



EDUCATED SOLUTIONS

REIMAGINING POST-SECONDARY IN THE AGE OF COVID-19

VOL. 14

Foreword by David Piccini, MPP and
Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of
Colleges and Universities

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FOREWORD



MPP DAVID PICCINI

In 2018, when I assumed the role of Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Colleges and Universities, both the state of post-secondary education and the province was complex. As a millennial, I was cognisant of the increasing costs of post-secondary education, while acutely aware of the growing public debt-saddled on future generations. Simply put, we had to do better. One of the first things our government did was to send a strong signal to the sector by lowering tuition by ten per cent across the board. Our government and the Ministry of Colleges and Universities remains dedicated to improving accessibility, affordability and quality of education in the Province of Ontario. I remain steadfast in my commitment to providing students across Ontario with a path for success in obtaining employment upon the completion of their studies. Synergizing education to labour market demand has long been part of our government's strategy, and I am proud to continue advancing policies that further this goal.

Earlier this year without warning, a global pandemic shuttered our economy and society. COVID-19 continues to disrupt students, both domestic and international, in their studies. From the onset of the COVID-19 outbreak, we took quick and decisive action to alleviate some of the immediate pressures post-secondary students faced. We will continue to provide resources and supports during this period and throughout recovery; from emergency funding, increasing mental health supports and investments in Indigenous education. The Ministry of Colleges and Universities is committed to students, and that's why we have continued to hold consultations with student groups and institutions to actively listen while we determine the best path forward and to strengthen frameworks that provide a beneficial opportunity for all.

Amidst the backdrop of COVID-19, a renewed discussion on racial equality and the difficulties faced by marginalized communities has emerged. I am happy that we are having these much-needed discussions. Our government has embraced these conversations and has enlisted the assistance of award-winning advocate, lawyer and community leader Jamil Jivani to lead these consultations. We can always find ways to improve. As I have done from the beginning, I will continue to engage students and work with them to ensure that we always keep their needs at the forefront, because when students prosper, our province prospers.

David Piccini is the Member of Provincial Parliament for Northumberland-Peterborough South. He currently serves as the Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Colleges and Universities and is a member of the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs.

EDITOR'S NOTE

RYAN TISHCOFF

RESEARCH AND POLICY ANALYST

Welcome to Volume 14 of *Educated Solutions*!

This year's edition focuses on how post-secondary education should respond to COVID-19—not just as classes get under way this Fall, but in the months and years to come. We're excited to showcase the ideas and perspectives of stakeholders across the sector.

When March began, campuses were full of students attending lectures and getting started on final assignments. A lot has happened since. Courses shifted to online delivery overnight, leaving students and instructors to adapt as best they could. Exams were written from home, where it was often difficult to tune out distractions and achieve high grades. Students also missed out on the Summer jobs they rely on to pay for school, leading some to question whether they'd be able to return this Fall. And like everyone else, they've spent the last six months feeling isolated and worrying about the well-being of friends and family.

Needless to say, it's been a strange and challenging year. But here's the good news: we now have an opportunity to reimagine post-secondary—to make it more accessible, to improve the quality of online learning, to strengthen relationships between students, instructors, institutions, and communities. Together, we can ensure that students have the support they need to excel academically, take care of their mental and physical health, and pursue fulfilling careers.

Thank you to all of our authors for contributing. Your continued support, especially in the midst of a pandemic, is invaluable to OUSA's advocacy toward accessible, affordable, accountable, and high-quality post-secondary education in Ontario.



PRESIDENT'S NOTE

JULIA PEREIRA
PRESIDENT

Whether we like it or not, it's fair to say that this pandemic will forever change the way we think about post-secondary education. As campuses shift most of their operations online this Fall, institutions and student unions alike have been forced to innovate—to review, reassess, and implement new practices that ensure the student experience remains paramount despite these difficult times.

As students grapple with uncertainty about the upcoming semester, face financial insecurity due to job loss, and endure social isolation after being uprooted from their physical campus community, it's incredibly important to focus on how post-secondary should move forward in response to COVID-19. This edition of *Educated Solutions* unpacks strategies for tackling the challenges that lie in store, including online learning, mental health, supporting students with disabilities, and more.

A few months ago, I could never have imagined my roles at OUSA and the Wilfrid Laurier University Students' Union transforming into what they've become. My vision for student success, while different than at the start of the year, has been shaped by the many incredible students who have spoken out about the challenges, uncertainties, and inequities they face this semester and beyond as a result of the pandemic.

While this year isn't what student leaders had expected or prepared for, it has been an incredible time for student engagement. Right now, we must prioritize and amplify student voices. Throughout the Summer, students engaged in meaningful advocacy through online petitions, live streams, town halls, and more to raise concerns about the quality and accessibility of online learning, the affordability of tuition, the loss of jobs, co-op placements, and work-integrated learning opportunities, and the overall predictability of the school year.

Students must continue to raise their voices, share their stories, and engage with their campus communities to ensure that they are represented and their needs are met. Institutions, for their part, must continue to include students in conversations that impact them—particularly the reopening of campuses and the structure of online learning. Students deserve transparency and accountability, and that means a seat at the table.



STUDENTS AND THEIR COMMUNITIES: COMING TOGETHER IN RESPONSE TO COVID-19

Sophie Helpard

It feels like COVID is the topic of every conversation I have, and I know I'm not the only one. Our province—like the rest of the world—will be talking about the impacts of the pandemic for decades to come. In university communities, a timely and important part of that discussion is the economic impact on cities and towns that will not see the influx in residents they usually would. This is serious, but the economic impact students have on a community is just one of the many ways they contribute.

Let's face it—Town and Gown relations aren't always easy. During my years as a student leader at Western University, and afterwards as OUSA's Executive Director, we were constantly fighting against the negative reputation students had in their communities. Whether it's unsightly moving days, unsanctioned street parties, or the decibel rate of outdoor orientation concerts, students living in university towns have often felt like the cast of *Footloose*. This September, none of those things are likely to happen. But neither will back-to-school shopping, dinners out with parents before they get back on the highway, and community volunteer fairs on campus.

By understanding the impact that universities and students have on their community, we can gain a better picture of exactly what's at stake.

First, and perhaps most obviously, is the economic impact. The Council of Ontario Universities (COU) states that, annually, the total economic impact of universities in Ontario is [\\$115 billion](#). That takes into account a number of factors. Universities employ significant numbers of high-skill, high-wage employees and contractors in almost every field. COU puts this figure at over [100,000](#) Ontarians employed by universities, with almost 500,000 more indirectly supported by the large-scale purchasing made by universities. In total, there are 21 universities in Ontario; these exist in small towns in Northern Ontario and big cities, but also in growing communities that use their local post-secondary institutions to build industry. Over [500,000](#) students are enrolled at an Ontario university, and 60,000 of them are international students.

Students stimulate the economy for eight to twelve months of the year. They support local restaurants, bars, and stores, but they also typically live as any other resident would, using services, accessing healthcare, and shopping for groceries. They also rent homes and apartments that in some cases occupy entire neighbourhoods or purpose-built buildings. Many universities are moving online for the Fall semester, leaving students the option to "attend" university from anywhere in the world. While some may still decide to move back to their campus community, many will not, and the economic uptick that the community would have seen in other years will be drastically decreased. There's also the faculty and staff employed by universities, who purchase homes or rent in the local community and enroll their children in local schools and programs, and whose spouses or partners may take jobs in the local economy.



Economic reliance on universities is not unique to Ontario.

The presidents of all ten universities in Nova Scotia recently published a letter to Nova Scotia students encouraging them to attend university in their home province. But even this might not be enough. In a province of under one million residents, a system of ten institutions and a multi-campus community college relies heavily on external enrollment. In Nova Scotia, that comes from out-of-province and international students. COVID has created great uncertainty around the short- and long-term return of international students to Nova Scotia, and universities across the province are turning to Nova Scotia residents to fill the gap. One of the institutions that will be greatly affected is Cape Breton University, where international students make up more than [50 per cent](#) of the student population. Locally, the Sydney and Area Chamber of Commerce on Cape Breton Island recently speculated that each international student attending Cape Breton University spends [\\$38,000](#)

per year in the local economy. With approximately 3,500 international students enrolled, the impact on landlords, car dealerships, and other local businesses is vast. COVID has made it more difficult for international students to study in Canada, due to formal travel restrictions, quarantine requirements, and the general fear individuals have of travelling—not to mention a concern amongst host communities about those coming from abroad.

Students also have a significant impact on their communities. Today's typical student doesn't reside on campus for the entirety of their degree, nor do they spend all their time at the library. Many students now integrate into their community through experiential learning. Volunteer opportunities, placements, and work-integrated learning opportunities all provide students with [valuable](#) experience and expand their off-campus involvement. We know that approximately [a third](#) of Ontario's university students participate in work-integrated learning opportunities that, in many cases, are located in the community that surrounds their campus. This year, we don't know what opportunities will exist for students to work or volunteer in their community, and even those who are able to complete a placement or co-op may need to do so virtually, given the amount of workplaces that have transitioned to "work from home" policies during COVID.

Student unions also have a rich history of creating community engagement opportunities for students. These include everything from "good neighbour" campaigns, which encourage students to introduce themselves to local residents and help out where they can, to larger programs that students invest in. A good example of that is the [Early Outreach Conference \(REACH\)](#), started by the University Students' Council at Western University. This program is intended to introduce approximately 250 youth in London and the broader community to post-secondary education opportunities. The REACH conference now has thousands of alumni and has made a tremendous impact on the lives of younger students. Programs like this were cancelled or postponed this past Spring, and with continued uncertainty around campuses re-opening, students are unsure whether they will be able to engage in these activities moving forward.

Universities also act as a community hub for innovation, learning, and culture. In this sense, universities in Ontario are much more than academic institutions. They are public spaces. They are world-class facilities, filled with incredible minds that are working to solve local problems in addition to global ones. For example, Laurentian University in Sudbury has [committed](#) to being a leader in the reconciliation process through transformative post-secondary education and research. The university is proud of its Indigenous studies, including the [Indigenous Social Work program](#), which teaches students the knowledge and skills they need to work with First Nations peoples and all communities that use a helping service. Graduates of this program are uniquely prepared to support First Nations communities, including those in the university's surrounding area. While academic programs are scheduled to continue on most campuses, the vital, experiential elements that allow students to do community outreach may not be available in the short term.



Even on a more basic level, I think about the value Brock University brought to the Niagara Region when I was growing up there. Without Brock's facilities I don't know where I would have taken my lifeguard certification course, had dance recitals, or attended a region-wide high school spoken word festival. Universities across the province run Summer day camps for local kids, offer continuing education to professionals, and sponsor community initiatives. Simply by looking at the stands during sports games on campus, it is clear the community benefits from these diverse and complex institutions. These activities may be outside of an institution's core academic mission, but they are important community-building efforts that serve an important purpose.

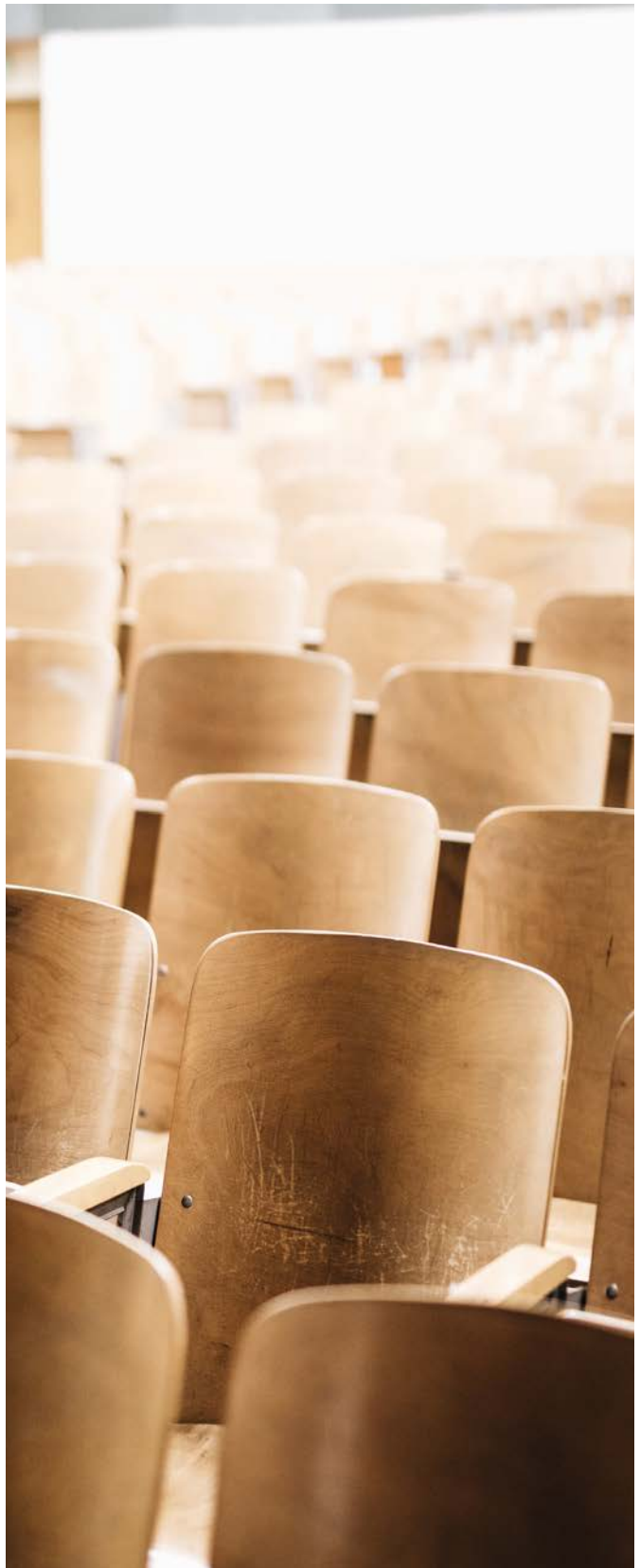
In the post-COVID world we are all desperately hoping for, universities and cities that can learn from these challenging times should be able to harness new opportunities.

The walls of a university are porous. Students go out into the community and bring economic and cultural benefits with them. And universities, in turn, allow the community to come in and benefit from the value they offer—whether that's watching a sports game or learning from innovative research on a local issue. Unfortunately, like all public spaces in our community, the university will now have a reduced flow of people, ideas, and money because of the limitations imposed by the pandemic.

In the post-COVID world we are all desperately hoping for, universities and cities that can learn from these challenging times should be able to harness new opportunities. While we fight the doom and gloom of local businesses closing and deserted campuses, I offer three opportunities that COVID has thrust upon Ontario's post-secondary education sector.

The first is an opportunity to ease Town and Gown relations. Cities and towns in Ontario that are home to university campuses should use this moment to study the impact the institution has on their community and understand the life that students bring to it. In my experience, students' economic impact is taken for granted by local mayors and city councils. The seemingly negative impacts students can have on a community are much easier to spot. A student stepping on a neighbour's garden during homecoming is more memorable than the student that shovels their neighbour's driveway. And even harder to put your finger on is the billions of dollars seeping into the economy. I sincerely hope that, coming out of COVID, cities double down on their commitment to local universities and focus on the good that students offer.

The second is an opportunity to build on the sense of community and responsibility to others that students already feel. A question I've heard many people ask is, "What if students have large gatherings on campus and spread COVID?". I believe that students deeply acknowledge the responsibility they have to their peers, their professors, student support staff, and every resident of the city they live in. We already know that students have stepped up to assist with COVID efforts across the province. For example, medical students have created [programs](#) such as the Senior-Student Isolation Prevention Partnership and the Health Care Worker Support Initiative, in addition to lending support to contact tracing efforts by the government. As any university will tell you, students aren't enrolled at university just to gain knowledge about their chosen subject matter. They're there to learn how to solve problems. COVID is a chance for students to apply what they've learned and help their communities recover.



The final opportunity is one for institutions. Universities are now in a position to reflect on how they contribute to the community. When I was deciding where I wanted to complete my undergraduate degree, academics was the most important factor. But the community I would spend (at least) four years in was a close second. That's why university tours for prospective students don't just cover labs and classrooms. On campus, the gym, the residences, and the pub get just as much attention. And for students who won't be living on campus, or who come to university for upper-year studies or second-entry degrees, offerings of the local community are an increasingly important factor. Universities are physically tied to the communities they reside in, and if that community fails, an important piece of student life might disappear with it. Every time a local business or service feels the negative effects of COVID, it chips away at student life in that community.

We don't know what the coming months will bring, and this uncertainty makes it difficult to forecast what the ultimate impact of COVID-19 will be on and off of university campuses. Communities will undoubtedly feel the economic impact with significantly fewer students returning in September. The cultural impact students have on their communities will also be evident, as will the loss of the university as a community hub. I am, however, confident that the bond between students and the communities they live in will grow in response to COVID.

In 2017, OUSA's Ontario Post-Secondary Student Survey asked students from their member campuses whether the city where their university is located actively engages post-secondary students in municipal issues. Only 29 per cent of respondents said yes. Communities must put in the hard work to improve Town and Gown relations and make students feel welcome. Students, for their part, should integrate themselves responsibly and productively into their communities. And finally, institutions must reflect on their roles in the community and throw the doors wide open to the local community... when it's safe to do so.



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UPDATING OUR TEACHING PRACTICES TO SUPPORT STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH AND SKILL DEVELOPMENT

DR. NICOLE CAMPBELL

WESTERN UNIVERSITY



Whether it be physical walls or a virtual space, supporting students directly in courses allows them to grow as individuals, which will ultimately have positive impacts on their academics. In this article I share my journey as an instructor and the lessons I have learned about supporting students.

I started my faculty position in the Fall of 2015, and I was eager to innovate and connect with learners. During this time, I was also enrolled as a learner in an online Master of Education Program; I learned a lot in the program about education, but I also walked away with so much empathy for learners. The experience humbled me because it reminded me what it was like to be a student. More importantly, it opened my eyes to what it was like to be a student in today's society. Prior to this experience I had not thought a lot about mental health in academia, but I quickly understood why so many students were struggling.

It is no secret that the mental health crisis on university campuses has been growing rapidly, especially over the past five years. The majority of university students report that their poor mental health is associated with academic stress and anxiety. When I was a student in the online education program, what I found most challenging was not the content itself, but rather keeping track of expectations and deadlines and learning to use new tools, all while working full-time and raising a family. Although this exact scenario does not apply to most of our students, we do know that they often balance full course loads, jobs, volunteering, family commitments, and social lives.

"I believe we as instructors need to humanize our teaching practices. I urge all instructors to be kind and compassionate with their approaches ... Treating students as individuals and not making assumptions about their resources or abilities makes us more accessible and equitable instructors."

Needless to say, students are really busy; so when we add the cognitive load of each individual course to their plate, it impacts their academic success. For reference, "cognitive load" refers to the mental effort associated with learning. For example, if it is difficult for a learner to navigate a course site or access expectations, this will pose an additional demand on the learner, which could interfere with their academic success. As instructors, we often don't fully understand the cognitive load that we are asking of learners or how it impacts their learning. There are, however, ways that we can support students that minimize this stress and help learners achieve their academic potential.

Mental health and well-being initiatives have been employed at universities across the country, and I believe they are well intended. The problem is that the demand for care continues to rise and these initiatives often don't reach all students; therefore, I challenge institutions and instructors to find creative ways to proactively support students. We could spend a long time discussing whether it's the instructor's role to support students, or we could analyze if today's youth have it "harder" than previous generations; however, I suggest that we simply acknowledge that things are different now and that students are in need of our support. I also see instructors as frontline figures because students regularly interact with them and, in some cases, build professional relationships. The idea of supporting students might make some people uncomfortable initially. I want to be clear that by no means am I suggesting that instructors play counselling roles; the majority of us are not qualified to do so and therefore it would be highly inappropriate. What I am suggesting is that there are things we should (or should not) do that relate to supporting students during their academic journey.

First and foremost, I believe we as instructors need to humanize our teaching practices. I urge all instructors to be kind and compassionate with their approaches—I have yet to regret offering kindness, and I don't believe students at large have taken advantage of my kindness in the past. Simple gestures such as including your institution's mental health resources on the syllabus, sharing a story about personal failure, or extending a deadline go a long way. Next, evaluate your approaches in terms of transparency. The more time I spent trying to be as transparent and inclusive as possible with my teaching, the more I realized I was applying principles of universal design for learning in my courses. Treating students as individuals and not making assumptions about their resources or abilities makes us more accessible and equitable instructors. Ultimately, these approaches support students and have positive impacts on their mental health.

The last approach to supporting students that I would like to highlight, which is not addressed as much in the literature, relates explicitly to teaching skills. For many years I had not considered the value of embedding skill development in my courses; like others, I was focused on teaching content. I can't recall my "aha" moment, but it became clear that there are foundational barriers to academic success; students want (and need) to be taught skills that will benefit them during their undergraduate degree and beyond. As most universities shift to online learning this year, embedding skill development will be imperative and I believe it will humanize learning in a way that also addresses equity and accessibility.

We all can look back over our education or careers and identify lessons we learned implicitly, but what if we updated our practices and explicitly taught these skills? To get started, I reflected on my training over the years and thought about things that I wish I had been taught, or at least made aware of, so that I would have been better equipped in the future. I also asked this question of colleagues and students and used this feedback to inform what I call creating a thriving curriculum. There is nothing groundbreaking about this curriculum, other than the fact that it is embedded directly within courses. Students often refer to it as the life coaching they wish they had throughout their undergraduate program. We tackle many topics, including time management, project management, resilience, learning from failure, imposter syndrome, advocating for yourself, and teamwork; among these, I have found that organizational skills are most closely linked to academic success.



In any given year, students are struggling to balance their academic and personal lives. The upcoming year is going to pose even more challenges for students, but I believe there are ways we can help mitigate their stress and anxiety. Students might think they are good at learning online, and we often assume they are because they grew up in a digital age, but they need our assistance to learn how to manage their time and approaches in an online environment.

To that end, I want to provide some concrete ideas that are

fairly easy to implement but will signal to students that educators care about their success. Something that might seem obvious is to promote the use of planners and calendars (digital or paper) so that students can input all their dates at the start of the term. You might also invite them to let you know early in the term if there are weeks that are academically heavy and provide some flexibility during those times. I have provided a “one-time, 24-hour, no-questions-asked coupon” in the past and I have also had students select their due dates (within reason) based on their schedules. I recommend providing time in class for these activities so that students can make it a priority.

Project management is another great organizational skill that I believe all students can benefit from learning, especially in an online environment. I highly recommend introducing students to the idea of a work breakdown structure, which allows them to break down a project into smaller, more manageable tasks. Students in my courses are introduced to this concept and then asked to apply the framework and submit a copy of the structure on their major assignments. Some students take it more seriously than others, but at least all students have been exposed to the idea. In my courses, I also emphasize that each student needs to find strategies that suit their individual needs.

If you do decide to implement skill development in your courses, make sure it is accompanied by reflection. At the start of the term, I ask students to set goals for themselves that relate to their program's learning outcomes; they then monitor their progression by completing critical reflections throughout the term. I teach students about the elements of a good reflection and provide feedback about how they can achieve more depth in future submissions. We also do more informal reflections during class sessions. Students are given reflection prompts that are relevant to the skills we have discussed (e.g., learning from failure) and I give them three to five minutes to jot down their thoughts or reactions. By the end of the course, students have accumulated resources they can review to see their personal progress and growth, which has been a really positive experience.

Embedding skill development doesn't need to be complex, and you don't need to sacrifice a lot of your class time or content to make an impact. My advice is to start small, be creative, collaborate when possible, and take advantage of resources that already exist. Placing an emphasis on skill development signals to students that you care about their success, which ultimately humanizes learning and makes the learning experience more enjoyable. An added bonus is that you will likely build community throughout the process, which we know also supports students. I have been on this journey for many years and I will never look back—my role has become so much more meaningful and I have been having so much fun teaching since I updated my practice.



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LEARNING THROUGH ADVERSITY: EMBRACING INCLUSIVE PEDAGOGIES

Dr. Ian Muller

WILFRED LAURIER UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' UNION

Disruption is often a precursor to change. As is the case with the most dramatic of disruptions, the COVID-19 pandemic is forcing students, instructors, and institutions to grapple with a fundamentally different-looking university experience. With post-secondary students forced to adapt to remote academic delivery in the short-term, it's worth exploring how existing pedagogical strategies within teaching and learning can mitigate this predicament. While substantive data is still being collected, we know from growing anecdotal reports that students are facing challenges as they lose access to the equalizing resources of campus and adapt to home learning environments. By looking to pedagogical strategies that emphasize an ethic of care and inclusive learning goals, instructors can work in collaboration and partnership with students to maintain robust learning outcomes. There is even an opportunity to recognize the immense value of these approaches and advocate for greater application in all teaching and learning scenarios.

While student opinion data concerning the COVID-19 pandemic is currently limited, research conducted by Abacus Data on behalf of the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations (CASA) provides some useful insights about the new realities of post-secondary education. As students are confronted with continued remote learning into the Fall at a minimum, prominent concerns surround coursework, the availability of academic assistance, and technology requirements. For example, an alarming 77 per cent of respondents indicated that the ability to perform just as well in an online academic environment as in person was either "a big concern" or "somewhat of a concern." Remote learning fundamentally alters access to important learning tools, including laboratories, studios, and other physical equipment, while also distancing the broader supportive community critical to the on-campus experience. Approximately 60 per cent of respondents were worried about being able to access academic supports or help from peers. Similar worries exist about the technological requirements necessitated by remote learning. Despite a tendency to assume that all students enjoy broad and reliable internet, 55 per cent of students surveyed indicated concern about access to reliable high-speed connections, and 47 per cent were worried to some degree about whether they would have devices compatible with the requirements of the classroom.¹

In rural areas in particular, the lack of reliable high-speed internet service poses significant problems for remote learning. Whether it's synchronous learning, group projects, or online assessment, all rely on learning management systems, video conferencing, or web platforms that require dependable internet service. In Wellington County, the volunteer-based Puslinch Highspeed Committee was formed in 2019 to accelerate the deployment of high-speed internet to this underserved rural community. An early May 2020 story on *GuelphToday.com* describes the real barriers to study and employment that emerged during the pandemic for a family with two university students working out of a rural residence. Existing bandwidth is insufficient for multiple users and using an LTE satellite ¹ hotspot becomes incredibly costly². The existence of the Southwestern Integrated Fibre Technology expansion project, a municipally-led initiative, provides hope for the future but does not mitigate the hurdles for students learning remotely as a result of COVID-19 during the upcoming Fall term.

Access to reliable internet is one example of how campuses work to mitigate issues of access and provide tangible accommodations that reduce the financial burden of post-secondary education. At Wilfrid Laurier University, whether through the Students' Union's Tech Share Program, the University's Laptop Loaner Program, or physical computer labs, students have access to technological resources they may not own themselves. With the majority of Ontario campuses adapting to some level of reduced campus access, including limited residence capacity, we must confront the reality that students' home learning environments will vary widely. An insightful feature in *The New York Times* earlier this Spring illustrates the vastness of personal circumstances by contrasting a student who retreated to a family vacation home on the coast of Maine, a student balancing their studies while helping to keep a family food truck business viable in Florida, and a Russian international student unable to afford the trip back home before travel restrictions were imposed³. A student's personal circumstance will influence their access to a dedicated study environment and the availability of the requisite quiet space for completing online assessments; it may also impose new obligations to balance family responsibilities. It is also critical to understand this learning context through the trauma, financial insecurity, and personal disruption brought by a once-in-a-generation global pandemic.



The range of student concerns exacerbated by the pandemic provides an additional vantage point from which to consider an ongoing discussion about pedagogical change happening within the post-secondary teaching and learning community. Specifically, how do we enable a more engaged and dynamic exchange of knowledge between instructor and student? A leading proponent of incorporating an ethic of caring into teaching and learning, Nel Noddings, articulates a longstanding criticism of a certain default approach in post-secondary education:

If it is not already obvious, let me say explicitly that I think university educators and researchers are part of the problem. Our endless focus on narrow achievement goals, our obsession with sophisticated schemes of evaluation and measurement directed (naturally enough) at things that are relatively easy to measure, our reinforcement of the mad desire to be number one—to compete, to win awards, to acquire more and more of whatever is currently valued—in all these ways we contribute to the proliferation of problems and malaise.⁴



For Noddings, a pedagogy that incorporates care maintains an emphasis on academic achievement but also asserts that there is more to consider than purely intellectual growth. Education should instill support for worthy institutions, a healthy work ethic, compassion, empathy, trust, and respect. Instructors should approach their responsibility for this moral education from a caring or relational orientation, which emphasizes modeling, dialogue, practice, and confirmation. At the university level, this requires instructors to reassess course design, the goals of instruction, modes of evaluation, patterns of interaction, and the selection of content.⁵

This pedagogical strategy is understandably more straightforward when teaching is not confined to remote delivery, the Zoom classroom, and the unpredictability of a WiFi connection. Scholars Ellen Rose and Catherine Adams confront this challenge by evaluating how effectively an ethic or pedagogy of care can be applied to online learning.⁶ Can the importance of a supportive environment where care is central to the pedagogical relationship be translated through email, learning management systems, and other digital tools? In a study that focuses on the anecdotal observations of a small number of instructors,⁷ Rose and Adams describe a challenging balance between attentiveness to student needs and the persistent accessibility inherent to digital communication. With respect to an ethic of care, scholarship has shown that students learning online require frequent and timely feedback and multiple opportunities to connect with the instructor. This type of purposeful interaction helps to translate the relation focus of the pedagogy of care to the online environment.

From the interviews conducted by Rose and Adams it is apparent that matching the instructor's capacity with the student's expectations of online learning is often difficult. One instructor explains that:

When I am online, I work hard on maintaining a warm, confident voice, creating a presence that is welcoming, unthreatening, and helpful. I'm always deeply aware, in a way I'm not in a face-to-face situation, of how I am "coming across" to others... It feels so false; even though I like to think that's exactly who I am, I still feel like I'm putting on a mask.⁸

Additionally, the constant stream of emails, messages, and requests sent to instructors is described as creating a “tyranny of availability.” Accessibility must be balanced with reasonable professional boundaries. Rose and Adams describe this as a negotiation between caring and carrying the weight of too many cares, and while this is not unique to the online teacher, it is amplified by constant presence of the online environment.⁹

In this current moment there is an even greater imperative to mitigate the challenges of online learning and re-think pedagogical approaches. With a similar emphasis on the pedagogy of care, Kevin Gannon’s *Radical Hope: A Teaching Manifesto* outlines strategies intended to foster openness, inclusivity, critical reflection, dialogue, and a commitment to an accessible and meaningful post-secondary education.¹⁰ Gannon frames his “pedagogy of radical hope” around several key principles. Good teaching, he asserts, should be life-affirming, centered on student agency, inclusive, and embodied in tangible practice. This includes establishing an accessible learning environment where the instructor can foster habits of lifelong learning, value students as active partners in teaching, and as co-creators of knowledge.¹¹ Collaboration instills trust in the instructor-student relationship.

Gannon stresses that we must recognize that students are complex human beings who have taken many different paths to arrive in the classroom. Further, instructors tend to respond to students in one of two ways:

One is to shut out the noise, to act as if our class space somehow exists outside the larger context of both our institutions and society and that students walk into it out of a vacuum. Course content is what matters; the rest is meaningless, at least for the time we and our students are in class. The other type of response is to acknowledge this increasingly difficult terrain and design our learnings paces with that in mind—spaces where course content is important but the learners are more so.¹²

If instructors fully consider the disruption and potential trauma many students are navigating during the COVID-19 pandemic, they should feel compelled to adapt their teaching or assessment strategy in some noticeable way.

Increasingly, research is demonstrating the real value of collaboration between instructor and student. Alison Cook-Sather argues that through the co-creation of teaching and learning strategies students experience a complementary set of outcomes, including exposure to intersecting identities, experiences, and knowledge that produces a more equitable pedagogy that deepens students’ capacity to listen and empathize.¹³ A 2014 report by The Higher Education Academy in the United Kingdom provides a pedagogical case for partnership as a student engagement strategy designed to enhance teaching and learning. Executed through partnership learning communities, students are able to participate in four overlapping areas: learning, teaching, and assessment; subject-based research and inquiry; scholarship of teaching and learning; and curriculum design and pedagogic consultancy. The report argues these types of partnership structures put reciprocal learning at the heart of the relationship, and stress trust, risk, inter-dependency, and student agency.¹⁴

Whether it's a pedagogy of care, Kevin Gannon's pedagogy of radical hope, or a learning partnership initiative, these teaching strategies elevate the value of a student's active and collaborative role in the classroom. In the early days of remote learning necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic, the starkest contrast to this type of approach has been a growing reliance on proctored online exams using technology-enabled monitoring. Promoted as a means to deter academic misconduct, these strategies operate under an assumption of misconduct often disproportionate to known behavioural trends. Some institutions have gone as far as to explore the feasibility of requiring multiple camera feeds, either with an external webcam in addition to the camera built into most laptops, or through the use of Zoom proctoring with a mobile device. For example, student concerns emerged at Wilfrid Laurier University in May 2020 about the growing technological requirements tied to online proctoring. ¹⁵An unfortunate consequence of this pivot to imposed digital surveillance is the perception of a more adversarial instructor-student relationship that erodes the trust and cooperative learning environment the pedagogies discussed here can foster. The student is considered first in terms of their potential to cheat, diminishing or ignoring their earnest commitment to course learning outcomes.

With a pedagogy of care, or other inclusive teaching goals, there is an opportunity to design courses and set student expectations that minimize academic misconduct temptations. This includes diversifying assessment type and frequency. It should be stressed that institutional timelines on academic delivery decisions and large class sizes are complicating factors that can create barriers to this type of change. However, if students are invested in their learning outcomes and understand the course's assessment requirements, they are more inclined to value and respect the process of obtaining that desired knowledge. Instructors who are especially mindful of how remote academic delivery and COVID-19 are impacting their students' ability to learn can proactively adapt their pedagogical strategy for this reality. Technological limitations, added family responsibilities, financial insecurity, and housing precarity will be introduced into the classroom more than ever while we continue to grapple with the ramifications of the COVID-19 pandemic. Let's strive for vibrant teaching and learning partnerships that empower students through and in spite of this adversity.



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LEARNING FROM STUDENT EXPERIENCES WITH EMERGENCY REMOTE EDUCATION: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SUCCESS

JESSICA RIZK, SARAH BRUMWELL, AND JACKIE PICHETTE

HIGHER EDUCATION QUALITY COUNCIL OF ONTARIO (HEQCO)

The COVID-19 pandemic caused a sudden disruption in the post-secondary education system, which pushed colleges and universities to move courses online in a hurry. As Ontario's institutions plan for a mostly remote Fall semester, faculty are reimagining their courses for online delivery, staff are stepping up to offer support, and students are beginning to adjust to a "new normal."

Over the last few months, HEQCO has engaged various stakeholders to learn about the types of supports that students, especially those with disabilities, need to succeed in a remote learning environment. We surveyed over 600 Ontario post-secondary students and more than 70 disability support staff at Ontario colleges and universities. We also interviewed over 30 student representatives, faculty, staff, and community advocates across Canada. Visit HEQCO's [website](#) to read the full report.

This article offers advice and strategies based on the challenges and advantages that students have encountered during remote learning. It complements our larger research initiative, which is aimed at providing practical advice to institutions and instructors. We hope Ontario's students find takeaways that will help them succeed in these unprecedented times.

What Have We Heard from Students?

Many of the challenges, hopes, and concerns we have gathered from student reflections on the Winter 2020 semester can be grouped into four themes: 1) executive functioning and transferable skills; 2) accommodations; 3) mental health and well-being; and 4) physical learning environment.

Executive functioning and transferable skills

The adjustment to remote learning that began in March 2020 has not been easy. Many post-secondary students have had to move out of residence and develop new, self-guided learning routines. These changes have acted in tandem with other stressors like financial instability due to loss of work and income, unexpected childcare responsibilities, and pandemic-related health risks.

In addition to these challenges, many students indicated they are having difficulty focusing, struggling to keep up with readings and assignments, and having issues with comprehension. Students also acknowledged that navigating these difficulties while successfully managing online learning requires transferable skills—43 per cent of students with disabilities and 46 per cent of students without said that opportunities to build and improve skills like time management and productivity would be very or extremely important to their future success. Staff agree; those we interviewed suggested strong executive functioning is needed to effectively navigate online courses and interactions. Staff also pointed out that effective time management will be essential as students continue coping with competing priorities during the pandemic.

Accommodations


Many of the students we engaged, particularly those with diagnosed disabilities, are going without accommodations that were available to them prior to the pandemic. For example, about 37 per cent of student respondents with disabilities disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement that they could access alternate format materials and/or communication options once the semester moved online. We heard that many students who rely on note-takers and scribes in their classes either no longer have those accommodations or are unsure about how to access them now.

Aware of these issues, staff have been working hard to share information about available accommodations and how to access them. This is important because, although our student survey indicates that students generally knew where to access supports like advising prior to the pandemic, just 25 per cent of students with disabilities reported knowing where to turn once classes moved online.

Some faculty are also helping to address these challenges by being more accommodating in their course design and delivery. More instructors are recording lectures, which allows students to pause, rewind, speed up or slow down the content. Others are offering a range of assessment options so students can choose to demonstrate their learning in ways that work best for them. Students are appreciative of this, and several have voiced hope that these sorts of accommodations remain in place even after the pandemic.

Mental health and well-being

Social connections are incredibly important for our mental health. Connecting with peers and faculty, both formally and informally, is an important part of the post-secondary experience that has been made more difficult by the shift to remote learning. Engaging in conversations with peers during class time or finding time to speak with professors (the way they might have done during office hours) has been challenging. Further, many students have shared that it has been hard to develop or maintain meaningful social connections or feel like part of a community since the shift to online learning took place.



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Some students have also encountered challenges when attempting to remotely access counselling services or supports offered through teaching and learning centres. While some students feel these services work best in a face-to-face setting, other students, who may not have felt comfortable walking through a physical door on campus, have welcomed the chance to access these services via phone or video calls from home.

Physical learning environment

Successful remote learning hinges on reliable internet access as well as proper equipment like a computer, webcam, and, for some, assistive technology. It also requires comfort navigating digital tools. While ideally all learners would have a dedicated, quiet learning space to use such technology, this is a luxury that many students (not to mention faculty and staff) do not have.

Some student representatives expressed remorse over the loss of separation between personal and school spaces. To try and address that concern, some faculty have opted to make the use of webcams optional while teaching over platforms like Zoom.

Still, the change is hard.

On a positive note, for some students with mobility issues, this shift has meant a huge reduction in their commute times. For others, remote learning provides an opportunity to “get more out of class content than ever before” because of the inaccessible nature of some institutional buildings where classes would have previously been held.

Recommendations for Students Learning Remotely This Year

Some of the key recommendations for students that emerged from our research include developing and maintaining support networks, being intentional about skill development, self-advocating, and practicing empathy and kindness. Below, we expand on these recommendations and offer some advice for students to consider as they enter a new semester.

Develop and maintain support networks

Loss of community has been a challenge for many since the pandemic began, including many students. We spoke with a number of the people who advised that students work on maintaining or developing new peer connections and mentorships. They urged students to lean into virtual communities, reach out to accessibility offices and other support centres, and talk to other students who are in similar situations. Above all it's important to keep in touch with your support system, however you can, in order to share your successes, struggles and concerns along the way.

Many faculty members are attempting to build opportunities for open discussion into their courses. We encourage students to take advantage of these kinds of informal or optional opportunities to engage with instructors, classmates, and other members of your school community.

Staff at several institutions have indicated they are offering more flexibility in how they offer support—students can now connect by phone, video, or text depending on their preference. Building social connections into your daily routine—to both receive and provide support—may be critical to maintaining your sense of community and reducing stress or anxiety. Experiencing a pandemic is difficult for everyone; make sure you are not experiencing it in isolation.

Seek out skill development opportunities

Ask yourself what you can do to be more successful in an online context and take it upon yourself to develop the skills—such as time management or organization—that you think you will need to succeed.

Consider how you might transfer or adjust the learning strategies you've gained in the past into an online learning environment. Ask yourself where the gaps in your skill set are and seek out opportunities at your institutions to address them. It may be helpful to ask instructors about the skills you will need to be successful in a given course and if they have suggestions for where you can develop them. Many institutions are currently offering resources like workshops, webinars, tip sheets, and links to educational videos—all geared to supporting the development of skills. Take advantage!

Self-advocate

Ontario post-secondary institutions are doing their best to support students during this incredibly uncertain time, but that does not mean they will always get it right. Students need to advocate for themselves—to their representatives, their instructors, and the staff offering support services.

Prepare yourself for self-advocacy by taking stock of your needs. Select courses that align with those needs and, if necessary, negotiate supports or accommodations. As one of our interviewees from the Canadian National Institute for the Blind said, "it's fair for students to ask questions and not take no for an answer." The most consistent piece of advice we have received from faculty is for students to be at the table. Ask questions and provide feedback to your institution every step of the way. And remember that feedback should not always be negative; as your instructors attempt new ways of teaching, facilitating engagement, and assessing learning, let them know what works well!



When things go poorly, try not to tune out or turn away. As one Ontario university staff member told us, “students should continue to engage and provide feedback, even when the institution has let you down.”

Self-advocacy is another important life skill that can be developed during the pandemic. Don’t give up—keep pushing forward!

Practice empathy

While we encourage students to advocate for themselves and their peers, we note that this should be done tactfully and with empathy. Students need to know that their instructors, staff, and institutions care about them and about their learning, and that no one was prepared for this massive transition to remote learning. Faculty may be learning how to engage with students on a digital platform for the first time in their careers. And staff, like all of us, are distracted by the news and may be taking on childcare or other responsibilities. Flexibility and understanding are needed across the board.

Students should also be empathetic to their peers who may be struggling to adjust to their home life or may not have access to the technology they need to participate effectively in course discussions or group projects. When the time comes to return to physical campuses, be mindful that for students who are immunocompromised, good health hygiene will continue to be essential (e.g., regular hand washing and staying home if you have any cold or flu-like symptoms).

Many of us are struggling with the risks and challenges of living in a pandemic. Keep in mind that we are all on this journey together, and that kindness and empathy can go a long way!



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STUDENT EXPERIENCE DESIGN: OUR NORTH STAR IN A COVID WORLD

Lena Patterson, Chris Fernlund, and Julie Huh

ECAMPUS ONTARIO

If COVID-19 has taught us anything, it is that the post-secondary education system is complex. It includes many players, practices, and procedures to facilitate quality educational experiences for students. In this complex system there are many architects, from the front-line educator to the academic advisor to the library systems administrator—all engaged to either directly or indirectly impact the student journey. But where does the student fit in these design processes?

In late May 2020, Dr. Alison Flynn, Associate Professor in the Department of Chemistry and Biomolecular Sciences at the University of Ottawa, wrote an [opinion piece in University Affairs](#) calling for deeper and more meaningful student contribution in post-secondary education. Through this work, Dr. Flynn illustrates how students, as key stakeholders in education, can creatively design and build our education system. The analogy she drew was to the health care system, designed by medical professionals without drawing upon the lived experience of the patients, families, and caregivers the system is designed to serve.

At most institutions, there is little space for students to design their own educational experience. Decisions regarding services, processes, and policies are often skewed to the norm, leaving little opportunity for the unique lived experience of a changing student body to emerge. Most students are limited to pursuing education in a specific place during a specific time. It is now abundantly clear that what works for one individual may not work for another.

COVID-19 has challenged the very notion of brick-and-mortar teaching and learning. When Ontario colleges and universities started closing campuses in mid-March to protect our communities from the spread, it became clear that this pandemic would leave a significant and lasting impression on our education system. Change of this magnitude has the potential to bring our values into sharp focus. It can also illuminate a deep disconnect between systems and the people that those systems are meant to serve.


Because now, more than ever, the “business as usual” mental models that we deploy day-to-day are under pressure. Existing systems, processes, and procedures do not fit the needs or the context.

As the pandemic continues to cause deep shifts in our society, many are turning towards human-centered design to reexamine what success looks like in a COVID world.

On June 3, 2020, *The Wall Street Journal* published an [article](#) arguing that human-centered design may better prepare organizations to weather significant shifts in the landscape by focusing on the needs of the end-user. Others in the [user experience community](#) have argued that the realities of COVID-19 mean abandoning traditional growth as a measure of success. Instead, success means prioritizing human connection throughout this crisis.


Human-centered design prioritizes human goals and conditions as an approach to problem solving. Design-thinking processes can identify and analyze touchpoints within a system that have not been noticed in the traditional model, all with an eye to reinventing the journey. In post-secondary education, human-centered design has the potential to reshape our institutions so that they can respond directly to the shifting needs of the people that work, grow, and learn within them.

At eCampusOntario, we apply principles of human-centered design to the Ontario post-secondary system. The Student Experience Design Lab (SXD Lab) takes in groups of 15 to 50 students, provides design thinking training, and empowers those students to apply their new skills to the challenges they face in their educational journey. First, the Lab creates space for student voices to discuss their lived experience. Second, we encourage them to use their expertise as students to inform future direction. In short, the SXD Lab empowers students to design an education system that works for them. It is an idea that has gained traction in the past and has renewed relevance in the context of a pandemic, where the importance of human health, safety, and security comes into sharp focus.



HUMAN-CENTERED DESIGN

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In 2018, Ryerson University launched a [student experience design project](#) to reimagine the learning environment to meet student need. Other thinkers in the space have suggested that post-secondary institutions should have permanent [student experience designers on staff](#) to ensure continual analysis and redesign of the systems that are built to serve them. We have already seen ingenuity from our institutions as they rethink how to engage students during COVID. When the University of Waterloo hired co-op students to support faculty in the transition to remote teaching, the university was meeting an immediate labor need and creating a meaningful opportunity for student contribution. Through COVID, the once-radical approach of engaging students in building their learning environment could become an engrained practice that perpetually closes the gap between student expectations and educational models. The fact that so many Ontario colleges and universities have thriving schools of design and user experience means there is no shortage of student talent already within the walls of the institution. [They are knocking on the door, asking to contribute.](#)

Student experience design offers an opportunity to reimagine learning systems and spaces. It also has the potential to help us realize the promise of an inclusive education system that truly embraces the full spectrum of human diversity. The pandemic has forced us to confront all aspects of the student experience. More than ever, we need to open our minds to the possibility of innovations in our system that recognize and respond to the needs of our most vulnerable students. In reflecting on [the importance of fragility and vulnerability in our society](#), Jutta Treviranus, Director of the Inclusive Design Research Centre at OCAD University, reminds us that "[most innovations we take for granted today were catalyzed by the desire to circumvent a barrier experienced due to a disability](#)." It is through deviation from the norm, not adherence to it, that we might design a better world. To do that, we need students in the driver's seat, gathering the insights and performing the analysis that provides the building blocks for change.

If COVID-19 has taught us anything, it is that the ability to adapt is paramount. As the new definition of human-centered success becomes increasingly relevant, institutions that engage students effectively in the design and development of their educational experience will be better able to lead through inclusive learning environments that respond to learners' evolving needs.

To learn more about the SxD Lab, visit <https://sxdlab.ecampusontario.ca/>



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ENSURING AN ENRICHING EXPERIENCE FOR ONTARIO'S UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

David Lindsay

COUNCIL OF ONTARIO UNIVERSITIES (COU)

September marks the beginning of a new chapter for many students across the province. Ontario's universities are excited to welcome this year's cohort of new and returning students.

Although university life and learning will look and feel quite different than it did in the past, the excitement and anticipation that students experience this time of year still holds true.

Ontario's universities continue to support our students—the province's future makers.

While the disruption of student life and academics brought about by COVID-19 has led to much uncertainty amongst students and their families, who envisioned a certain kind of university experience, our institutions remain firmly committed to the health and safety of our students, faculty, and staff as we continue to deliver on our academic mission.

Whether it's by adapting co-op education experiences online, virtual student mentoring, or developing online or hybrid courses, Ontario's universities continue to provide students with access to the high-quality programs and services they need throughout the pandemic and beyond.

Institutions also continue to provide ways for students to maintain vital social connections with their peers, even when physically distant, with the goal to help them navigate the process and ensure a successful start to their university journey.

With new guidelines, procedures, programs, and initiatives in place that prioritize the health and safety of our students, faculty, staff, and communities, our universities will continue to ensure that the university experience remains transformational for students.





A Path Towards Life-Long Success

Amidst the uncertainties caused by the pandemic, the value of a university degree—and the skills and experiences that come with it—remains unchanged. In fact, it has never been more important.

University students are interwoven into the social and economic fabric of our province. Throughout the pandemic, we have seen them do remarkable things for their communities.

They have stepped up to organize volunteer groups dedicated to supporting health-care workers and vulnerable populations, they are helping small businesses navigate COVID-19, and they are working with professors to create new tools, testing methods, and treatments.

The commitment and impact of these students will only continue—they will be the creative entrepreneurs and innovative employees of the future who help strengthen community resilience, drive innovation, rebuild new industries, create jobs, and adapt to a rapidly evolving economy.

Ontario's universities are working to ensure these students can continue to access the opportunities and enriching experiences that will help them become well-rounded, global citizens.

The depth of learning that students receive at our institutions will endure, as we continue to make every effort to ensure access to a high-quality post-secondary education that will equip students with the life-long skills needed to be adaptable in a global marketplace.

In fact, the transferrable skills that a university degree fosters help both new graduates and mid-career workers succeed in a rapidly changing economy. A 2019 RBC assessment found an increasing employer demand for this type of skillset, which includes critical thinking, co-ordination, social perceptiveness, active listening, and complex problem-solving skills.

“[STUDENTS] HAVE STEPPED UP TO ORGANIZE VOLUNTEER GROUPS DEDICATED TO SUPPORTING HEALTH-CARE WORKERS AND VULNERABLE POPULATIONS, THEY ARE HELPING SMALL BUSINESSES NAVIGATE COVID-19, AND THEY ARE **WORKING WITH PROFESSORS TO CREATE NEW TOOLS, TESTING METHODS, AND TREATMENTS.”**

These adaptable skills are critical. Whether it's the high school graduate beginning university for the first time, the current student continuing their studies, or the mid-career worker displaced by the pandemic, it is a good time for both the traditional and non-traditional learner to leverage what a university education can offer.

Today's universities are no longer a destination point during a single stage of life. Post-secondary education helps the modern learner become a life-long learner. From badges, micro-credentials, and upskilling and reskilling initiatives to collaborative programs and shared resource models, universities are offering a wide range of current and relevant programs, training, and certificates.

These types of short-duration programs will become increasingly important, allowing students to rapidly build on their experience and better prepare for a shifting future.

Innovative Technologies and Programs to Support Our Students

While COVID-19 may have changed how the university experience will look, Ontario's universities remain committed to equipping our students with the tools they need to navigate the future and foster resiliency.

New technologies and innovative programs are changing the way our students learn, and they will continue to change as the impacts of the pandemic ripple throughout the sector.

Each Ontario university continues to evolve programming to support new types of learning and help future-proof Ontario's students by preparing them for a new world of work. Through a hybrid of in-person classes and lab work, as well as quality online courses and services, institutions are finding ways to educate students through a broad mix of alternative and blended learning models.

Programs that integrate aspects that are vital to a student's academic success, such as virtual labs, seminars, discussions, one-on-one supports, and other activities, will ensure students remain engaged and accountable.

But we know a rich university experience is about more than academics. Students also value social and cultural supports and activities—the intangible programs that enable them to forge new friendships and relationships, develop personal accountability, and become well-rounded citizens.

Moving these activities online—from high school transition programs and orientation weeks to virtual parties and other engagement activities—creates an environment that fosters connections and leads to a fully enriching experience for our province's future leaders.

Ensuring access to post-secondary education

Ontario's universities are making every effort to ensure that new and returning students can continue to participate in these experiences and access every opportunity that a university education provides.

To help reduce some of the challenges students face, our institutions continue to work to minimize the financial and emotional impacts caused by COVID-19.

Universities have created student emergency relief funds to support those who have been unable to continue work placements and part-time employment, or face family financial challenges.

Each university is also providing continued mental health services and finding innovative ways to virtually connect with students. These resources help ensure students receive the counselling they need to support their mental health and wellness in a rapidly changing landscape. In addition, to help students who are facing challenges accessing the technology or broadband internet they need for their studies, institutions are providing laptops and other technological supports.

Connecting student learning to the workplace

While ensuring students receive the academic, social, and financial supports they need is critical, equally important is ensuring they are given the opportunities to apply their skills to real-world situations through work-integrated learning opportunities.

We know students value these experiences. In a recent Abacus Data survey, 86 per cent of current students and recent graduates in Canada said experiential learning led to an easier transition from school to a successful career.

COVID-19 has introduced many challenges to experiential learning programming, but it is also pushing the post-secondary sector to think differently about what is possible.

Many institutions are increasing flexibility on work term length, offering support with virtual interviews and providing tips to employers about working remotely with students, in order to reduce potential obstacles to hiring.

Because, not only are work-integrated learning opportunities beneficial to students, they also help their future employers. The C.D. Howe Institute recently found that nearly 60 per cent of surveyed employers in Ontario offered employment to at least one graduate who had participated in a co-op program.

Ontario's universities are and will continue to innovate the nature of work-integrated learning and partner with employers to adapt learning models and ensure students graduate with the practical experiences that will help them start their career.

Partnering for a Better Future for Our Students

With new challenges comes great opportunity. Ontario's universities are teaching, learning, innovating, and adapting in new and exciting ways to support our students, while prioritizing their health and safety.

We will continue to partner with government, industry, and local communities to develop new ideas to face the challenges ahead and ensure students graduate with the skills and resiliency that will help them navigate an evolving economy.

Today's students will shape the future of our province, bringing the new ideas and fresh approaches needed to help reimagine industries, strengthen community resilience, and build a brighter future for our province and all who live here.

Our institutions remain committed to providing these future makers with access to the high-quality programs and services they need throughout the pandemic and beyond.



David Lindsay is the President and CEO of the Council of Ontario Universities (COU).

THE GREAT RESET AND THE ROLE OF “THE STUDENT”

Nick Soave

WESTERN'S UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' COUNCIL (USC)

If you had told me on the evening of March 9th, 2020, as I prepared for my work week, that it would be the last week of “normal,” I wouldn't have believed you. Yet here we are in Ontario, where at the time of writing we've just entered Stage 3 of the provincial government's Reopening Ontario plan. There's now a new normal that looks vastly different than life before COVID-19. As with any crisis, the response has been rushed and difficult to execute thoroughly, and it's been difficult to maintain effective lines of communication.

In the post-secondary education (PSE) sector, the COVID-19 response occurred about halfway through the Winter term, which is a difficult time to connect with students because they are a month away from leaving campus and focused on final exams. This difficult communication timeframe, combined with a great deal of uncertainty and fear around COVID-19, has created a situation where many students are worried about the upcoming Fall term.



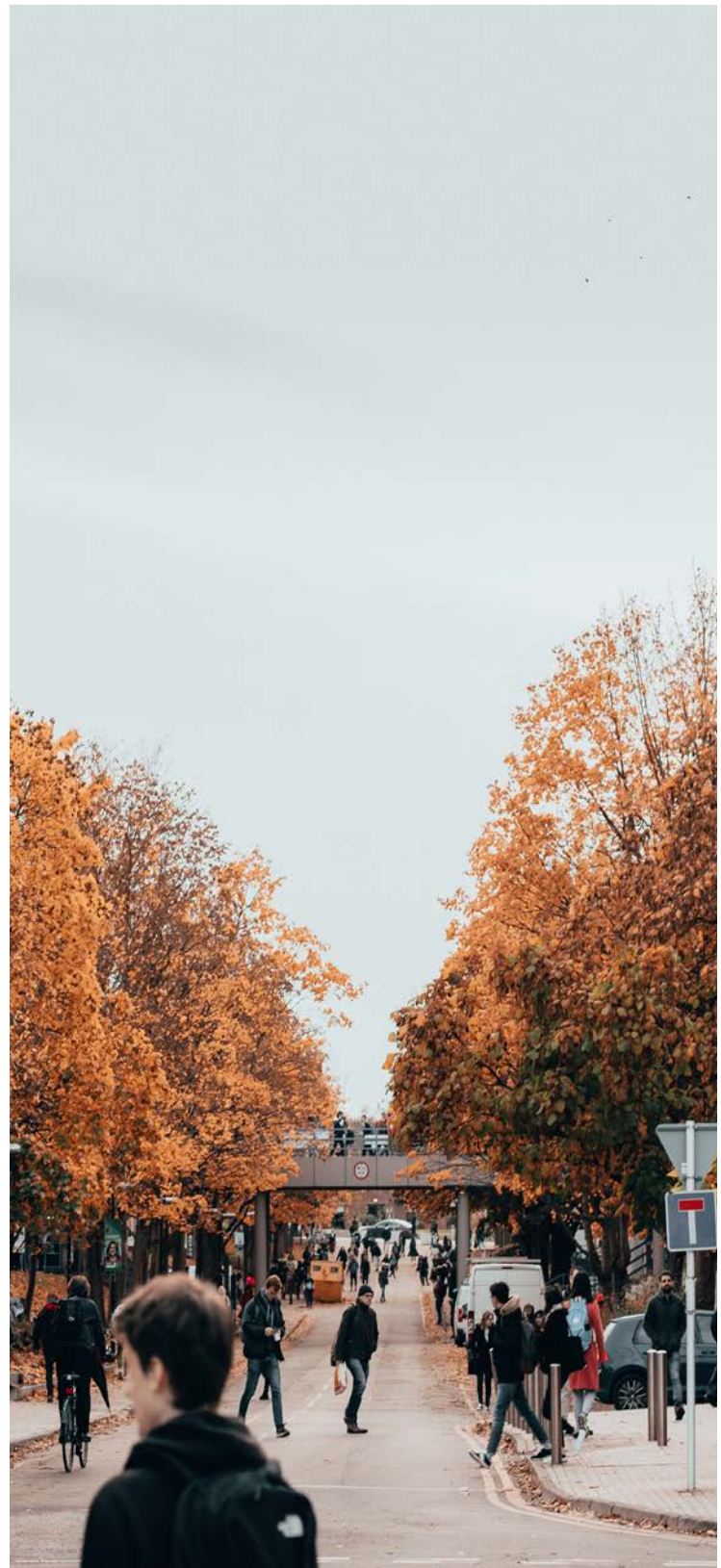
*THERE MUST BE A RENEWED COMMITMENT TO REGULAR
COMMUNICATION BETWEEN ALL PARTIES, INCLUDING
ADMINISTRATION AND THE UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT
POPULATION*

The PSE sector wasn't spared from the massive COVID-19 restrictions put in place to prevent the spread of the virus, and this made the traditional method of instruction impossible to offer. What has followed over the last four months is endless discussion of what a safe return to education would look like. The debate between in-person synchronous learning, asynchronous offline learning, and combinations of the two has been non-stop.

What's consistent in many of these discussions is an agreement that there will be a new normal. What's unclear is what that normal will mean to our educational environment, place of work, assessments—and the list goes on and on. For this article, I am going to refer to the next number of years as the “Great Reset” because the impacts of the COVID-19 restrictions on the economy will only be felt after programs like the Canada Emergency Relief Benefit (CERB) or the Canada Emergency Student Benefit (CESB) are over. For the Great Reset to be successful within the PSE sector, there must be a renewed commitment to regular communication between all parties, including administration and the undergraduate student population.

Communication will be the key tool used to evaluate and define the role of undergraduate students in the Great Reset, and it will be valuable to base our work in a communication framework that is already used in PSE. Students are regularly provided with a chance to complete surveys for course assessments; they also complete the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) every three years, which looks at satisfaction with the education experience. The results of these surveys are included in tenure discussion and are treated as a benchmark for comparison amongst universities. As well, a history of student engagement in strategic planning processes demonstrates that there is precedent for using student feedback to inform the vital next steps for the institution and the sector as a whole. Clearly institutions do value the feedback of students and seek it out regularly.

But if institutions value student feedback, then why did it take so long for most to ask for it during the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic response? In April, Western's University Students' Council's Vice-President put out an informal poll asking members of the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance (OUSA) and the Undergraduates of Canadian Research-Intensive Universities (UCRU) to determine which student unions had a seat at their institutions' crisis-response table or had been consulted for feedback. The result was, unfortunately, almost zero: of about 15 schools, only a couple student leaders had even been consulted, and none (at the time) had been granted a seat on the Crisis Response Committee (a committee that most institutions created to manage the day-to-day work of responding to COVID-19). Given that, now, survey after survey is coming back with students worried about the Fall term, it's clear that there was not enough communication between these two groups in the early stages of responding to the pandemic.



At the time of writing, we are just over a month away from the first day of classes and, thankfully, the engagement between students and senior university administration has improved. Most student unions have either joined the various committees working on facilitating a return to campus, or at the very least are regularly consulted on potential plans. Given how massive of a disruption the Great Reset will be, it is crucial that these examples of strong communication continue into the coming years.

The rest of this article will focus on three emerging issues that will require student consultation throughout the short-to-medium term of the Great Reset. These issues are: (1) the ongoing discussion regarding the cost of education during the pandemic and the push for tuition refunds or reductions; (2) the need to ensure community safety when students return to campus; and (3) the role of students in the province's economic recovery.

The debate about the new cost of education and the potential need for tuition reductions has been at a fever pitch across Canada since the beginning of Summer. Many universities have not engaged, seemingly hoping the issue will simply disappear. A couple of universities have addressed tuition reduction, most notably when the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design's Board of Governors decided to freeze tuition for the upcoming school year. For the most part, it seems that universities are either saying "our costs have actually gone up as we've transitioned online" or nothing at all.

Many student unions across the country have made their opinions clear on this issue: they believe that some form of reimbursement needs to occur. And while it's understandable that the position of senior university administration is "our costs have actually gone up," I think this points to a bigger problem—the disconnect between administration and students that has been either created or exposed by the COVID-19 pandemic response. To be fair, it's not always easy to communicate with students; I work at a student union, so I know it can be hard to understand what the average student is thinking. However, in times of crisis, it's incredibly important to be transparent and consult with your target audience as much as possible. The average student has little way of knowing how expensive it is for a university to convert a class that's been taught in person for over twenty years into an online course. I work in the post-secondary sector and also have no idea (although I'm certain it isn't an insignificant amount of money). Unfortunately, it doesn't seem as though this information will be breaking into the mainstream any time soon.

Many institutions (at the time of writing—late July) have approached the tuition discussion problem by staying silent and making no public statements. This does two things: first, it creates a void of information between students and the university; and second, it means there is no conversation between these two groups about how to move forward. If the lines of communication were open and universities were properly consulting with their students, the truthful answer of "our costs have actually gone up as we've transitioned to online" would lessen this debate significantly. Students would understand the true cost of shifting classes to an online or hybrid model, and then be able to make an informed opinion on tuition fees. Interestingly, if the trend of online learning continues into the 2021-2022 school year, the focus of debate may shift drastically from upfront setup costs to understanding what it costs to maintain this service-delivery model. This maintenance cost argument is an issue for next year's student leaders to monitor closely as we approach Spring 2021 and institutional budgets make their slow journey through each university's governance system.

Increased consultation will also be an important part of facilitating students' return to the communities where our PSE institutions are located. For a city like London, which sees almost a fourth of its population come and go with the academic year, the Fall brings a lot of questions. What does socializing look like once the worst of the pandemic is behind us? Are street parties a thing of the past? Will pancake keggers for St. Patrick's Day still be a thing? I don't know! You know who might know if it will be happening? Students! Have we asked them? We really should start the dialogue now so that senior administration can start planning. We should work towards creating long-lasting, positive change in our communities.

Finally, the most critical question that needs to be asked of our students as we embark on the Great Reset is how they want to be involved in the province's economic recovery. I have attended many webinars during the pandemic and have heard that the pandemic may mean the end of office spaces and the traditional nine-to-five workday. The Great Reset will create a different work environment, but no one knows precisely what it will look like. When the economy is in recession, it is harder for students to find jobs upon graduation. After 2008, the job market for students graduating was tough, and the job market for anyone graduating from 2020 onwards likely will be as well.

I have heard some say that the silver bullet for PSE institutions to support the rebuilding of our economy is work-integrated learning. I see the appeal of this approach and hope it happens; it could have a massive positive impact on students' academic and professional careers, as well as the local economies where they work. But accomplishing this will likely require some form of massive government subsidy. With businesses cash-strapped, every hiring decision is going to be scrutinized even more than usual. This could prevent a solution like work-integrated learning from taking hold.

Unfortunately, some business or community leaders may assume that students are willing to do any job for a paycheck. We saw this with the farming idea that came from the federal government some months ago—another example where a simple conversation would have cleared things up. Most students don't want to farm. If communities and businesses assume what jobs students are willing to apply for, they may create the wrong opportunities. The solution is to get businesses, students, and institutions into the same room, have a conversation, and find a mutually beneficial solution. These three groups can likely create something really interesting if given the right resources and a chance to reset the system.



December 2020 is uncertain, let alone March 2021. Our path to success as a PSE community is through working together to develop solutions that are mutually beneficial for all parties involved. In recent months, assumptions have too often replaced good communication, and the results haven't been ideal. We are in crisis mode and it's important to act fast, but we can't keep making the same mistake of forgetting to communicate with one another. The only way to find mutually beneficial solutions is to communicate, so if you are a student union representative or university administrator who hasn't sat down for a virtual coffee with each other, please do so.



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PERFORMANCE-BASED FUNDING AND THE PANDEMIC: WHY THE NEW MODEL WILL MAKE THINGS WORSE

Dr. Rahul Sapra

ONTARIO CONFEDERATION OF UNIVERSITY FACULTY ASSOCIATIONS
(OCUFA)

In the 2019 Ontario budget, the Ford government announced a paradigm shift in how universities and colleges in the province would be funded. Instead of the existing model, where post-secondary institutions receive funding based on the number of students they enroll, 60 per cent of public post-secondary funding—over \$3 billion—would now be tied to a set of performance metrics chosen by the government.

This “performance”-based approach marks a fundamental and destabilizing shift in how our public post-secondary education system is supported. By tying funding to the health of local labour markets and other outcomes over which universities and colleges have little control, this new funding model will compromise the integrity of Ontario’s higher education system. It represents an alarming shift that will create greater inequity, hurt students, and threaten the quality of education and research in our province.

To understand just how damaging such a funding model would be, we need look no further than the COVID-19 pandemic. Had the Ford government’s performance-based approach been in effect, universities and colleges would have experienced dramatic funding cuts following the pandemic’s substantial impact on the economy, labour market, and normal university operations.

The new funding model was supposed to come into effect this Fall. Given the COVID-19 pandemic, it is not surprising that the government delayed its implementation by a year. However, it is astonishing that the government still intends to move forward with the model in 2021.



The fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic is going to be with us for years to come and will play havoc with the performance metrics this government has chosen. This will increase instability across the sector, damage education and research quality, and directly impact the well-being of students, staff, and faculty.

A History of Performance-Based Funding

How did we get to this point? Well, it started with former Progressive Conservative Premier Mike Harris. In the late 1990s, his government proposed tying a small portion of post-secondary funding to performance outcomes. There were minor changes to these “key performance indicators” over the years, but they remained a small portion of public post-secondary funding (most recently calculated at approximately 1.4 per cent).



Under subsequent Liberal governments, a plan was developed to negotiate strategic mandate agreements with each university and college in the province with the stated goal of identifying strategic visions for each institution. As part of this initiative, the Liberals proposed expanding the scope of the existing performance indicators by raising the number of metrics to 28 and increasing the percentage of government funding tied to those metrics. Many raised concerns about the proposal, including faculty at Ontario’s universities and colleges.

Before the Liberals were able to implement their vision, Doug Ford was elected and the performance-based funding proposal received yet another overhaul. Ford’s Progressive Conservative government decided to dramatically increase the amount of government funding linked to performance metrics to 60 per cent and slash the number of metrics being tracked. How did they come to this decision? It’s hard to say. Their funding model was developed in secret, in a rush, and without any consultation with faculty, students, or staff.

By ignoring sector stakeholders and sound public policy supported by experts in post-secondary education, the Ford government chose to impose its ideological funding framework on Ontario’s post-secondary education system—a decision that, if it goes forward, will fundamentally undermine the quality of post-secondary education.

Before continuing, it is important to emphasize that the current level of public government funding for post-secondary education in Ontario is nowhere near adequate. Since 2008, per-student funding in the province has trailed the rest of Canada, resulting in Ontario ranking last in Canada when it comes to the student-to-faculty ratio. We are also ninth in the country in tuition affordability. Further, the Ford government’s performance-based funding announcement was accompanied by over \$1 billion in cuts to Ontario’s post-secondary institutions.

A Failed Funding Model

It doesn't take much research into performance-based funding to realize its many flaws. A wide body of research shows that performance-based models are incapable of credibly reflecting or evaluating the breadth and depth of a student's education, the long-term benefits of basic research projects, or the contributions of a faculty or staff member. Instead, studies of other jurisdictions where performance-based funding has been implemented show that this model is far more likely to have negative consequences—slowly but certainly eroding the integrity of post-secondary education systems.

By design, performance-based funding rewards institutions that meet specific targets while penalizing those that do not. In doing so, it denies vital funding to the institutions that need it most to improve their educational outcomes. In effect, rather than encouraging institutions to improve in areas where they are not meeting targets, this approach will ensure institutions fall further behind and will penalize students attending those institutions.

Substantial evidence also suggests that performance-based funding models pose a serious threat to equity and diversity. This would be especially devastating for smaller Ontario universities already struggling with the impacts of COVID-19 and would undermine access for Indigenous students and other equity-seeking groups.

When compared to larger research schools, minority-serving institutions are more likely to be negatively impacted by performance-based funding, forcing some to alter their approach to admitting students from traditionally marginalized backgrounds.

Other adverse consequences include shorter academic programs with less quality control, lower graduation requirements, increased hiring of precariously employed contract faculty, and less institutional autonomy as government exercises more influence over which programs are offered. These metrics and the complicated cyclical reporting mechanisms they require will also lead to increased bureaucracy for post-secondary institutions—straining already overburdened institutional budgets.

The Long-Term Impacts of COVID-19

With the COVID-19 pandemic fundamentally reshaping our living, working, and learning environments, now is a good time to take stock of how we fund Ontario's post-secondary education system going forward.

One of the most vital lessons from the COVID-19 crisis is the importance of adequately funded public services. As an increasing number of Ontarians find themselves and their families impacted by the spread of COVID-19, the importance of public services—including education—has never been more evident. The crisis has also shed a light on how funding for these services is far too low and the fees to access them—including tuition fees—are too high.



INVESTING IN EDUCATION IS ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT WAYS TO CREATE A **STRONGER SOCIAL FABRIC** CAPABLE OF REBOUNDED FOLLOWING MOMENTS OF CRISIS.

Even in better times, but especially in the wake of this crisis, it would be irresponsible of the government to introduce a destabilizing funding system that will force universities to direct their resources away from their core mandate of teaching and learning towards meaningless bureaucratic measures and reporting schemes.

The Ford government's decision not to support Ontario's post-secondary institutions during this pandemic is confounding. Time and again, we have seen that investing in education is one of the most important ways to create a stronger social fabric capable of rebounding following moments of crisis. With institutions already struggling to make ends meet, implementing a performance-based funding model will intensify the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, setting the province further back in its recovery efforts.

Robust, stable public funding for post-secondary education will allow Ontario's universities and colleges to provide strong foundations for weathering the fallout from COVID-19. Institutions will be able to invest in technology and training for improved online educational offerings, smaller in-person classes that prioritize health and safety, supports for students, and lower tuition fees to ensure that already struggling students can access post-secondary education.

What Ontario's universities and colleges need now—what we all need now—is stability and predictability. This is not the time for policy experiments that have failed elsewhere.



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BEYOND THE CHALLENGES OF REMOTE LEARNING: HOW ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATIONS HAVE IGNORED THE SHIFTING EXPERIENCES OF DISABLED STUDENTS

Chloée C. Godin-Jacques

NATIONAL EDUCATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF DISABLED STUDENTS (NEADS)



Since the beginning of the pandemic, the National Educational Association of Disabled Students (NEADS) has consulted a wide array of students from various disabled communities through weekly community engagement meetings and “coffee chats.” NEADS has also helped promote events and initiatives organized by disabled students’ groups and leaders in Canada. Repercussions faced as a result of the novel coronavirus have impeded the academic success of post-secondary students throughout the country.

Most institutions are accordingly preparing to deliver 2020-2021 academic courses remotely and limit on-campus access, with the exception of graduate students’ research and lab work. There are some colleges and universities, however, that are opting for significant in-person learning in a classroom setting. For instance, the University of Toronto is planning to hold lectures in halls at a 25 per cent capacity rate despite health concerns expressed by students and faculty members—especially disabled individuals, who often have immunocompromised health systems.

Regardless, the steep transition to remote learning has been most challenging for students who rely on academic accommodations for complete and meaningful participation within the classroom setting and beyond. Ordinarily, academic accommodations are readily available to disabled students, as well as others, who require assistance in different sectors of daily life whilst pursuing any type of education at the post-secondary level. These in-class accommodations are applied in similar ways across all institutions, and their specificities differ according to students’ particular needs.

"...REMOTE LEARNING GENERATES FURTHER BARRIERS FOR STUDENTS WHO ALREADY EXPERIENCE CHALLENGES WITHIN THE CURRENT POST-SECONDARY SYSTEM. THESE STUDENTS DO NOT HAVE ACCESS TO SUPPORTS THAT WOULD OTHERWISE HAVE BEEN OFFERED, OR WHICH WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN NECESSARY, BEFORE THE PANDEMIC."

Students must then confirm access to their accommodations on a bi-yearly or yearly basis. In classroom settings, such accommodations may include but are not limited to assistive technologies, alternatives to print materials, note-taking and interpreting, exam accommodations, and accessible transportation. Different accommodations should also be granted to students participating in on-campus student life initiatives.

While academic accommodations are still being considered in this transition, they are often not shifting to meet the imminent barriers of remote learning that students would not otherwise experience. Some provinces and territories, notably and most recently British Columbia with its [COVID-19 Go Forward Guidelines for B.C.'s Post-Secondary Sector](#), have established frameworks to guide institutions toward creating meaningful experiences for their students during the pandemic. Even so, in most cases, students seeking academic accommodations because of disability are not included in this documentation. In Ontario, the Ministry of Colleges and Universities has yet to release any type of provincial guidance for colleges and universities regarding the implementation and execution of academic accommodations in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. There is such an absence of consistent and universal accommodations for remote learning across all post-secondary institutions in Ontario.

Some of the most prominent colleges and universities have included specific information pertaining to remote learning within the academic accommodations section of their website, but doing so is currently not mandatory or regulated. A brief search of institutions' accessibility services websites shows that, as of August 2020, this information remains scarce to students who are inquiring for academic accommodations related to remote learning barriers. Unfortunately, most post-secondary institutions do not have any accurate resources for students seeking academic accommodations for remote learning. Resources that do exist are often challenging to find within the institution's website.

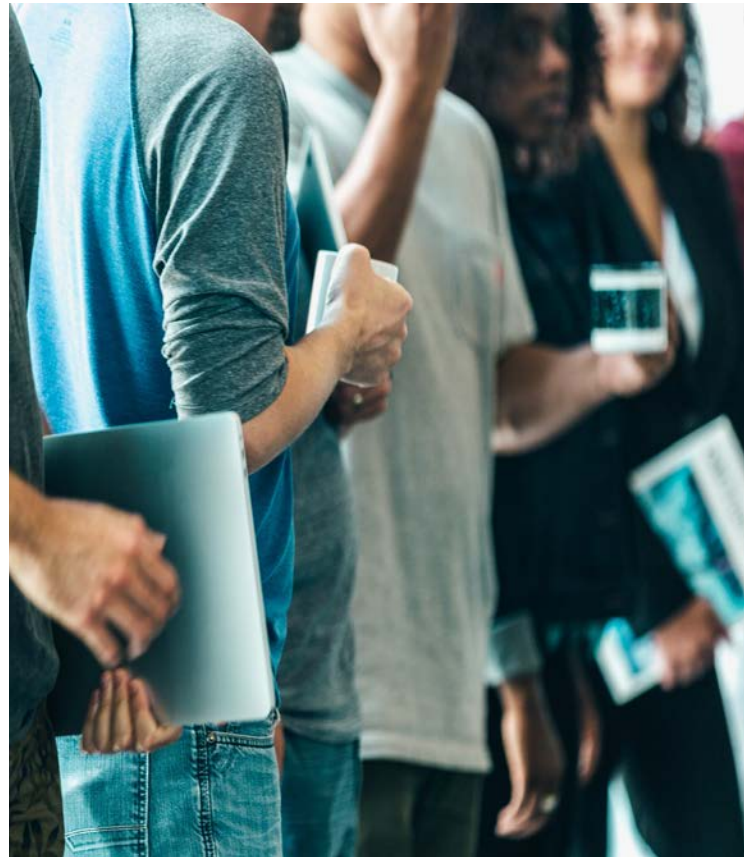
There is an obvious distinction between in-class and remote academic accommodations that is not always differentiated by colleges and universities, and more specifically within accessibility and disability services websites. For instance, a few web pages discussing academic accommodations did not have a section for remote accommodations—which is in itself very problematic, especially in the context of COVID-19. Post-secondary institutions seldom acknowledge the wide range of remote learning repercussions that are ultimately shifting into amplified barriers for students seeking alternative accommodations to their various in-class academic supports. One best practice framework has been set by the Paul Menton Centre, Carleton University's accessibility services provider. The Centre has published an [online FAQ guide](#) for writing exams in a remote setting, a resource which has been absent from many other accessibility services websites. In most instances, academic accommodations for remote learning are not identified and explained. Students who need specific accommodations to further their remote online experiences may not even be aware such options exist.

Recurring stories of struggles demonstrate that remote learning generates further barriers for students who already experience challenges within the current post-secondary system. These students do not have access to supports that would otherwise have been offered, or which would not have been necessary, before the pandemic.

Such examples, which are not always considered, include but are not limited to: access to reliable internet connection and software; support from assistive technology specialists; and quiet space for writing exams and studying. Accordingly, a few disabled students have reported failing their courses because they were not offered appropriate tools to complete assignments and/or testing.

It is noteworthy to mention that, despite the absence of provincial frameworks for academic accommodations, both federal and governments have established initiatives to reduce financial burdens of all students. Such programs include the Canada Emergency Student Benefit (CESB), through which disabled students can claim an additional \$750 per month with an attestation of their disabilities (\$1,250 per month for all students and \$2,000 per month for disabled students). Additionally, for the upcoming academic year, the Canada Student Loans Program has increased the upfront grants offered to disabled students to \$4000 and the upfront grants offered to all eligible students to \$6,000. It is important to note that disabled students can apply for both types of grants. The Canada Student Loans Program has also provided a six-month, interest-free moratorium on loans that are in repayment—and this can be especially beneficial to disabled students and graduates.

Ultimately, disabled students must be offered meaningful tools to experience success in remote learning. Post-secondary institutions must develop and implement academic accommodations that accurately represent the new barriers and challenges that students face when participating in remote learning in the midst of a pandemic. In-class academic accommodations do not suffice, and thus accessibility and disability services must shift their practices accordingly.



Chloée C. Godin-Jacques is the Ontario Director & Fund Development Committee Co-Chair of the National Educational Association of Disabled Students (NEADS).

FALL 2020: LET'S BRING ONLINE LEARNING TO ITS FULL POTENTIAL!

Phil Lebel

CANADIAN ALLIANCE OF STUDENT ASSOCIATIONS (CASA)

The post-secondary education (PSE) world was certainly hit hard last Winter when the COVID-19 pandemic arrived in Canada. While some people saw the pandemic coming, it was hard to imagine the effect it would have on our PSE institutions, students, and teaching personnel. Everyone was caught by surprise and had very little time to react. This resulted in many different responses from coast to coast, leaving a lot of students perplexed about the upcoming semesters.

The idea of going back to classes this Fall has triggered some health and safety concerns. As public health authorities promoted social distancing and reduced indoor activities, no one could blame a student for being worried about returning to a PSE institution full-time. That is why many institutions are looking at reducing their on-campus activities and shifting them online wherever possible.

Amid the onset of the pandemic, the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations (CASA) commissioned a study on students' perspectives going forward in this new pandemic reality. The study gathered the responses of 1,000 PSE students across Canada in May 2020. The message from this study was clear and informs the title of its corresponding report: "Students are Still Worried." Unsurprisingly, students expressed worries about their financial situation and, of course, about their health and safety. But students are worried about academics as well.

Among the concerns raised, the academic training students will receive in the upcoming semesters was top of mind. In the study, 31 per cent of students said they were thinking of delaying or deferring their Fall semester, and 9 per cent had already deferred. Furthermore, 25 per cent were thinking of switching from full-time studies to part time, as 6 per cent of respondents had already done.

These reactions are understandable when you take into account students' perception of online education. Two-thirds of students surveyed said they didn't think they could get the same learning experience they would in a classroom; these students did not feel as though remote courses had the same value as in-person classes. Furthermore, 60 per cent felt they wouldn't receive the same support as they would in person. This perception isn't surprising given that, for many students, the Winter 2020 semester was their first time experiencing remote teaching. However, online teaching can be great!

For example, in 2016, the Université de Montréal did an internal study on three classes that were offered both in person and remotely (and which had the same means of evaluation for both options). To the surprise of many, students participating in the courses remotely had a better success rate than those attending the class in person. The remote-class students also had higher final grades compared to their in-person colleagues, which is not surprising since the success rate was higher.

But if online teaching can be so great, why do students have such a bad perception of it now that they've tried it? A significant difference in the Winter 2020 term was that most students didn't attend purpose-made online teaching; they attended in-person classes that happened to be delivered online, and the teaching personnel were far from ready to adapt.

Getting a course built and ready to be delivered online takes weeks of preparation. In Winter 2020, even the luckiest PSE educators had only one or two weeks to adapt to a new reality. An article entitled "[The Difference Between Emergency Remote Teaching and Online Learning](#)," published in *Educause Review*, does a good job explaining the complexity of remote teaching, the different strategies available, and how almost no institution could provide sufficient support for their teaching personnel in such a short time. Only a few lucky, experienced instructors were ready for online teaching.

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"IN THE WINTER 2020 TERM ... MOST STUDENTS DIDN'T
ATTEND PURPOSE-MADE ONLINE TEACHING;
THEY ATTENDED IN-PERSON CLASSES THAT HAPPENED
TO BE DELIVERED ONLINE"

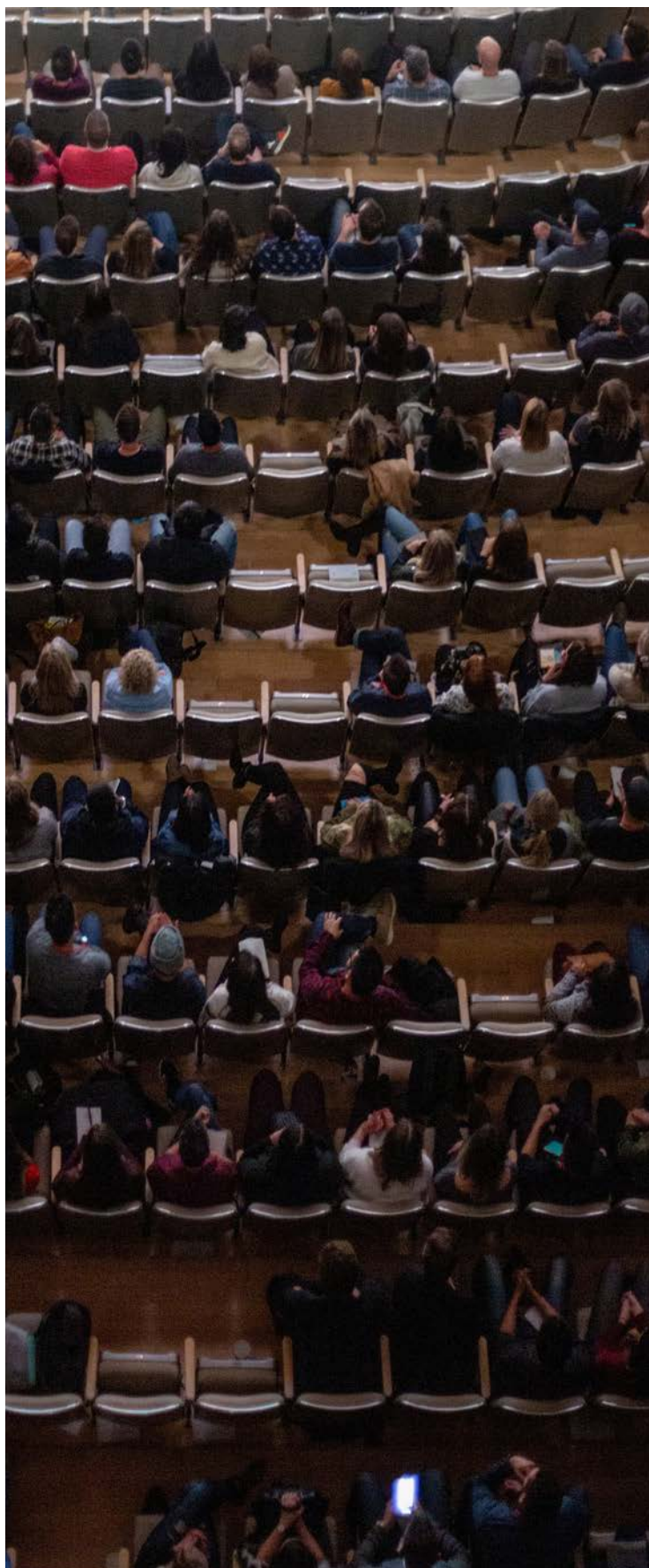
The same crisis that pushed everyone into emergency remote teaching is still present, which is probably the reason why many students don't see the difference between what we went through last term and what is to come in the Fall. But there is one major difference: time! Now that the dust has settled, people (administrators, educators, and students) can catch their breath and look forward to the future. As we prepare for the Fall, the urgency of the COVID-19 response is easing, allowing us to focus on preparing for our new digital reality.

Many remote-teaching professionals are starting to offer advice and training to their colleagues to ensure the return of high-quality PSE. For example, the *Educause Review* article suggests using an asynchronous education model to permit as much flexibility as possible for everyone. This would ensure that people can adapt their education to their unique circumstances, like having to mind kids at home full-time while continuing to study. The same applies to teaching staff who may have to juggle increased household responsibilities with delivering the same quality of instruction that they had before the pandemic.

Many resources are being made available to educators this Summer to help them acquire these new skills and apply them to their Fall classes. For example, the Government of Quebec has partnered with the Université TÉLUQ to offer a free fifteen-hour class on remote teaching. Unfortunately, this training is only available in French and no similar initiative (in which a government provided funding to a PSE institution so that they could make their training available to everyone for free) could be found. While similar classes are available, these are not free and are often linked with rigid registration calendars. Governments across Canada have an opportunity to provide universities with funding to be put toward providing free, bilingual training in online teaching methods.

Some tools are already offered by provincial organizations such as BCcampus and eCampus Ontario, who offer tools, tips, and tricks to PSE educators to help them manage their switch to online courses. eCampus Ontario also offers webinars throughout the Summer, which feature online learning experts sharing their experiences, successes, and failures.

But one of the most important tools offered by eCampus Ontario is its Open Educational Resources (OER) bank. These are government-funded, peer-reviewed, free-to-use, and adaptable resources that can improve the PSE experience. This library opened in 2017, in partnership with BCcampus, and offers more than 250 OERs, most of them being free textbooks. It is estimated that, since its creation, the OER bank has helped close to 100,000 learners collectively save more than \$10 million. Getting access to textbooks for the Fall semester will also be a challenge for many, which is why these resources need to be known by educators for them to, ideally, build their class around them, or to at least refer to them as affordable, high-quality alternatives to the usual reference manuals they would be proposing.



Of course, something being available online doesn't mean it's accessible to everyone. In CASA's recent study, 55 per cent of students said having access to a reliable high-speed internet connection is a challenge for them. The Government of Canada's 2019 Federal Budget featured a ten-year plan to have 100 per cent of households connected to high-speed internet. If today's reality tells us anything, it is that this plan needs to be accelerated! Sufficient internet access is now key to making PSE accessible to everyone, including those living in rural or remote communities.

There are supports and materials ready to be set in motion to bring online learning to its full potential. The challenges of COVID-19 are unprecedented, but there are a lot of resources already available to help educators pivot to online education. If word gets around and people use these resources properly, then together, we can have a great Fall semester.



Phil LeBel is a Policy and Research Analyst for the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations (CASA).

*OUSA represents the interests of **150,000** professional and undergraduate, full-time and part-time university students at eight student associations across Ontario.*



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The Directors of OUSA are representatives from each student association holding full membership with OUSA. They form OUSA's Steering Committee and guide the organization's governance, advocacy, policies, and finances.

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Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance

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BROCK UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' UNION

Brock University - St. Catharines, Ontario

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