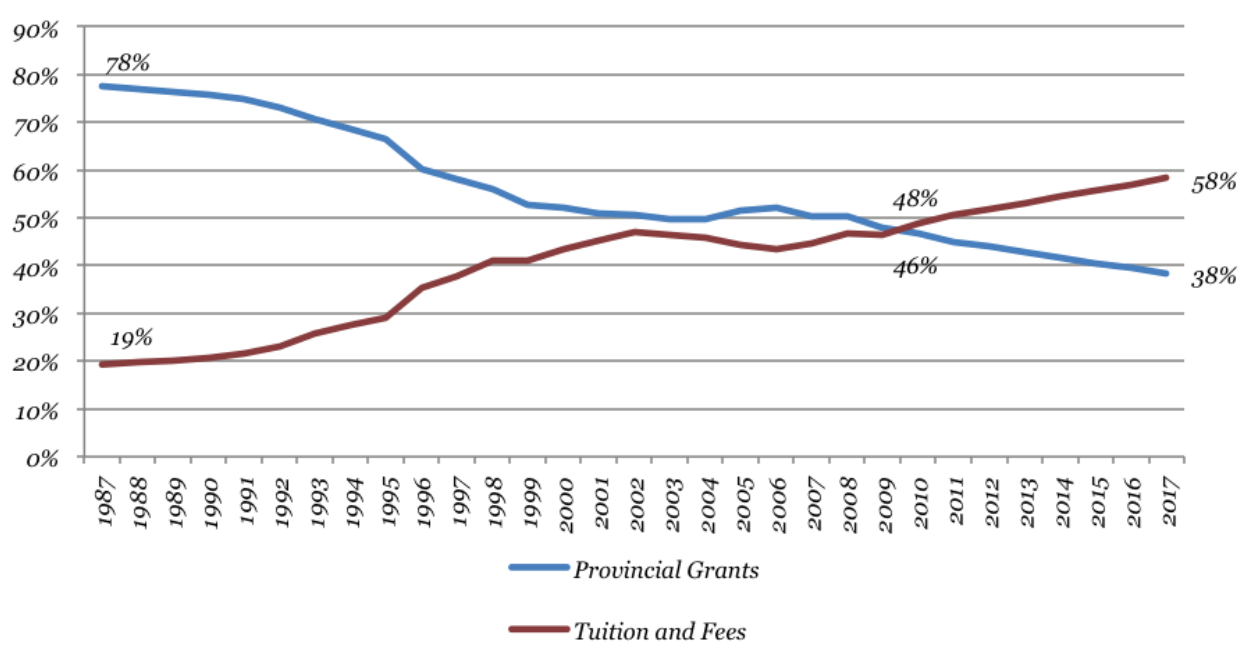
Ontario prides itself on its excellent public services, public health system, K-12 system, and public universities. Unfortunately, if the current tuition framework is extended, the public nature of our post-secondary institutions will continue to decrease, and this will have impacts on the accountability, and by extension, the accessibility of our post-secondary system.

The graph on the following page demonstrates how students have taken on an ever-increasing role for funding our post-secondary system, due to both slower growth in government funding and substantial increases in tuition. This trend, if allowed to continue, will lead Ontario to a point where universities may decide that they are better off forgoing public funding, and choose to privatize, which will have a few significant impacts.

First, to receive public funding, institutions must follow tuition regulations. If institutions decide to forgo public funding, they would have the ability to charge students any amount they choose. As was seen during periods of deregulation of professional schools



**FIGURE 3: PROJECTED STUDENT FEES AND GOVERNMENT GRANTS AS A PROPORTION OF OPERATING REVENUE, 1987-2017**



in the 1990s, institutions no longer constrained by tuition regulations will likely substantially increase their tuition costs, and substantially change the socio-economic makeup of their classes in the process.

Secondly, along with public funding comes expectations that universities will provide the Student Access Guarantee through tuition set-aside funds. This program helps to cover students' unmet financial need, and as such, is an important investment to maintain.

Finally, institutions that receive public funding are expected to participate in accountability mechanisms. Universities that forgo public funding will no longer be required to report back to the government on a number of indicators.

At a certain point, the government must decide what kind of post-secondary system it wants in Ontario.

If the government wishes to maintain the public nature of our post-secondary system, and avoid making it unaffordable and inaccessible, a new tuition framework must be more affordable than the last.

### STUDENTS EXPECTED TO PAY MORE FOR LESS

Students are unwilling to accept that costs at Ontario universities will continue to grow far faster than the pace of inflation and that because of this, their tuition will continue to increase far beyond inflation, and far beyond their ability to afford these increases. In particular, students are unwilling to continue to pay more and more tuition when they have not seen quality increases commensurate to their increased investment. While tuition has increased substantially over the last two decades, in this same time period, student-faculty ratios have increased<sup>10</sup> while faculty workloads have decreased.<sup>11</sup> Thus students are paying more while (proportionally) fewer faculty are teaching fewer hours of class.

Because of the aforementioned concerns, students have recommended that the government reset tuition in Ontario to recommit to affordability. Two recommendations will allow the government to do this:

**Recommendation: Freeze tuition fees for at least one-year and increase per-student funding to post-secondary institutions at the rate of inflation to partially compensate.**

*Estimated Cost to Government: Approximately \$100.4 million in 2013-2014.*

**Recommendation: Should tuition increase in any future year, it must be no more than the rate of inflation as measured by the Ontario Consumer Price Index.**

*Estimated Cost to Government: \$0*

# MORE SUPPORT FOR CAMPUS MENTAL HEALTH

In May 2012, OUSA made a submission to the government of Ontario entitled *Student Health: Bringing Healthy Change to Ontario's Universities*. This submission highlighted the challenges Ontario's universities are facing in terms of students' mental and physical health, and provided recommendations to the government on how to improve the health of Ontario students on post-secondary campuses.

While the submission suggested the need for investments in both physical and mental health provision, this submission will focus primarily on how the government can better support mental health.

OUSA's research identified that post-secondary students are a segment of the population particularly vulnerable to mental illness. Some studies have shown that as many as one in four post-secondary students will experience a mental illness or addiction during the course of their studies.<sup>12</sup> This can be explained by a number of factors. Firstly, the typical age of onset for many disorders is 18-24, meaning individuals will often have their first encounter with mental illness while attending a post-secondary institution. Secondly, for many students, college or university is their first experience living away from home and their established social support networks. Thirdly, post-secondary institutions are generally demanding, competitive, high-stress environments, which can trigger anxiety- and depression-related illness, especially when combined with the preceding two factors.

Furthermore, due to improved outreach at the primary and secondary school level, Ontario has improved access to post-secondary education for students with mental illness, increasing their participation rates and thus increasing the need for mental health support during their studies. This achievement is noteworthy, but the next step is to ensure that these students are supported throughout their post-secondary studies.

Finally, as costs associated with post-secondary education continue to increase, financial pressures on students intensify, causing students to increase the number of hours worked to meet their financial obligations.<sup>13</sup> This adds an additional source of stress and anxiety for students.

Students are increasingly concerned about mental health because Ontario's post-secondary institutions have had difficulty meeting increased demand for mental health services on campus. University administrators, student leaders, staff, and healthcare professionals all agree that there has been an increase in the use of mental health services by students in the past five years.<sup>14</sup>

With increasing use, wait times at university counseling centres have also risen. Survey results demonstrate that a significant number of students wait in excess of a month to receive access to mental health services.<sup>15</sup> Depending on the time of year and subsequent demand, students can be left waiting months before being seen by a practitioner, particularly for follow-up appointments. This finding identifies a significant resource shortage in providing counseling to students that can leave students without support when they most need it.

Based on these concerns, students made a number of recommendations to the government to address student mental health. One recommendation, which the government has addressed in the form of the Mental Health Innovation Fund (announced in September 2012), was to fund system-wide initiatives aimed at improving the health of post-secondary students. Students strongly support the bold investment made in the form of the Mental Health Innovation Fund as it will enable colleges and universities to better integrate care, pilot new approaches to delivering mental health supports, and evaluate best practices in the provision of different types of care. With partners, OUSA has submitted a proposal to the fund for a project that we believe will help to improve the integration of post-secondary

mental health care and the sharing of best practices throughout the system.

Another of the paper's recommendations was to provide dedicated funding to improve the provision of frontline mental health supports at post-secondary institutions and to help institutions meet rising demand for mental health services. Now is the time to move forward with this recommendation. To do so, students recommend the government provide direct funding to hire additional mental health support workers at all of the province's post-secondary institutions. At a generous high per-counselor cost, students estimate that the government could fund two additional counselors at all of Ontario's post-secondary institutions for \$8.4 million. While the government may choose to distribute funding for these counselors differently depending on the needs of each post-secondary institution, we believe that creating funding to provide each institution with two additional counselors will help to address the system's needs.

Ensuring mental health support to post-secondary students is crucial from an equity and access perspective, but it also makes sense from an economic perspective, as funding to improve student mental health has a substantial return on investment. Early interventions aimed at post-secondary students can lessen the future need for healthcare, with every \$1 spent on early health treatment saving \$30 in lost productivity and social costs.<sup>16</sup> As Ontario charts a path forward to reduce the provincial deficit, small investments now that achieve a social good and a fiscal efficiency are particularly wise investments.

**Recommendation: The government should provide funding to hire up to two additional mental health counsellors at every post-secondary institution in Ontario.**

*Estimated Cost to government: \$8.4 million per year*



# SUPPORTING STUDENT EMPLOYMENT

Students have been pleased to note the increasing recognition in Ontario's political discourse of the need to address youth unemployment. Youth unemployment is of particular concern to students, as students rely on summer and in-study employment to cover ever-increasing post-secondary costs, and well-paying jobs upon graduation to pay down their student debt. It is for these reasons that students recommend that the government develop and invest in a youth employment strategy.

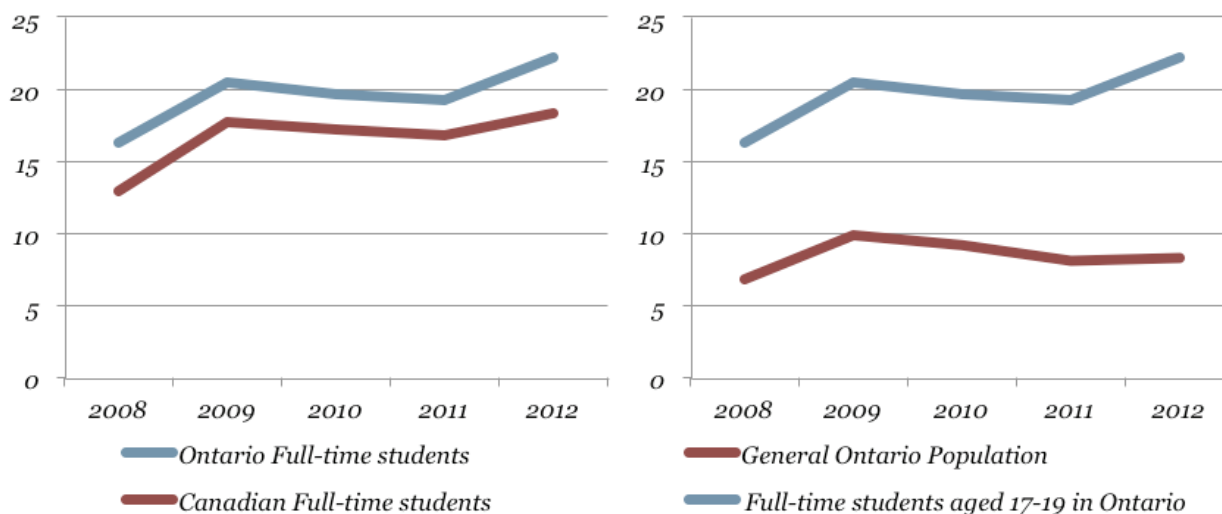
Students believe that a youth employment strategy should address the need for improved employment

opportunities in four areas:

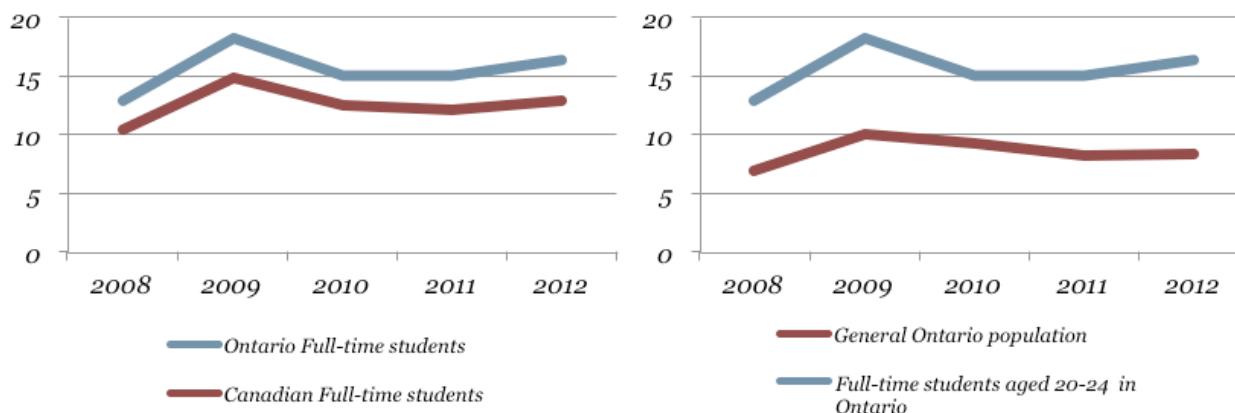
- Summer employment;
- In-study employment;
- Work-integrated learning;
- Post-graduate employment.

By supporting employment in these four areas, the government will help students find opportunities to fund their postsecondary education, achieve the maximum benefit from their studies, and contribute to Ontario's economy upon graduation.

**FIGURE 4: AVERAGE SUMMER UNEMPLOYMENT RATES FOR POST-SECONDARY STUDENTS AGED 17-19 FROM 2008-2012<sup>18</sup>**



**FIGURE 5: AVERAGE SUMMER UNEMPLOYMENT RATES FOR POST-SECONDARY STUDENTS AGED 20-24 FROM 2008-2012**



## SUMMER EMPLOYMENT

Summer employment is of particular concern to students this year after the second-worst summer for student employment on record, and a number of years where Ontario students' summer job market has underperformed relative to the Canadian student summer job market and the general Ontario job market.<sup>17</sup> Students not only rely on summer employment as a resource to cover their education costs, but also are increasingly looking for summer employment that provides them with skills they need to find work upon completion of their post-secondary studies. If current trends in summer employment continue, students will see increasing difficulty affording their post-secondary education.

To improve opportunities for summer employment, the government should look at expanding funding for wage subsidy programs, such as Employment Ontario's Summer Jobs Services. By increasing the size of the hiring incentive (currently \$2 per hour), the government could increase the number of positions available.

## IN-STUDY EMPLOYMENT

In-study employment is becoming more of a necessity in Ontario, due to increasing fees, financial aid that does not cover all of a student's needs, and as noted previously, fewer summer employment opportunities. One study found that undergraduate students have an average in-study employment rate of 64%, with many students working an average of 18 hours a week and two thirds working more than 10 hours per week.<sup>19</sup> This suggests a doubling of in-study employment since 1976.<sup>20</sup>

The rising need for in-study employment is of particular concern: depending on the location

of the employment and the number of hours worked, in-study employment can have a negative impact on a student's academic performance, especially for students from under-represented backgrounds. A number of studies have found that students who work more hours are more likely to say that it has negatively impacted their academic performance.<sup>21</sup> However, research has demonstrated that in-study employment is less likely to have a negative impact on a student's academic performance if the hours worked on a weekly basis are limited,<sup>22</sup> and if the student works on campus.<sup>23</sup>

To improve the availability of high-quality work opportunities for students, the government should consider re-investing in the work-study program, as it provided students with on-campus, limited-hours work opportunities, a form of employment less likely to impede academic performance.

## POST-GRADUATE EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES AND WORK-INTEGRATED LEARNING

Post-graduate employment outcomes are increasingly of concern for students because post-secondary education is no longer a guaranteed path to employment as it has been in the past. For example, between 2011 and 2012, the recent graduate employment rate decreased from 75.6 per cent to 73.1 per cent.<sup>24</sup> While this is still the highest employment rate of any type of post-secondary education,<sup>25</sup> decreasing employment opportunities for students graduating with mounting debt is a problem for both students and the government. The province must ensure that the labour market is generating more employment opportunities to recent graduates, not fewer.

To address the need to improve post-graduate employment outcomes, the government should make investments that allow students to have

high quality work experiences relevant to their field of study during their postsecondary studies. Providing improved opportunities for summer employment and in-study employment can contribute towards this end, as can investments to improve the availability of experiential and work-integrated learning.

Experiential and work-integrating learning have a number of benefits to students. Research has shown that students who participate in these activities are more likely to graduate,<sup>26</sup> have more opportunities to interact with faculty on an informal basis,<sup>27</sup> and use wages earned during their work terms to help cover their costs.<sup>28</sup> Students also benefit from experiential learning experiences upon graduation, as it provides them with hands-on experience and skills that employers are looking for. The benefit of co-op programs in particular is best demonstrated by the fact that co-op graduates have better post-graduate earnings and employability than non-co-op graduates.<sup>29</sup>

It is unfortunate, given the benefits of co-op programs, that demand currently outstrips supply.<sup>30</sup> To improve the number of co-op opportunities available to students in Ontario, the government should look at improving and expanding incentives to hire co-op students. Specifically, the government could look at ways to improve the Co-operative Education Tax Credit for employers to ensure that it enables employers to address their own needs in hiring co-op students.

Students support Premier Wynne's commitment in the government's 2013 Speech from the Throne: "to address the serious issue of youth unemployment, your government will join forces with high school educators, colleges, universities, training partners and employers to establish opportunities for young people to enhance their skills; find placements,

internships and co-op programs; and gain valuable, real world experience."<sup>31</sup> Students look forward to working with the government to address the concerns raised in this budget submission to develop a youth employment strategy that addresses youth unemployment in all its facets.

**Recommendation: The government should develop and invest in a youth employment strategy to improve employment opportunities during the summer, in-study, and upon graduation.**

# IMPROVING STUDENT MOBILITY

While Ontario students have become increasingly mobile due to a variety of internal and external factors, Ontario's post-secondary system has been slow to adapt. According to a survey OUSA conducted in 2011, over one in 10 Ontario university students transferred their credits between post-secondary institutions, the vast majority of which transferred between two universities. The government has recognized Ontario's slow progress on credit transfer: according to a discussion paper circulated this past summer by the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, "despite gains, Ontario's credit transfer system continues to lag behind comparable jurisdictions' systems, and student mobility remains a challenge for the province."<sup>32</sup> Students believe that credit transfer should be a top priority for the government, as it improves the accessibility and affordability of our post-secondary system, and reduces costs to government.

Improved credit transfer improves the accessibility of Ontario's post-secondary system by recognizing that Ontario students follow different pathways to attaining a post-secondary credential. Some students may begin their degree at one institution, and have to move to an institution closer to home part way through their degree due to an inability to cover their living costs, or to take care of a loved one. Others may begin their degree at an institution close to home and then realize that their career or academic interests would be better met at another institution. These students should not be required to essentially restart their degree because their previous education has not been properly recognized.

Improved credit transfer also improves the affordability of our post-secondary system, by ensuring that students are not required to pay a second time to learn the same material. Recognizing that some students transfer because of financial obligations, Ontario must ensure that we are not unnecessarily increasing costs for students to complete a degree.

Improving credit transfer will also lead to savings for government. As the government funds universities on a per-credit basis, public costs increase when a student repeats a course, as the government pays twice for the same learning to take place. Furthermore, if a student's time to complete their degree increases due to poor credit transfer, and they qualify for non-repayable financial assistance, the government's costs to assist that student complete their degree will also increase.

Ontario's interest in moving forward with online education will also require improvements to credit transfer. Online education promises more learning flexibility to students on campus, better access to post-secondary education for students in rural and northern areas, and new learning opportunities for mature students and students with dependents. But these promises are only possible if a new online learning institution fits into a more integrated credit transfer system than currently exists. Students must be certain that if they choose to enroll in a course online, their home institution will recognize it, and that it will count towards their degree requirements. Students must also know that there will not be significant additional costs to have this credit recognized. Without improvements in credit transfer, online learning will be unable to improve the accessibility or flexibility of Ontario's post-secondary sector because students will not be sure that it will help them attain their educational goals.

Students commend the government's investment in credit transfer through funding provided to the Ontario Council on Articulation and Transfer (ONCAT). Students will continue to work with ONCAT to improve credit transfer in Ontario, but believe that in addition to the work of ONCAT, there are opportunities to speed up the progress of improvements to credit transfer in Ontario at no cost to the government.

OUSA has identified a number of ways that student mobility can be improved in Ontario, but two



recommendations are particularly important. First, Ontario students would like to see Ontario adopt the recommendation of the pan-Canadian protocol on the transfer of credits, endorsed by the Premiers of Canada’s provinces in 1995, that states the following: “all course work completed by transfer students during the first two years of university study in Canada will be recognized and fully credited for the purposes of granting a degree,” based on a few stipulations:

- “The transfer student is deemed admissible and has been presented with an offer of admission;
- The transfer student has achieved a passing grade in his/her course(s) and has obtained grade levels that would normally be required of continuing students; and
- The credits earned are related to the program of study in which the transfer student will register, or the credits can be counted as electives for the program of study.”<sup>33</sup>

Secondly, students recommend an end to the practice of setting minimum grade requirements above the passing grade for transferred credits to be accepted. Currently, many universities will accept transfer students, then subject their credits to a

second evaluation, where they may have to surpass a minimum grade requirement 10-20 per cent higher than the passing grade of their own institution. OUSA believes that if a student has passed a course, and meets all other admission requirements, they should receive credit for it.

OUSA believes these changes are possible in Ontario given that members of the Council of Ontario Universities (COU) have recognized that their educational quality is roughly equal.<sup>34</sup> Credits received at any Ontario university should be of sufficient quality for any other institution to at least accept them as general credit, if not program-specific credit.

**Recommendation: The government should require first and second year university credits to be transferable system-wide.**  
*Estimated Cost to Government: \$0*

**Recommendation: The government should mandate that all per-course minimum grade requirements be set at the passing grade.**  
*Estimated Cost to Government: \$0*

**FIGURE 6: PER-COURSE MINIMUM GRADE REQUIREMENTS - 2011-2012**

INSTITUTION	COLLEGE	UNIVERISTY	INSTITUTION	COLLEGE	UNIVERSITY
Algoma	60%	60%	Ottawa	73%	--
Brock	70%	60%	Queen’s	60%	60%
Carleton	73%	60%	Ryerson	70%	65%
Guelph	70%	60%	Toronto	N/A	60%
Lakehead	75%	65%	Trent	70%	60%
Laurentian	65%	60%	UOIT	75%	65%
Laurier	70%	70%	Waterloo	70%	65%
McMaster	73%	65%	Western	73%	60%
Nipissing	75%	65%	Windsor	60%	60%
OCAD	65%	65%	York	70%	60%

# ENDNOTES

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- \*\* Since a majority of students are not attending school in the summer, supplementary questions are asked from May to August to monitor their labour market situation, or, in other words, their rate of employment during the summer months.
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**ONTARIO UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT ALLIANCE**

26 Soho St, Suite 345

Toronto, M5T 1Z7

**t:** 416.341.9948 **f:** 416.341.0358

**w:** [www.ousa.ca](http://www.ousa.ca) **e:** [info@ousa.ca](mailto:info@ousa.ca)

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