



Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance

The Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance is a non-partisan advocacy organization that represents the interests of over 150,000 undergraduate and professional, full-time and part-time university students at eight student associations across Ontario.

ANCILLARY AND INCIDENTAL FEES

Alongside tuition fees, students pay ancillary and incidental fees to fund services, supports and resources to enhance their post-secondary experience. Ancillary and incidental fees form a large part of the cost of attending post-secondary institutions. Despite being key stakeholders in this regard, students worry about several issues that impede the transparency and distribution of these funds. Some issues include autonomy in levying fees, the clarity of fee guidelines, and gaps within the different fees they pay. As ancillary fees encourage a holistic and fulfilling post-secondary experience, students require measures that would strengthen the incidental fee funding model to promote transparency, accountability and affordability.

THE PROBLEM

Threats to the Autonomy of Students and Student Groups

Students are concerned that prior government interference in student association processes and autonomy greatly limited student associations' ability to provide employment and experiential learning opportunities for students. Individualized designation of non-essential fees threatens the existence of programs and services offered on post-secondary campuses that are funded through non-essential ancillary fees by creating financial uncertainty regarding the total funding available to cover staffing and miscellaneous costs. Additionally, programs and services offered on the campuses of post-secondary institutions for marginalized students are disproportionately impacted by the individualized designation of non-essential ancillary fee payment. By overriding democratic decisions and providing post-secondary students with the option to individually opt out of paying non-essential ancillary fees, that were previously deemed mandatory, the programs and services funded by these fees become more expensive to access, placing undue financial hardship on students of low-socioeconomic status.

Fragmented Ancillary Fee Guidelines

Students are worried that the current *Tuition Fee Framework and Ancillary Fee Guidelines* fail to emphasize the complexity and importance of an-

ncillary fees as it focuses heavily on tuition.

Many institutional services receive little oversight from students in how they are funded and to what degree. As well, post-secondary students are often unaware of what services their fees are being used to fund, contributing to a lack of transparency and respect for their role as primary funders and stakeholders at their post-secondary institution.

Institutional ancillary fee protocols are not easily available or accessible to all members of a post-secondary institution, leading to a lack of transparency and accountability. Notably, there is a lack of fairness over how institutions assess ancillary fees for on-campus facilities/services, specifically in instances when they cannot be feasibly accessed or are unequally accessible (e.g. the student attends courses at a satellite campus, remote learning).

Gaps Among Various Types of Fees

Another concern for students is that universities do not adequately communicate details surrounding the functionality of meal plans to students, and this causes misinformation/lack of understanding. Students are not adequately represented in decision-making groups that govern housing and residence operations, and further, they are often limited in their abilities to influence decision-making bodies due to lacking adequate

ANCILLARY AND INCIDENTAL FEES

training and background information on how to navigate and effectively engage in complex issues like housing. In addition, housing prices can be set at fully autonomous rates by universities, which could be seen as a revenue-generating mechanism in financially difficult times. The rental-dependent enrollment growth of many post-secondary institutions has outpaced the rate of available student-suitable housing in their surrounding communities. Students are also worried that many university meal plans lose their value if not used within the term student is living in residence.

Furthermore, course withdrawal fees are unregulated by the government, allowing universities to set and change these fees at their own discretion, subjecting them to potentially high increases and limiting course selection flexibility.

Administrative fees are often nominal but widespread, and therefore impractical to regulate on a fee-by-fee basis and there is no provincial regulation preventing net-profit-generating administrative fees. Fees that could be considered administrative are not classified as such and therefore may not fall under any type of regulation.

Many Ontario student associations have contract/financial obligations to third-party organizations for which they've expressed desire to leave, but haven't been able to due to overly stringent requirements. Further to this, many students feel uncomfortable with third parties receiving student money and perceive a lack of accountability for third party fees.

Students are concerned that when a post-secondary institution fails to replace broken/outdated equipment or learning resources in a timely manner, student-funded endowments are frequently used to purchase these materials, resulting in less finances for their intended purposes. Post-secondary institutions are becoming increasingly reliant on student-sponsored endowment funds to provide the necessary components of a quality education to students. There is a scarcity of data on how much student endowments/external donations are being relied upon to maintain baseline educational quality, and the administration of these endowment funds is often opaque and information is not readily available to contributors.

System-wide and vendor fees are exempt from the current requirements under the *Ancillary Fee*

Guidelines and are often implemented without student approval or consultation. Students are worried that these fees represent a method for post-secondary institutions to unfairly circumvent student approval of compulsory ancillary fees.

Unaffordable and Incomprehensive Fees for Additional Learning Resources

Students of low-socioeconomic status are disproportionately affected by the high costs of learning materials, and the high and unregulated prices of textbooks and course materials place a significant financial burden on students. In addition, students are required to pay for software, programs, and/or subscriptions, often in addition to required course textbooks, to complete graded course activities and evaluations in compulsory courses, making post-secondary education more costly and unaffordable, while also placing students who cannot afford to purchase these materials at an academic disadvantage. There is also concern that students attending post-secondary institutions are not made aware of the cost of required textbooks and additional learning materials before registering for a course, making it hard for students to financially prepare themselves for the total costs of materials needed to complete their courses of study.

Work-integrated learning fees are exempt under the *Tuition Fee Framework and Ancillary Fee Guidelines* protocol which allows post-secondary institutions the ability to charge students high and unregulated amounts for work-integrated learning services, making this educational opportunity inaccessible for some students. Post-secondary institutions have also experienced an increase in students wishing to participate in a work-integrated learning program but do not have enough spots or work opportunities available in these programs to meet student demand. Students are worried that those who, for a variety of reasons, cannot participate in a work-integrated learning program, are placed at both an academic and professional disadvantage, potentially affecting their ability to gain employment post-graduation.

Students are concerned that high costs of additional physical learning materials required to participate in any course of study places students who cannot afford to purchase these materials at an academic disadvantage. Furthermore, students are currently experiencing financial pres-

ANCILLARY AND INCIDENTAL FEES

sure to purchase learning materials, clothing, and/or equipment necessary for academic participation and evaluation, placing undue financial hardship on students to successfully participate in their courses or programs of study.

Another worrisome issue for students is the high costs of attending field trips in compulsory courses. These fees often incurred by students in addition to their tuition and course material fees creates inequity within the classroom as the cost of attending field trips may prevent students from participating in these enriching learning opportunities.

A Lack of Transparency and Accountability

Non-academic student services often misunderstand what students want or need, thus unnecessarily increasing the cost of the service. The purposes or origins of ancillary fees are often poorly communicated to students, limiting transparency and institutional accountability. Additionally, the provincial term “compulsory non-tuition-related ancillary fee” is not used consistently at every Ontario post-secondary institution, which leads to inefficiency and a lack of transparency. Students are also concerned that it is often unclear whether fees are being charged on a per-term, per-course/credit, or flat-fee basis. The administration of the payment and refund process (where applicable) of various ancillary fees is sometimes done in an inconsistent manner through many different offices and forms, contributing to a lack of transparency and accountability.

Unbalanced Cost Sharing

Students are worried about being unfairly burdened with financing access to services and goods that benefit the entire university community. The large student contributions towards operational budgets creates an inequitable cost sharing system and disadvantages students of low-socioeconomic status both in-study and after graduation.

Another concern for students is that they often have little to no oversight on projects that are student-funded. There is insufficient funding for student-focused capital projects in Ontario, and students are disproportionately responsible for financing campus buildings and enhancements that benefit the entire university community.

Student services that support the personal well-being, inclusion and safety have become almost completely dependent on ancillary fees, and many of these fees are not considered “essential” under the *Tuition Fee Framework and Ancillary Fee Guidelines*. Lastly, inadequate and unreliable investment in baseline student services disproportionately impacts students with mental health concerns, students with disabilities, Indigenous and racialized students, survivors of sexual violence, and students of low-socioeconomic status.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Respecting Student and Student Group Autonomy

The provincial government must avoid the creation of any future policy that allows students to opt out of paying non-essential fees on an individualized basis for those fees which students have already determined through a democratic process should be mandatorily accessed. The provincial government should also revise the current version of the *Tuition Fee Framework and Ancillary Fee Guidelines* to mandate that student associations must obtain a majority of student support through a democratic process, set through the existing by-laws of that institution, before levying and/or removing fees.

Distinguishing Ancillary Fee Guidelines

The provincial government should divide the *Tuition Fee Framework and Ancillary Fee Guidelines* into two distinct policies, thus creating standalone ancillary fee guidelines, to ensure adequate attention is given to both frameworks. While drafting the new policies that affect the payment and distribution of ancillary fees, the provincial government should engage in consultations with post-secondary institutions, and their respective student unions, to ensure that these policies do not hinder the functioning of existing services.

The provincial government should mandate, through a standalone ancillary fee guideline, that students must be given the opportunity to sit on the governing bodies of the services funded by ancillary fees. This standalone policy should dictate that students should be proportionally represented on the governing bodies of these services in reference to the percentage of the budget they contribute, up to a simple majority. In addition,

ANCILLARY AND INCIDENTAL FEES

this policy should compel post-secondary institutions to publish a breakdown of how each ancillary fee was individually utilized at the end of the fiscal year for public viewing. The provincial government should also continue to mandate that post-secondary institutions provide students with a breakdown of student paid fees at their institution in an accessible and easy-to-understand format, prior to fee collection.

The provincial government should, through standalone ancillary fee guidelines, revise the guidelines so that institutional ancillary fee protocols are required to include terms on the categorization, approval, and review timelines of various fees. Further, the provincial government should develop an institutional ancillary fee protocol structure that can be provided as a best practice example for post-secondary institutions, which should establish high-level roles and procedures for fee recommendations, approvals, collection, and remittance. Where student services may not be equally accessible to all students, the Ministry of Colleges and Universities should require universities have a policy, developed in consultation with students, with respect to how ancillary fees are assessed to students studying primarily online/on satellite campuses. As well, the provincial government should, through standalone ancillary fee guidelines, outline procedures for fee remittances so that payments are agreed to be made within reasonable timelines, avoiding administrative surcharges for late payments. The provincial government should, through standalone ancillary fee guidelines, continue to mandate that post-secondary institutions publish their institutional ancillary fee protocols in an accessible format that is available to all students attending this institution prior to the collection of ancillary fees.

Prioritizing Students Among the Different Types of Fees

The Ministry of Colleges and Universities should mandate that universities provide detailed information on the functionality of meal plans alongside other relevant information. The provincial government should mandate, through standalone ancillary fee guidelines, that all university residences or housing systems have an oversight body with significant student representation, and that this oversight body be responsible for compiling a periodic public report on the state of the student housing system, including a breakdown of aggregate revenues, operating expenditures,

and contributions to any housing capital fund. The provincial government should also mandate that undergraduate student representatives be provided with adequate training and support to enhance their abilities to provide useful feedback and insights to decision-making bodies. The provincial government should mandate, through standalone ancillary fee guidelines, that any profit generated by housing services should be used to maintain, improve, and build future on-campus housing. Additionally, the provincial government should mandate that universities need to have housing available for all incoming rental-dependent students and 20% of the returning students. The provincial government should provide targeted funding towards the construction of more off-campus university-owned student housing without offloading the initial capital costs onto students. The provincial government should also mandate that universities transfer any leftover meal plan dollars to flex dollars of equivalent purchasing power (minus adjustments to inflation) and monetary value, after a student has left residence. In cases where it is not preferable for a student living off-campus to have access to residence food facilities or when the student has graduated university, any remaining meal plan dollars should be refunded to the student.

The provincial government should, through standalone ancillary fee guidelines, ban course withdrawal fees for changes in course configurations within the course add/drop period. If course withdrawal fees are not banned outright, the provincial government should, through standalone ancillary fee guidelines, ban course withdrawal fees when students have to withdraw due to compassionate reasons, such as medical or mental health concerns.

The provincial government should establish, through standalone ancillary fee guidelines, that administrative fees must be charged at a commensurate or lower rate than the cost of providing the services funded by those fees. The provincial government should mandate, through standalone ancillary fee guidelines, that before the introduction or change in an administrative fee, a rudimentary assessment of the additional cost of providing that service be conducted, and that these assessment documents be made available to any student upon request. Furthermore, the provincial government should mandate, through standalone ancillary fee guidelines, that universities should provide essential academic records

ANCILLARY AND INCIDENTAL FEES

such as official transcripts, proof of enrollment at no cost for current students and recently graduated students (of up to 5 years out of school). The provincial government should establish, through standalone ancillary fee guidelines, that any fee not otherwise categorized by the standalone ancillary fee guidelines or categorized by a mutual agreement of a post-secondary institution and its student associations, shall be considered a miscellaneous fee and be treated identically to an administrative fee. If a fee is classified as miscellaneous, the provincial government should mandate, through standalone ancillary fee guidelines, that this miscellaneous status remain until a stakeholder requests that the Ministry of Colleges and Universities determine the classification of the fee into another category.

The provincial government should mandate that all student associations have a policy describing the process to enter and exit contractual/financial agreements with third-party organizations, and should enact legislation that allows student associations to enter renegotiation discussions with third party organizations before renewing the contract.

The provincial government should mandate, through its standalone ancillary fee protocol, that independent, student-sponsored endowment funds be required to publish their financial information and a list of sponsored projects in a way that is readily available to students who've contributed to it. In addition, the provincial government should task post-secondary institutions to systematically assess and readjust areas of their budgets that consistently require supplemental funding from student endowment funds to preserve the quality of academic programming. The provincial government should also include expenses incurred by student endowments on behalf of post-secondary institutions in their evaluation of the cost of education provision.

The provincial government should eliminate both the system-wide and vendor fee exemptions from the *Tuition Fee Framework and Ancillary Fee Guidelines*.

Affordable and Comprehensive Additional Learning Resources Fees

The provincial government should increase funding provided to post-secondary institutions for the purpose of creating a program in which students with a demonstrated financial need are

able to purchase textbooks and required course materials for a subsidized or reduced cost. The provincial government should increase funding allocated towards post-secondary institutions for the purpose of creating and developing new Open Education Resources (OERs), and include the creation and development of OERs as a criteria in the tenure process at their institution, so as to incentivize teaching faculty and staff to continue developing these resources. The provincial government should also mandate that the cost of required course materials be made available to students prior to registering for their courses of study to ensure transparency regarding the total costs associated with successful course completion.

The provincial government should invest in work-integrated learning programs on campuses to reduce these programs' dependency on student ancillary fees. Additionally, the provincial government should revert back to the initial set up of the Career Ready Fund for the purpose of creating new work-integrated learning placements at post-secondary institutions and to reduce their dependence on ancillary fees to fund these opportunities. The provincial government should include work-integrated learning fees as a non-exempt fee within the ancillary fee protocol.

The provincial government should mandate that post-secondary institutions create a subsidized rental or used option where students with demonstrated financial need can rent or purchase physical learning materials to decrease inequity within the classroom, and should create grants that support the aforementioned programs. The provincial government should also mandate post-secondary institutions regularly replace or update items in their loaned equipment inventory to ensure students of low-socioeconomic status are not placed at an academic disadvantage or face risk to their personal safety. The provincial government should increase funding given to post-secondary institutions for the purpose of starting a rental program where students can rent the physical learning materials needed for course evaluation and participation.

Furthermore, the provincial government should increase funding given to post-secondary institutions for the purpose of creating bursaries for students of low-socioeconomic status so that these students are able to attend and participate

ANCILLARY AND INCIDENTAL FEES

in course field trips. The provincial government should mandate that the approximate costs of attending field trips where participation is required for academic evaluation should be advertised at time of enrollment so as to increase transparency and enable students to make an informed decision whether to register for the course.

Increasing Transparency and Accountability

The provincial government should establish standalone ancillary fee guidelines, distinct from the tuition fee framework, in consultation with post-secondary institution administrators, student association representatives, and the Council of Ontario Universities (COU). In addition, the provincial government should mandate, through standalone ancillary fee guidelines, that all fiscal material, including budgets, audits, and explanatory breakdowns of ancillary fees, be publicly disclosed in a way that is readily available to students. The provincial government should mandate that the term “compulsory non-tuition related ancillary fee” be used consistently across the sector. The provincial government should also mandate, through standalone ancillary fee guidelines, that all post-secondary institutions levy and collect all ancillary fees through a centralized online system.

Equitable Cost Sharing

The provincial government should increase operating grants such that student tuition and ancillary fees make up no more than a third of operating revenue for the administration of undergraduate academic programming and support services.

In addition, the provincial government should mandate that any committees or decision-making bodies responsible for overseeing capital project budgets contain at least one voting student member from the institution’s respective student union. The provincial government should create priority funding for projects that enhance student development, such as student centres, health centres, and athletic facilities. The provincial government should also ensure that investment required into deferred maintenance does not exclude spaces originally funded through student ancillary fees. The provincial government should mandate that, for all student-ancillary-funded spaces, agreements must be made between post-secondary institutions and stu-

dent associations to establish a management structure of the project that prioritizes student concerns and priorities.

Lastly, the provincial government should classify ancillary fees that fund baseline student services as “essential” under standalone ancillary fee guidelines, and should co-fund baseline student services and supports in an effort to provide a minimum standard of safety and well-being at post-secondary institutions across the province.