



A MESSAGE FROM YOUR BCFS CHAIRPERSON

Dear members,

For 50 years, members of the BC Federation of Students (BCFS) from across British Columbia have been relentlessly fighting for accessible, equitable, and affordable post-secondary education.

Your students' union is among the 14 students' unions that make up the BCFS, representing over 170,000 members like you! Whether it be advocating for more public funding in our institutions, international student fairness, or increasing funding to provincial grants, your students' union is part of a collective voice that fights for better education.

For years, we have been vocal about the detrimental effects of the decrease in government funding of post-secondary institutions and the overreliance on international tuition fees. Institutions are experiencing service cuts, program cuts, and skyrocketing tuition fees, and students are bearing the consequences, alongside facing a high cost of living. This issue can no longer be ignored!

Now more than ever, we must work together. Through collective action we've seen victories achieved, including a cap on domestic tuition fee increases, the elimination of interest on provincial and federal student loans, the elimination of tuition fees for adult basic education, the introduction of the BC Access Grant, and many more.

Together, we will continue to fight to save our post-secondary education. We have been building this momentum for half a century, and we are not stopping now. Together, we can achieve an equitable, affordable, and accessible post-secondary education system, one step at a time. If you want to join the movement, get engaged with your students' union, run for your Board of Directors, and do not be afraid to let your voice be heard.

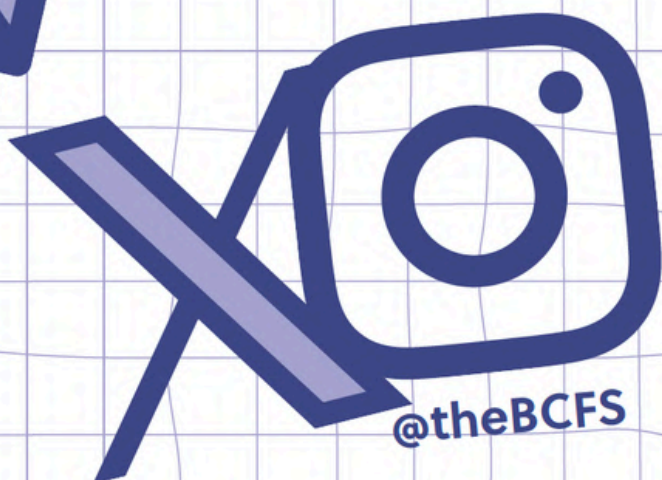
We are stronger together.

In solidarity,

Debi Herrera Lira

Chairperson, BC Federation of Students

Stay in Touch



About the Federation

Amplifying student voices for 50 years

In 1975, students across British Columbia saw the need to work together as a single, united movement in order to be an effective force for provincial and national change. Today, the Federation brings together over 170,000 students from 14 universities, colleges, and institutes across BC.

The Federation gives students a space to effectively collaborate, organise, and mobilise to advocate for collective interests locally, provincially, and nationally. The Federation also provides valuable services for individual members and member local students' unions.

OUR FOUNDING PRINCIPLES

DEMOCRATIC & CO-OPERATIVE

**BRING STUDENTS
TOGETHER
FOR CHANGE**

**PROVIDE SERVICES
THAT MEET NEEDS &
BUILD COMMUNITY**

**SHARE
IDEAS &
EXPERIENCE**

**EFFECTIVELY
DISTRIBUTE
RESOURCES**

**ADVOCATE
FOR
STUDENTS'
NEEDS**

**TO ACHIEVE AN ACCESSIBLE, HIGH QUALITY,
NATIONALLY PLANNED, POST-SECONDARY
EDUCATION SYSTEM WHICH RECOGNIZES THE
LEGITIMACY OF STUDENT REPRESENTATION & THE
VALIDITY OF STUDENT RIGHTS.**

What we do for students

Run campaigns

to make post-secondary education more affordable and accessible

Provide services

to meet students' unique needs and save students money

Lobby for change

on behalf of students to all levels of government

Connect students

across the province to create community and build solidarity

Meet your Student Representatives!

Each of the Federation's member local students' unions elects one student member to be their representative on the Executive Committee and be the voice for students at their institution.

The Federation's four At-Large Directors, Chairperson, Indigenous Caucus Chairperson and Secretary-Treasurer are elected annually at our AGM.

Scan the QR code to meet your Executive Committee representatives.



**Meet your
Exec. reps**



Your student movement

An Introduction to the BC Federation of Students

When it comes to making positive changes to public education, we are stronger when we work together than when we are working alone. Governments—both provincial and federal—are often reluctant to implement policies that benefit students. However, a chorus of voices calling for a common goal is a powerful tool to bring about change. Working together through the Federation gives students across BC a united voice and influence on public policy.

Working together and pooling resources also means students can get better, ethically oriented services for less. Through economies of scale, the Federation helps save money for individual students and member local students' unions money through initiatives like the Deals App – our student discount program – the promotional materials service, and the BC Student Health Consortium.

Democratic Decision Making

Regardless of region or size, each member local students' union has an equal voice at the table to set the agenda for the provincial student movement.

The Federation is run by an Executive Committee that includes one representative from every member local students' union. The Committee meets at least four times per year to discuss and direct the operations of the organisation.

The Federation also holds one general membership meeting every year to review, debate, and determine the campaigns, services, and policies of the organisation.

Each students' union selects delegates to represent students at their institution in the decision making of the general meetings.



RECENT

STUDENT POWER IN ACTION

By working together, students and the Federation have won some major victories, including:

2005

BC's tuition
fee cap
(ongoing)

2008

\$800 million in new federal
funding for post-secondary
education

2008

Canada's first national system of grants for
low- and middle-income students

2011

Introduction
of a U-pass
(and
discounted
transit rates)
for lower
mainland
students

2017

Reduction
of interest
on BC
student
loans

2017

Elimination
of tuition
fees on
adult basic
education

2018

\$250,000 in new funding for
open education resources

VICTORIES

2019

Elimination
of interest on BC
student loans

2019

\$3.26 million in new funding
for open education resources

2020

\$41 million in
new funding
for the BC
Access Grant

2022

Temporary elimination of
off-campus work limits for
international students

2023

Increase
to the
Canada
Student
Grant

2023

Elimination of
interest on federal
student loans



WE'RE CALLING ON THE BC GOVERNMENT TO:



*Join thousands of
students across BC &
take action!*

***Take action to stop
cuts to academic
programs & student
services on campuses***

***Ensure institutions
do not rely on tuition
fees as their main
source of funding***

***Restore public
funding to the post-
secondary system to
at least 75%***

***Strengthen the
Tuition Limit Policy
& cap international
tuition fee increases
at 2% annually***

***Freeze, then
progressively reduce
tuition fees***



CAMPAIGNS & GOVERNMENT RELATIONS

Advocating for Students' Issues

The BC Federation of Students fights for a fairer post-secondary system—one that puts students first. We bring your concerns to government, back them up with in-depth research, and organise campaigns to push for change. Whether it's through protests, petitions, social media actions, or speaking directly with decision-makers, our campaigns are powered by students like you.

We're advocating for an accessible education system—one that's affordable, inclusive, and responsive to student needs. That includes domestic and international students, students in rural and remote communities, trades students, Indigenous students, and those from historically marginalized backgrounds.

With institutions now running major deficits, services being cut, and tuition fees continuing to rise, students are feeling the pressure on campus every day. The time to act is now.

Get involved! Scan the QR code and take action to support our campaigns.

CAMPAIGNS & GOVERNMENT RELATIONS

Institutional Funding & Tuition Fees

For years, students warned the BC government that relying on international tuition fees to fund our public post-secondary system was risky and unfair. In 2024, that warning became reality: the federal government capped international study permits, exposing just how fragile the system has become.

Years of underfunding have led to program cuts, layoffs, and reductions to services students rely on. Institutions are charging students more while delivering less—and it's not sustainable.

That's why we're calling on the BC government to:

- ***Complete the Post-Secondary Funding Formula Review and Develop a New Funding Model.*** In 2022, BC launched a long-overdue review of how it funds colleges and universities. Students, staff, and faculty gave input—but years later, the government still hasn't published the results or made changes. Without action, institutions remain underfunded, and students continue to pay the price.
- ***Restore public funding*** to the post-secondary education system (and our institutions) to 75%.

In the 1980s, the provincial government covered more than 75% of college and university operating costs. Today, that number has dropped below 44%—forcing schools to rely on increasing student tuition to stay afloat. Tuition fee revenue has increased by over 300% since 2002, reaching 47.6% of institution's revenue and surpassing the proportion of government funding.

Restoring public funding to at least 75% would reduce pressure on students, stabilise institutions, and strengthen access to post-secondary education—ensuring it is protected as a public good.



Your representatives meet with MLAs and MPs to advocate for policies to make education more affordable.

The Funding Crisis in Post-secondary

BC's post-secondary system is in crisis—and students are living the consequences. Institutions across the province are facing deep financial pressure, with 17 colleges and universities projected to run deficits this year. These are not abstract budget problems—they're cancelled classes, longer waitlists, fewer course options, and fewer support services for students.

The root cause? A funding model that has pushed institutions to rely on unpredictable international tuition instead of stable public investment. Unless the province reinvests in post-secondary education, students will continue to pay more for less.

This shift has real and immediate consequences for students:

- Cancelled courses and academic programs
- Layoffs of instructors and staff
- Reduced services, including shorter library and cafeteria hours
- Longer wait times for counselling and academic support

Over the past year alone, the crisis has become impossible to ignore. VIU is facing a \$20 million shortfall and has cut programs, cancelled projects, and frozen hiring. North Island College and Camosun College are laying off faculty and cutting classes. Across the province, institutions like SFU, Langara, KPU, TRU, Selkirk, Okanagan College, and the College of New Caledonia are all slashing programs and jobs, citing declining international enrollment and unstable government funding.

In 2022, the BC government launched a long-overdue review of how it funds public post-secondary institutions—a system that hadn't been updated in over 20 years. The review was meant to address growing inequities and ensure colleges and universities have the stable, predictable funding they need to support students and meet the demands of local communities and the labour market. Students, faculty, and staff across the province took part in the first phase of the review, submitting ideas to build a fairer and more sustainable system. But years later, the government has yet to publish the findings or move forward with a new funding model. Until real change is implemented, students and institutions will continue to feel the pressure. It's time to finish what was started.

The solution is clear: restore public funding and reinvest in the future of post-secondary education.

Rising Tuition Fees

Since 2001, tuition fees in BC have increased by more than 125%. Fees are one of the biggest barriers keeping students out of the classroom, especially those from low-income families—who are disproportionately Indigenous, students of colour, trans students, students with disabilities, and students raised in single-parent homes—and mature students. On top of tuition fees, the cost of rent, groceries, gas and other expenses continues to rise.

It hasn't always been this way. In the early 2000s, BC had some of the lowest tuition fees in the country. But after decades of cuts, tuition has more than doubled, and students are now working multiple jobs or going into debt just to afford a basic education.



Student Debt is Holding Us Back

Student loan debt is a huge problem in Canada; nearly half of all students graduate university in debt. As of July 2022, the total amount of student loan debt owed to the federal government, by more than 1.9 million Canadians, was \$23.5 billion – which only increases further when you include provincial loans and private debt. In BC, student debt has risen 88% since 1999, and today the average student loan balance at graduation is over \$30,000.

Studies show that student debt holds young people back not only professionally, but also in other important ways: because of rising debt, recent graduates in Canada are delaying major life events like getting married, buying a home or car, and starting a family. Students not only struggle to pay their tuition fees, but face huge challenges finding affordable housing, covering the cost of groceries, gas and other costs associated with day-to-day life. The 2023 BC budget introduced the doubling of student loan maximums and increasing the income level required for repayment to begin, but allowing a student to take on more debt is not a solution to creating an accessible and equitable education system that will meet the future needs of our province. Students are tomorrow's nurses, early childhood educators and trades people but the education required to fill these, and other well-paying jobs, is increasingly unaffordable. Together we can fight for better.

So what's the solution? To freeze and progressively reduce tuition fees. The provincial government must reinvest in post-secondary education and commit to ensuring cost is never a barrier to learning and upskilling.

Fairness for International Students

While all students in Canada have faced dramatic fee increases over the last decade, tuition fees for international students have become particularly burdensome in recent years. Average tuition fees for international students can be as much as five times the already high fees paid by domestic students. International students make up a substantial portion of the enrolment at BC's public universities and colleges, and institutions have come to rely on them as a revenue stream to make up for government funding shortfalls.

Pressure on institutions to rely on international student tuition fees is significant; tuition fees for international students in BC have increased 538% since 1991 and are now on average more than \$25,400 per year. The disparity between fees paid by international and domestic students is huge: while international students make up approximately 20% of overall enrolment in BC universities, their fees make up 48% of tuition fee revenues. To make matters worse, international tuition fee increases are not regulated, unlike domestic tuition fees, which can

only increase to a maximum of 2% each year. Beyond the cost of education, international students often face a lack of adequate services, such as advisors, counselors, and financial and other supports if they find themselves in difficult situations.

International students are major contributors not only to our institutional communities (and budgets), but also to our off-campus communities and BC's economy. Fairness and predictability for international students is necessary to ensure BC remains a desirable destination to study for students from around the world and to create equity for all learners studying in the province.



Reconciliation Through Education

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was created to investigate and respond to the serious effects residential schools had, and continue to have, on survivors and their families. Running from 2008 to 2015, the Commission held national events and heard accounts from survivors. The TRC then gathered their findings and put them into a report that included a list of calls to action for federal and provincial governments to implement to begin addressing the damage the legacy of residential schools, including the regressive politics that led to their creation and maintenance, had on the Indigenous population in Canada. The 94 calls to action in the TRC's report address issues around health, child welfare, education, and the preservation of language and culture. These recommendations are aimed at seeking equity for Indigenous people.

The TRC's recommendations for post-secondary education focus on providing necessary funding to educate teachers on how to integrate Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods in the classroom. Education needs to be a top priority in the federal and provincial reconciliation framework. Investing in Indigenous education is a necessary step towards reconciliation and provides a pathway to stronger economic stability and reducing income inequality.

There continues to be a large gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous learners attaining a post-secondary degree. Using 2015 graduate numbers, the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) found that another 78,000 Indigenous graduates are required to close the attainment gap, which would require an increase of 80.6% of current funding. This gap is due to years of piecemeal funding increases and a cap of only 2% in funding increases that have allowed the program's funds to be far lower than necessitated. For the 2022-23 fiscal period, the AFN has identified a conservative estimate of \$7.27 billion over five years to address the backlog

of Indigenous learners waiting to access the Post-Secondary Student Support Program (PSSSP). Programs like the Métis Nation Post-Secondary Education Strategy and the Inuit Post-Secondary Education Strategy are also underfunded. Continuing to raise these issues to government decision-makers is necessary to ensure progress is made on implementing the TRC's recommendations for the post-secondary sector and that the required funding is available for Indigenous students wishing to pursue post-secondary studies.

Open Education Resources

Open Education Resources (OER) are teaching, learning, and research resources that reside in the public domain, which permits their free use and re-purposing by others. These resources commonly include textbooks and open access journals but can also include other materials used for learning and research like course materials, modules, videos, tests, software, and more.

The cost of textbooks and course materials has long been a financial challenge for students. Constantly changing versions of textbooks and skyrocketing prices have put many textbooks beyond the reach of students.

In 2012, the BC government created the Open Textbook Project and provided \$2 million to fund the development of OER as a result of student advocacy. Since then, students in BC have saved over \$41.5 million thanks to instructors adopting OER materials for their classes.

Talk to your instructor about using OER in your class! If you want to get involved in the movement to fight high textbook prices with high-quality, low-cost alternatives, contact your students' union.

MEMBER SERVICES



The Federation offers a number of programs and services to meet the unique needs of students, and to help students and member local students' unions save money.

Student Discounts: *the Deals App*

The Federation runs a province-wide student discount program – the Deals App – to help save members like yourself money during a cost of living crisis.

The Deals App can save you money at restaurants, retail stores, gyms, and hotels, on flights, internet and phone plans, and at local businesses in your community.

Together with member local students' unions, the Federation partners with businesses all over the province to offer student discounts in stores and online. You can access discounts right from your phone. Download the Deals App for free and get access to instant savings at hundreds of businesses across British Columbia.

Members' Handbook & Dayplanner

Many students' unions produce and distribute day planners (like this one!) to their members. Not only does it save students from having to buy their own, but they also contain important information about your student representatives, the resources and services available to you, and campaigns and advocacy work you can get involved in through your students' union. Be sure to check out your students' union section at the front of this handbook to learn more.

The Federation's members' handbook service began in 1993 as a means of producing dayplanners for members at small students' unions who could not, on their own, produce such a service. Today the Federation coordinates the production of 14 versions of the handbook – which are locally-produced on recycled paper in a unionized facility – and member local students' unions of all sizes benefit from economies of scale. Not only does this service provide a superior product for members, but it saves money that is passed back to you in the form of improved or expanded services and events on campus.

BC Student Health Consortium

The rising costs of prescription drugs, health procedures, and dental services that are not covered by provincial health plans have an enormous impact on students' budgets. The BC Student Health Consortium – the Federation's health and dental insurance service – was created by students, for students. It secures lower rates and better coverage for eligible members using the collective expertise and purchasing power of member local students' unions.

Working with not-for-profit insurance provider GreenShield, the Federation

supports member local students' unions with the design, negotiation, promotion, and administration of their members' health and dental plan. The BC Student Health Consortium also strives to drive progressive change among those offering students health and dental benefits.

These plans provide you with coverage for prescription drugs, dental care, counselling, paramedical services, gender-affirming healthcare, legal assistance services, life insurance and more, as well as discounts on dental visit co-pays and prescription glasses and contacts.

Ethical & Sustainable Promotional Materials

The Federation coordinates the purchase of ethically and sustainably sourced materials for campuses across the province. Materials include water bottles and lanyards made from 100% recycled plastics, union-made pens, ethically sourced clothing and lots more! By purchasing these products collectively through the Federation, member local students' unions can make your membership dues go further and help make campuses sweatshop-free.

Campus Mobile App

Designed for students, Ready Education connects campuses and creates communities by providing an online platform to share information about events, clubs, services, and advocacy work happening on and off campus. The app can be used to share apartments for rent, buy or sell used textbooks, or simply to connect with other students in your community. Among other benefits, this partnership allows the app to be made available to campus clubs for event promotion, member sign-up, and ongoing communication with club membership. Ask your students' union if they have a campus app, or search for it wherever you download your apps!



LEARNING & BUILDING CONNECTIONS

Skills Development Symposium

Being a students' union director is super rewarding, but it can also feel daunting at first. There's so much to learn when you're first elected and start on the board of directors! From legal responsibilities, to overseeing students' union finances, engaging your members, talking to the media, and working with your staff, it's a lot to wrap your head around.

To help students' union directors and staff be the most successful they can be and fulfill their roles in advocating for the needs of students on your campus, the Federation holds an annual province-wide conference to host a variety of skill-building workshops.

The Skills Development Symposium consists of workshops and seminars that provide elected representatives with a broad range of skills required to effectively operate a students' union. The Symposium also provides participants with an opportunity to make connections and develop relationships with student leaders from across the province. The Symposium is fully subsidized by the Federation for one participant from each member local students' union, and partially subsidized for up to eleven more. This allows students' unions to spend just a little bit of money to ensure staff and directors have the training they need to be the most effective on your campus.