



POLICY PAPER

Accountability & System Vision

Fall 2021

Prepared by:

*Aaryan Chaudhury, Government Affairs Manager
Alma Mater Society, Queen's University*

*Jacob Marinelli, Commissioner of External Affairs
Alma Mater Society, Queen's University*

*Siobhan Teel, Vice President Education
McMaster Students Union*

*Sneha Wadhwani, Associate Vice President, Provincial and Federal Affairs
McMaster Students Union*

With files from:

*Malika Dhanani, Research & Policy Analyst
Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance*

ABOUT OUSA

OUSA represents the interests of 150,000 professional and undergraduate, full-time and part-time university students at eight student associations across Ontario. Our vision is for an accessible, affordable, accountable, and high quality post-secondary education in Ontario. To achieve this vision we've come together to develop solutions to challenges facing higher education, build broad consensus for our policy options, and lobby the government to implement them.

The member institutions and home office of the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance operate on the ancestral and traditional territories of the Attawandaron (Neutral), Haudenosaunee, Huron-Wendat, Leni-Lunaape, Anishinaabek, and Mississauga Peoples.

This Accountability & System Vision Policy Paper by the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License](#).

Suggested citation:

Chaudhury, Aaryan, Jacob Marinelli, Siobhan Teel and Sneha Wadhvani, *Policy Paper: Accountability & System Vision*. Toronto: Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance, 2022.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

OUSA policy papers are written by students to articulate student concerns and offer student-driven solutions for accessible, affordable, accountable, and high quality post-secondary education in the province.

To support our policies and ensure that we are effectively representing undergraduate and professional students at Ontario's universities, students and student groups from each of our eight member institutions were consulted to provide guidance and feedback on the principles, concerns, and recommendations contained herein.

OUSA would like to thank students and student groups from Brock University, Laurentian University, McMaster University, Queen's University, Trent University Durham GTA, the University of Waterloo, Western University, and Wilfrid Laurier University for their valuable contributions to this policy paper.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

GLOSSARY	4
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	5
INTRODUCTION	13
UNIVERSITY GOVERNANCE	14
INTRODUCTION TO UNIVERSITY AND STUDENT GOVERNANCE	14
INCREASING STUDENT AND DIVERSE REPRESENTATION ON GOVERNANCE BODIES AND COMMITTEES.....	14
STUDENT VOTING EQUITY ON UNIVERSITY GOVERNANCE	17
QUALITY ASSURANCE.....	18
DEGREE EXPECTATIONS	18
INCREASING INFRASTRUCTURE FOR STUDENTS FROM EQUITY-DESERVING GROUPS	21
INCREASING LEARNING INFRASTRUCTURE FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES.....	23
QUALITY ASSURANCE MECHANISMS.....	24
CAPACITY EXPANSION	26
INDIGENOUS STUDENTS' SUPPORT FRAMEWORKS	26
INFRASTRUCTURE TO SUPPORT RURAL AND NORTHERN STUDENTS	28
INFRASTRUCTURE TO SUPPORT FRANCOPHONE STUDENTS	30
DEFERRED CAMPUS MAINTENANCE AND REPAIR	32
SATELLITE CAMPUS INFRASTRUCTURE.....	33
INTEGRATING MINISTRY OF COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES FRAMEWORKS.....	36
FUNDING MODELS	37
SHARED RESPONSIBILITY FOR UNIVERSITY OPERATIONAL FUNDING	37
STRATEGIC MANDATE AGREEMENTS.....	38
RE-EVALUATING PERFORMANCE-BASED FUNDING MODEL AND ITS DEVELOPMENT	39
TEACHING AND RESEARCH.....	42
DATA COLLECTION	44
IMPROVING SMA DEVELOPMENT WITH EQUITY, TRANSPARENCY, AND STUDENT INVOLVEMENT.....	44
DIFFERENTIATION	46
WORK-INTEGRATED LEARNING FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS	46
WORK-INTEGRATED LEARNING FOR DOMESTIC STUDENTS.....	47
WORK-INTEGRATED LEARNING FOR STUDENTS WITH SYSTEMIC BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION.....	49
OMBUDSPERSON OFFICE & MEDIATION OFFICES.....	49
OMBUDSPERSON OFFICE MEDIATION OFFICE FINANCING.....	50
INCREASED STUDENT REPRESENTATION	52
CONNECTION TO ONTARIO OMBUDSPERSON	52
POLICY STATEMENT	54

GLOSSARY

Equity-deserving groups: Groups that are being denied equity as a result of any aspect of their identity, including but not limited to race, class, gender, sexuality, disability, and immigration status.

Infrastructure: Physical structures, supplies, resources, buildings, and facilities that contribute to institutional operation. Infrastructure also includes digital, technological, and transport-related supports, and where applicable, is specified throughout the paper.

Rural and northern students: This definition has been adapted from OUSA’s “Rural and Northern Students” policy paper.¹ Rural communities, as defined by Statistics Canada, are those whose population is less than 1,000 and whose population density is less than 400 per square kilometre.² Rural areas comprise of districts outside of census metropolitan areas including Toronto, Ottawa, Hamilton, Kitchener-Cambridge-Waterloo, London, St. Catharines-Niagara, Oshawa, Windsor, Barrie, Greater Sudbury, Kingston, Guelph, Brantford, Thunder Bay, or Peterborough. Northern areas, as defined by the Government of Ontario, refers to the City of Greater Sudbury and other districts including Kenora, Rainy River, Thunder Bay, Algoma, Cochrane, Manitoulin, Sudbury, Timiskaming, Nipissing, and Parry Sound.³ The five publicly-assisted universities that would fall within northern Ontario include Algoma University, Lakehead University, Laurentian University, Nipissing University, and L’Université de Hearst. All that considered and unless otherwise specified, rural and northern students include:

1. Students from rural and northern communities who attend northern post-secondary institutions;
2. Students from rural and northern communities who attend post-secondary institutions in southern, urban centres; and
3. Students from southern, urban centres who attend post-secondary institutions in northern regions.

Student mediation: Refers to processes at post-secondary institutions that handle academic and non-academic disputes between students and faculty, institutional administration, institutional resources, relevant policies and procedures, and other students. Offices that engage in this work are referred to differently across Ontario institutions, and for the purposes of this paper, student mediation encapsulates ombudsperson offices, appeals boards, and other bodies that manage student-related concerns and disputes.

University board: A university board is responsible for matters involving institutional finances, property, and activities. University boards play the important role of appointing the university’s president and appraising their performance. They are typically comprised of senior administrators (like the president and chancellor), internal faculty members, and external public members, and are governed by a set of internally written by-laws. In Ontario, university boards have decision-making autonomy and do not typically face interference from the provincial government but the two may occasionally engage with one another.⁴

University senate: University senates are institutional bodies that manage and make decisions pertaining to academic operations and matters. At most Canadian universities, the senate shares governance responsibilities with the university board, a model known as bicameral governance.⁵

¹ Malek Abou-Rabia, David Bath, Katlyn Kotila, and Serina Seguin. *Policy Paper: Rural & Northern Students*. Toronto: Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance, 2020.

² “Population Centre and Rural Area Classification 2016,” Statistics Canada, February 8, 2017, online: <https://www.statcan.gc.ca/eng/subjects/standard/pcrac/2016/introduction>

³ Government of Ontario, “Ontario population projections,” *Government of Ontario*, August 25, 2021, <https://www.ontario.ca/page/ontario-population-projections>

⁴ Julia Eastman, Glen A. Jones, Olivier Bégin-Caouette, Sharon X. Li, Christian Noumi, and Claude Trottier, “Provincial Oversight and University Autonomy in Canada: Findings of a Comparative Study of Canadian University Governance,” *Canadian Journal of Higher Education* 48, no.3 (2018): 65-81

⁵ Moira Macdonald, “University boards in the spotlight,” *University Affairs*, January 3, 2018, <https://www.universityaffairs.ca/features/feature-article/university-boards-spotlight/>

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The post-secondary sector contains many macro-level agents and structures that work together to shape the direction and delivery of post-secondary education in Ontario. From university governance, to quality assurance, capacity expansion, Ministry frameworks, funding models, Strategic Mandate Agreements (SMAs), differentiation, and mediation offices, there are a multitude of tools and measures that strive to achieve the accountability and systemic vision of post-secondary education. While these aspects do not directly interact with students on a daily basis, they do have a significant impact on access and outcomes for students, particularly those from equity-deserving groups. Consequently, students have collaborated to voice their concerns and offer recommendations on the following issues:

THE PROBLEM

Limited Representation in University Governance

There is a lack of proactive communication between internal governing bodies and the broader community of stakeholders, which creates substantial barriers for individuals to engage with governing bodies and decisions being made that may affect them. Undergraduate student representatives are often limited in their abilities to influence decision-making on governing bodies since they comprise very few seats on those bodies. Additionally, there is insufficient provincial guidance on the representation of undergraduate students on university governance bodies and these student representatives are often limited in their abilities to influence decision-making on governing bodies due to lacking adequate training on how to navigate and effectively engage in complex governance systems. Individuals from marginalized groups face unique concerns in the post-secondary environment and due to unique and potentially exacerbated challenges, individuals from marginalized groups face additional barriers to engaging with university governance. There is currently a lack of representation of individuals from marginalized groups in senior leadership at universities. A large portion of university boards across Ontario do not have internal reporting processes to their constituents.

Students are often restricted from voting on issues that directly impact them, such as tuition, because it is seen as a conflict of interest. In addition, students are often restricted from voting on issues that directly impact them, because they are seen as inexperienced.

Insubstantial Quality Assurance Processes

University Undergraduate Degree Level Expectations (UUDLEs) remain too vague and subjective, inadequately defining what the learning outcome students should have learned after each level of instruction. Implementations of UUDLEs are not currently standardized amongst institutions and lack clarity on what is expected at each degree level. Further, UUDLEs have no equity-based degree expectations in the current framework.

There is currently a lack of data available to indicate the professional pathways of students from equity-deserving groups, including participation in the labour market upon completion of post-secondary education. Students are concerned that the needs of under-represented groups are currently not being met with regards to the accessibility and quality of post-secondary education in Ontario. Students from low-income backgrounds are disproportionately at risk for not being able to afford high quality internet.

At present, students with disabilities are given inequitable access to physical spaces on campus, negatively impacting their success in post-secondary education. Further to this, the current *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)* framework is not sufficient for student accessibility needs on post-secondary campuses.

As it stands, students are worried that quality assurance mechanisms allow room for bias in the favour of universities and that current program reviews do not require feedback from students. Additionally, data collected from university performance reviews is not currently made available to the public.

Incomprehensive Capacity Expansion Initiatives

Most post-secondary institutions in Ontario are in the southern regions which heightens community disconnect for Indigenous students attending university far from their homes. Notably, there has not been enough support and celebration of Indigenous voices, students, and culture on the campuses of Ontario universities. Many post-secondary institutions campuses have historical and ongoing relationships rooted in colonialism and oppression with statues, memorials, and names of physical spaces reflecting figures involved in oppression, system violence, and genocide.

Students in rural and northern communities face additional financial barriers to accessing technology, given the increased price of internet in rural and northern communities, and private sector internet providers are not effectively incentivized to support access to quality internet service in rural and northern areas. In addition, rural and northern students face greater barriers compared to urban students in accessing inter-regional transportation options to their post-secondary institutions and/or experiential learning opportunities.

Institutions and programs that offer programs in the French language have not been protected in recent years, and their longevity has not been prioritized by the provincial government. Francophone students have very limited options for learning in French and must choose between relocating and learning in another language, and post-secondary institutions that offer programs in the French language do not offer a wide-array of diverse courses.

There is a significant backlog of maintenance requests across post-secondary campuses, resulting in inaccessible and unsafe learning spaces. Currently, no standardized post-secondary AODA education policy is in place to ensure standards for physical spaces on post-secondary campuses.

High quality services and supports are not readily and equally available across institution's primary campuses and satellite campuses. The ancillary fees paid by students on satellite campuses are not reflected in the quality of services available on their home campus. Additionally, commuting to distant university campuses or moving entirely can be inaccessible for post-secondary students who require accommodations not limited but including financial, accessibility, and other needs. Most post-secondary students do not have access to private transportation for reasons including, but not limited to, parking availability and accessibility, maintenance and insurance costs, and environmental concerns, which leaves post-secondary students particularly reliant on public transport systems. Due to their housing a proportionally smaller population of students, areas that satellite campuses are located in may not be served adequately by safe, affordable, and accessible public transport. Satellite campuses are often not located in accessible areas for students living in rural and/or northern areas, and lack proper infrastructure to support their students. At times, satellite campuses may have a lower priority than main campuses when considering infrastructure improvements that would increase quality and accessibility of programs and offerings.

Fragmented Ministry Frameworks

Students are concerned that the province's institutional funding framework, tuition framework, and student financial aid framework are utilized separately in an incohesive manner.

Unbalanced Funding Models

Students at some universities across Ontario do not have transparency into how their tuition and ancillary fees are allocated in their university budget. The cost of higher education has increased disproportionately

to public funding, making higher education financially inaccessible. Since 2011, tuition fees have accounted for over 50 percent of universities' operating budgets, and student contributions have continued to increasingly outpace government contributions each year. Currently, per-student funding does not increase with inflation each year, resulting in students contributing disproportionately more to their higher education than public funding. Due to inadequate government funding, institutions in Ontario rely on increasing international tuition, ancillary fees, and revenue-generating campus services to supplement operating budgets.

Gaps in Strategic Mandate Agreement Development and Intentions

The provincial government's proposal to increase weighting of performance-based funding within the SMAs from 1.6 percent in 2019 to 60 percent by 2025 is a stark change and relies too heavily on these metrics. In addition, the Ministry of Colleges and Universities has not consulted with post-secondary students on the impact of performance-based funding criteria on student's experience and expectations. As it stands, there is no opportunity for students to provide feedback to the province on problems, highlights, or questions about the current performance-based funding criteria with the SMAs, and performance-based funding models may put equity-deserving students at a disadvantage. The current performance-based funding model, through a dramatic increase in the proportion of performance-based funding, fails to effectively treat universities like a public good and ignores the positive societal externalities that would be lost through unnecessarily decreased funding.

Research intensive universities receive higher funding from the provincial government, and this contributes to disparities in teaching quality between skilled instructors and researchers required to instruct. Post-secondary institutions that promote research funding and opportunities do not prioritize teaching and student learning outcomes to the same high degree. Providing increased funding to research institutions discourages differentiations between universities and the programs offered which undermines the sector's long-term sustainability.

Students are also concerned that SMA report back data is not centrally stored in a publicly accessible manner.

As they exist, SMAs do not reflect students' need for diversity, transparency, and representation in the province's framework. In the development of the current SMAs, students and student organizations were not consulted, which diminished Ontario students' ability to contribute. Further, the current SMA structure does not encourage diversification and differentiation in institutions' program offerings.

Non-Prioritization of Differentiation in Work-Integrated Learning

Students are worried that international students have additional burdens and barriers when accessing experiential learning and workplace study opportunities on campus.

Post-secondary institutions across Ontario do not have equal work-integrated learning (WIL) opportunities and currently, there is no way for Ontario post-secondary institutions to address the challenges students face when participating in these opportunities. In addition, different Ontario post-secondary institutions use a variety of supports and strategies to address student WIL accessibility concerns which are not uniform between institutions. Currently, there are insufficient WIL opportunities for students across Ontario post-secondary institutions.

Some student populations including mature students, racialized students, Indigenous students, and students with disabilities face additional barriers when accessing WIL opportunities. A student's functional limitations may limit them from working while studying, which prevents them from gaining work experience during their studies. Further, students may experience covert and overt racism or religious discrimination when searching for WIL or while working as a result of their racial and/or religious identity.

Ombudsperson and Mediation Office Operations

Students are worried that at many institutions, they are forced to bear either the most of the cost or partial cost of dispute resolution mechanisms on university campuses.

Additionally, student representation is not mandated across university ombudsperson offices/mediation offices, despite being a significant stakeholder in post-secondary education.

The number of academic and non-academic issues have increased in the last three years, with a lack of appropriate dispute resolution processes. Lastly, no formalized connection exists between Ontario Ombudsman and institutional ombudsperson offices, resulting in inconsistent reporting standards across different university offices.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Increasing Student Representation and Participation in University Governance

The province should mandate that undergraduate student representatives be provided with adequate training and support to enhance their abilities to provide useful feedback and insights to governing bodies. Additionally, the provincial government should establish a report that evaluates students' influence within university governing bodies across Ontario and renew this report every 3 years. The province should also mandate that each university board implement a regular internal reporting process in which they share their activities and decisions to stakeholders, including but not limited to, university community members. The province should mandate university governing bodies to implement recruitment and retention strategies to increase the representation of equity-deserving groups in their senior leadership and governing bodies. The province should work with university governance committees to implement recruitment and retention strategies to increase the representation of marginalized groups (those historically disadvantaged by their race, gender, class, or other aspects of their background) in their senior leadership.

The province should amend Ontario University Acts to state that student governors may take part in discussions and vote on matters relating to student issues, including but not limited to tuition and ancillary fees. The province should also mandate that students occupying seats on university governance committees receive adequate training so that they can succeed in their roles.

Strengthening Quality Assurance Processes

The Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance (OUCQA) should revise the UUDLEs to model Lumina Foundation's Degree Qualification Profile learning outcomes. In addition, the OUCQA should consult with equity-deserving students to develop equity-building skillsets as a part of degree level expectations and ensure that student feedback is incorporated during the tuning process of updating UUDLEs.

The provincial government should mandate that Ontario universities should, through non-compulsory means, track data regarding the participation, retention, and campus experience of students from equity-deserving groups in post-secondary education. The Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO) should conduct consultations with students from under-represented groups to better inform policy recommendations on the accessibility and quality of post-secondary education in Ontario. The provincial government should develop a grant, qualified through OSAP, aimed at covering the cost of high quality internet for students from low-income backgrounds.

The AODA should continue to create a post-secondary education framework that clearly defines standards for physically accessible spaces on campus, including the types and number of spaces that should exist.

Following the completion of the AODA framework for Postsecondary Education Standards, the provincial government should adopt all formal recommendations on post-secondary campuses within the timelines identified by the Postsecondary Education Standards Development Committee. Additionally, the provincial government should provide envelope funding to institutions to ensure older spaces on university campuses comply with AODA standards. The provincial government should also increase post-secondary special purpose grants to increase accessibility of hybrid learning technology not limited to high-flexibility classrooms, lecture capture technology and digital learning infrastructure for all students.

The OUCQA should only approve Institutional Quality Assurance Processes that provide province-wide metrics based on the evaluation of learning outcomes, and should ensure the team for cyclical program reviews includes at least one student reviewer and that the review process incorporates feedback from current students and graduates. The provincial government should task HEQCO to take on the quality assurance mechanisms of the current Quality Council of the Council of Ontario Universities (COU). Further, the province should ensure data collected from university performance reviews should be made available and easily accessible to the public on OUCQA's website. In addition, the province should ensure equity-focused perspectives are considered as part of cyclical eight-year reviews of program quality in higher education.

Developing Supportive Capacity Expansion

The provincial government should invest in programs focused on Indigenous languages and studies in both publicly funded post-secondary institutions as well as Indigenous Institutes. The provincial government should encourage post-secondary institutions to remove statues and memorials of problematic historical figures who contributed to the genocide and ongoing abuse of Indigenous communities and Peoples, including those that were complicit in the residential "schooling" system. Further to this, the province should provide envelope funding to post-secondary institutions to create memorials and awards celebrating Indigenous leaders to be selected and awarded by Indigenous Peoples. The provincial government should also invest in more transportation between post-secondary institutions and First Nations communities, as well as culturally relevant community and resources centers on post-secondary campuses. The provincial government should engage in meaningful conversations with Indigenous Peoples, including Indigenous students, faculty, and staff to ensure their needs are met on campuses through a provincial advisory committee which will allow Indigenous Peoples to make suggestions to improve learning. The provincial government should mandate post-secondary institutions to consult with Indigenous advisory bodies that are directed and controlled by Indigenous students, faculty, and community members.

To increase the accessibility of post-secondary education for rural and/or northern students, the provincial government should introduce a Technology Accessibility Grant that is open to these students who require access to technology off-campus. The provincial government should introduce a Rural and Northern Travel Grant that is open to rural and/or northern OSAP-eligible students, living 40 kilometers or more from the nearest publicly-assisted institution. Additionally, the provincial government should engage in strategic partnerships to provide financially accessible, high-speed, and reliable internet to rural and northern communities.

To better support Francophone students, the province should invest in existing programs offered in the French language across all disciplines at Ontario universities in all regions to ensure a wide array of course and program offerings in the French language. The provincial government should work directly with universities offering programs in the French language to ensure solvency and ongoing financial support for post-secondary institutions that have French language programs and Francophone students have access to diverse programs in the French language. In addition, the province should provide funding to Ontario post-secondary institutions to recruit instructors for French programs to promote the expansion and accessibility of French language programs.

The provincial government should provide envelope funding to universities' deferred maintenance budgets for the implementation of repairs and enhancements to all campus spaces to increase the overall

accessibility of campus for students with disabilities. The provincial government should also work with institutions to ensure accessibility and safety standards are maintained such as the standards outlined in the current AODA.

To enhance the effectiveness of satellite campuses, the provincial government should include a metric in SMAs that addresses how institutions will develop and sustain equitable infrastructure for satellite campuses. The province should encourage post-secondary institutions to prioritize satellite campus infrastructure to the same quality as main campuses, and commit funds towards the expansion of post-secondary access to growing communities through means, including but not limited to, the creation of satellite campuses. The provincial government should commission HEQCO to evaluate the efficacy of satellite campuses as a strategy for improving access to post-secondary education for populations in rural and northern communities. Additionally, the Ministry of Colleges and Universities should work with the Ministry of Transportation to prioritize underserved satellite campus communities when distributing funding through the Community Transportation Grant Program. The provincial government should also invest in rapid transit projects in municipalities with post-secondary institutions, especially currently underserved satellite campuses. The provincial government should make additional funding available to post-secondary institutions for projects and initiatives that address existing quality disparities in services, programs, and offerings between campuses. The provincial government should mandate consultations with various stakeholders, including current and prospective students, when creating new satellite campuses through advisory bodies. Lastly, the provincial government should make additional funding available to post-secondary institutions for projects and initiatives that address existing disparities pertaining to accessibility of physical spaces on satellite campuses.

Integrating Ministry Frameworks

To increase the cohesiveness of various Ministry frameworks, the provincial government should review the current frameworks through an advisory body with representation from students, university administrators, and industry professionals to draft a new encompassing framework. The province should also develop clear guidelines stating deadlines for each framework and promote them in an accessible format that's available to students.

Sharing Responsibility for University Operational Funding

The provincial government should work in conjunction with COU to create policies that mandate universities communicate detailed tuition breakdowns to their students once per academic term. The provincial government should work in conjunction with the COU to create policies that mandate student involvement in budget planning. The provincial government should increase operating grants until students are contributing at most/a maximum of one-third of universities' total operating budget, and should index base operating grants to national inflation each year.

Student Involvement and Areas of Reconsideration within Strategic Mandate Agreements

The provincial government should measure the success of performance-based funding within SMAs by developing advisory bodies with university administration, students, graduates, and industry professionals. The Ministry of Colleges and Universities should decrease the annual weight increase of performance-based funding within SMAs to between 5 and 8 percent annually rather than 10 percent. Further, the province of Ontario should balance the post-secondary funding model more evenly between the SMA envelope, enrolment envelope, and special purpose grants to ensure student concerns are incorporated and institutions are accountable to student needs. The provincial government should conduct appropriate consultations with students from equity-deserving groups to ensure their needs are met under a performance-based funding model, and measure representation of equity-deserving groups in student and faculty bodies, as well as their success rates (i.e., sense of belonging, faculty and staff duration and tenure rates, etc.) and representation in course syllabi, at post-secondary institutions as a performance indicator. The provincial government should also add a bargaining mechanism to the core of the SMA system that would allow and encourage universities to propose innovative changes to their

operations while adapting their SMAs to judge performance, and thus calculate performance-based funding, more appropriately.

To increase support for teaching-focused institutions, the provincial government should adjust the university funding model to reflect the value of these institutions. The province should also consult with students through advisory committees at each post-secondary institution to better understand how student needs and learning goals, particularly those from groups deserving equity, can be incorporated within SMAs. Further to this, the provincial government should utilize feedback from students to adjust SMAs to reflect student learning and career goals and hold post-secondary institutions accountable for the use of students' tuition through SMAs. The province should incorporate student learning goals and feedback from consultations to inform post-secondary institutions of gaps in high quality teaching and innovative instructors. The provincial government should also provide grants and other funding opportunities that recognize the value of innovations in teaching, promoting best practices in curriculum and instructional design, and teaching-as-research.

OUSA also recommends that the government should, publicly by default, centrally store data collected by the SMA report backs.

The provincial government should ensure that SMAs acknowledge potential biases and make efforts to mediate this through ongoing research into pedagogy, barriers to representation at the post-secondary level, and improving accountability. The province should also adjust the SMA development process to include opportunity for student feedback while actively consulting with student organizations. Additionally, the provincial government should encourage diversification of program offerings by including consideration for course variety within future SMAs. The province should consult with current students and those who discontinued their studies at each post-secondary institution across Ontario to better incorporate student needs and learning goals within the SMAs.

Enhancing Work-Integrated Learning for Student Groups to Promote Differentiation

The provincial government should increase investments to provide targeted support for international students in WIL programs and better engage international students in these opportunities and to receive feedback from existing programs. The province should further research WIL participation rates, barriers to participation, and strategies, to enhance overall rates of participation for these students. In addition, the Ministry of Colleges and Universities should provide envelope funding for post-secondary institutions to retain dedicated work-integrated learning international student advisors.

The provincial government should further research WIL participation rates, barriers to participation, and strategies, to enhance overall rates of participation for domestic students. The provincial government should also increase funding to ensure that sufficient WIL opportunities are uniform across all Ontario post-secondary institutions. The provincial government should invest in the Career Ready Fund to incentivize employers to increase opportunities for disciplines and programs of study that currently lack WIL opportunities, and should prioritize paid WIL opportunities through this Fund.

To increase access to WIL for students with systemic barriers to participation, the Ministry of Colleges and Universities should partner with post-secondary institutions and businesses to increase these opportunities that are equally available to students and that meet the current student demand. The provincial government should also prioritize work-integrated learning opportunities, including research grants, for students who have limited access to these opportunities.

Improvements to Ombudsperson and Mediation Office Operations

To reduce student contributions to ombudsperson and mediation offices, the provincial government should provide institutions with the funding necessary to adequately run these offices on university campuses, including satellite campuses, following an enrolment-based model.

The province should also mandate at least 20 percent of ombudsperson office, or mediation office, by case, seats to students in their undergraduate degrees.

The Ontario Ombudsman should establish a student committee with an elected (by students) undergraduate and graduate representative from each Ontario post-secondary institution, and should establish a formalized connection with institutional student mediation offices through the Ministry of Colleges and Universities. Finally, individual student mediation offices at institutions should release accessible and transparent reports at the end of each academic year with a summary of the aggregated data.

INTRODUCTION

One of OUSA's primary advocacy drivers aims for an accountable and sustainable post-secondary system in Ontario. This system can be complex and involves the resources of various stakeholders, each with their own interests and objectives. Despite being a macro-level issue within the post-secondary sphere, students have many concerns about the accountability and systemic vision within the sector, given that student access and outcomes are significantly influenced by these agents. This paper consolidates two previous OUSA papers, *Accountability and System Vision*, as a result of a decision made by OUSA's 2020-21 Steering Committee. The previous *Accountability* paper addressed issues relating to quality assurance, Strategic Mandate Agreements (SMAs), university governance, and ombudsperson offices. Conversely, the *System Vision* paper addressed differentiation, capacity expansion, and funding models. Each of these topics continues to hold importance for students and have carried over into the current policy paper.

Issues of accountability in post-secondary stem from the publicly-assisted nature of the sector, albeit over the past several years institutional operating revenues have seen decreases from government contributions while student tuition and fees have seen increased contributions. This is particularly worrisome for international students, whose tuition fees remain unregulated by the government and are subject to unpredictable changes. The introduction of SMAs, which were previously Multi-Year Accountability Agreements, was intended to provide a level of transparency between institutions, the government, and the public. As of 2020, SMAs have entered their third iteration and weigh heavily on performance-based measures, specifically those that assess economic and employment outcomes. The rapid change and strong reliance on performance-based funding has students cautious about the impacts of this funding model. However, accountability also presents itself in other areas like quality assurance, which should consider the implications of these processes on delivering a high quality education, and university governance, who hold decision-making autonomy on issues directly affecting students. Accountability is also extremely important in student mediation processes because of the influence and criticality this has on the post-secondary experience. It is important to note that some of these offices are known as "ombudsman" or "ombudsperson" offices, while the province itself has an Ontario Ombudsman. For the purposes of this paper and where "student mediation" is not accurate, the term "ombudsperson" will be used when discussing institutional offices to de-gender the terminology used in OUSA's advocacy. However, when discussing the provincial body, the term "Ombudsman" will be used to keep consistent with provincial terminology.

Looking at a vision for the post-secondary system in the province, students are thinking about the ways in which equity can be better integrated into all facets of the system. The government has placed a focus on differentiation as a driver for change within the sector, releasing *Ontario's Differentiation Policy Framework for Postsecondary Education* in 2013 that highlights the ways institutions must commit to differentiation through the resources and programming they provide. Notably, this framework has not been updated since its release and with the needs of students, faculty, institutions, and other stakeholders constantly evolving, attention to differentiation must be prioritized in order to equitably serve these needs. In addition, the *Major Capacity Expansion Policy Framework* was released in July of 2020 and under this framework, institutions are eligible for government support for expansion projects, being evaluated under four criteria: (1) enrolment; (2) facilities; (3) jobs and economy; and (4) student access. This framework aligns with the economic and labour market focus of SMAs, but risks neglecting the current needs of various student groups and geographic areas, hindering their access and quality of education. Concerningly, current funding models are unsustainable for the sector due to the heavy reliance on student tuition to fund operational budgets rather than government contributions. The COVID-19 pandemic unveiled the issue behind this concern as institutions may download the cost of pandemic-related costs to students, especially international students, with limited government support.

While a seemingly indirect issue for students, mechanisms of accountability and actions towards achieving a desired system vision critically influence the ways in which students experience their post-secondary education. It is our hope that the following concerns and recommendations will illustrate current gaps and areas for improvement within the post-secondary sector, and further OUSA's mission to achieve an accountable, accessible, affordable, high quality education for students in Ontario.

UNIVERSITY GOVERNANCE

INTRODUCTION TO UNIVERSITY AND STUDENT GOVERNANCE

A university board is the highest governing body at a university and oversees the university's finances, property, and activities. University boards are responsible for appointing the university president and monitoring their performance. Terms for university boards vary among institutions; OUSA's member schools refer to their boards either as the "Board of Trustees" or "Board of Governors."

At most Canadian universities, the board shares governance responsibilities with the university senate, who deals primarily with academic matters. This model of shared governance between the board and senate is known as bicameral governance. The recommendations within the following section regarding university governance refer to both the senates and the boards.

Student governance has taken the shape of student representation on these committees, as well as student unions. Student unions can collaborate with the university to provide student services, and can advocate on the behalf of students to governance bodies at the university.

INCREASING STUDENT AND DIVERSE REPRESENTATION ON GOVERNANCE BODIES AND COMMITTEES

Principle: Equitable representation of students on university governance is vital for the successful operation of university governance.

Principle: As key stakeholders, students have a right to be involved in their university's governance and decision-making processes.

Principle: Students provide valuable insights on how a university's actions, values, and operations are experienced by students, and thus are vital to a university's effective governance.

Principle: University governance bodies are most effective if all members are able to engage to their full potential.

Principle: University bodies and committees are most effective when their membership is comprised of a diverse range of perspectives and experiences.

Principle: Transparent information regarding the activities of university boards should be made available to stakeholders, including but not limited to, university community members.

Concern: There is a lack of proactive communication between internal governing bodies and the broader community of stakeholders, which creates substantial barriers for individuals to engage with governing bodies and decisions being made that may affect them.

Concern: Undergraduate student representatives are often limited in their abilities to influence decision-making on governing bodies since they comprise very few seats on those bodies.

Concern: There is insufficient provincial guidance on the representation of undergraduate students on university governance bodies.

Concern: Undergraduate student representatives are often limited in their abilities to influence decision-making on governing bodies due to lacking adequate training on how to navigate and effectively engage in complex governance systems.

Concern: Individuals from marginalized groups face unique concerns in the post-secondary environment.

Concern: Due to unique and potentially exacerbated challenges, individuals from marginalized groups face additional barriers to engaging with university governance.

Concern: There is currently a lack of representation of individuals from marginalized groups in senior leadership at universities.

Concern: A large portion of university boards across Ontario do not have internal reporting processes to their constituents.

Recommendation: The provincial government should mandate that undergraduate student representatives be provided with adequate training and support to enhance their abilities to provide useful feedback and insights to governing bodies.

Recommendation: The provincial government should establish a report that evaluates students' influence within university governing bodies across Ontario and renew this report every 3 years.

Recommendation: The provincial government should mandate that each university board implement a regular internal reporting process in which they share their activities and decisions to stakeholders, including but not limited to, university community members.

Recommendation: The provincial government should mandate university governing bodies to implement recruitment and retention strategies to increase the representation of equity-deserving groups in their senior leadership and governing bodies.

Recommendation: The provincial government should work with university governance committees to implement recruitment and retention strategies to increase the representation of marginalized groups (those historically disadvantaged by their race, gender, class, or other aspects of their background) in their senior leadership.

Adequate student representation on university governance is vital to ensure student perspectives are incorporated in the decision-making processes of these governance structures. Currently, there is a large disparity in undergraduate student representation on university senates. According to the latest available data from OUSA's member institutions, the percentage of undergraduate students on university senates ranges from 8 percent at Brock University to 23.5 percent at Queen's University, with half of them falling closer to the 8 percent mark, as seen in Table 1.

Table 1: Undergraduate Representation on University Senates (2021-2022)⁶

School	Total Number of Senate Members	Number of Undergraduate Students on Senate	Percent of Undergraduate Students on Senate
Brock	75	6	8%
Laurentian	73	10*	13.6%
McMaster	67	6	8.9%
Queen's	68	16	23.5%
Trent	51	11*	21.5%

⁶ Information gathered from respective institutional websites: [Brock University](#), [Laurentian University](#), [McMaster University](#), [Queen's University](#), [Trent University](#), [University of Waterloo](#), [Western University](#), and [Wilfrid Laurier University](#)

Waterloo	96	8*	8.3%
Western	103	14	13.5%
Wilfrid Laurier	78	7	8.9%

* Some student seats were vacant at time of writing

Undergraduate student representation is vital to ensure that student needs are understood by university governance, whose decisions directly impact student academics. The wide discrepancy in the percentage of undergraduate students on university senates is an indication of inconsistency in the representation of student voices at these tables.

University boards currently also have low student representation, with undergraduate students occupying between one and three seats on university boards at OUSA member institutions, as seen in Table 2.

Table 2: Undergraduate Student Representation on University Boards (2021-2022)⁷

School	Total Number of Board Members	Number of Undergraduate Students on Board*	Percent of Undergraduate Students on Board
Brock	26	1	3.8%
Laurentian	25	2	8%
McMaster	57	1	1.7%
Queen's	25	1	4%
Trent	22	2	9%
Waterloo	39	3	7.6%
Western	31	2	6.4%
Wilfrid Laurier	34	2	5.8%

* Excludes observer/non-voting undergraduate student members

Ensuring there is adequate representation of undergraduate students on senates and university boards is vital for student perspectives to be taken into consideration in the decision-making of these groups. Students have told us that they do not feel there is adequate student representation in university governance as well as in the decisions made by these groups. It is important for university boards and senates to value student perspectives in their decision-making, as their decisions often directly impact students. However, given the complexity of institutional governance bodies, student representatives may not always be well-equipped to participate in these groups and may struggle with an imbalanced power structure in these groups making it difficult to contribute. Given that student representatives voice the concerns of a primary stakeholder in the institutional system, they should be given an opportunity to be adequately prepared to be active participants in governance bodies. This is why the province should mandate that undergraduate student representatives receive training and support to enhance their abilities to provide useful feedback and insights to governing bodies.

⁷ Information gathered from respective institutional websites: [Brock University](#), [Laurentian University](#), [McMaster University](#), [Queen's University](#), [Trent University](#), [University of Waterloo](#), [Western University](#), and [Wilfrid Laurier University](#)

It is also important to ensure student voices are valued at these decision-making tables. Most university boards currently have one or two student representatives, diminishing their voting power and making the student voice at these tables negligible. It is important that university governing bodies ensure the voices of these students are heard and that their contributions carry equal weight compared to their senior administrative counterparts. One method of ensuring student representatives feel their perspectives are valued is for the provincial government establish a triennial report that evaluates students' influence within university governing bodies. This would be a useful tool to monitor equitable participation and inclusion of students within institutional governance, ensure that their contributions are meaningfully considered, and identify areas of concern.

Additionally, there is a lack of consistency in the data available regarding the demographics of those occupying senate and board seats. Senates play a vital role in academic decision-making at universities, hence why representation of marginalized voices on university senates is so important. Historically, academia has been an unwelcoming space for marginalized groups, and current demographic data in Ontario reflect a lack of marginalized representation in undergraduates. OUSA's 2020 Ontario Undergraduate Student Survey (OUSS) found that 39 percent of respondents identified as a "person of colour," or "a racialized person", 25 percent identified as LGBTQ+, 27 percent identified as having a disability or multiple disabilities, and 2 percent identified as Indigenous.⁸ This lack of representation of individuals from equity-deserving groups indicates that higher education is still not a welcoming space for marginalized students and that they face multiple barriers in accessing their education. Moreover, these proportions are not reflective among institutional governance and senior leadership, where equity-deserving groups are significantly under-represented. Nationally, racialized individuals make up only 8 percent of university senior leadership, disabled individuals make up about 5 percent, Indigenous people comprise about 3 percent, and Two Spirit and LGBTQ+ individuals make up about 8 percent.⁹ The decisions being made in these bodies must reflect the needs of all campus community members, and while being careful not to tokenize the experiences of equity-deserving groups, diverse representation can provide various, valuable perspectives in these conversations. To that end, OUSA recommends that the province mandate university governing bodies to implement recruitment and retention strategies to increase the representation of equity-deserving and marginalized groups in their senior leadership and governing bodies. This would facilitate movement up the leadership pipeline for equity-deserving groups and expand opportunities to use their experiences and skills in these important processes. In addition, taking demographics into consideration when appointing individuals to the Board or Senate would be helpful in increasing the representation of individuals from marginalized groups on these committees. Alongside inclusive hiring practices, ensuring individuals from marginalized groups have the supports they need to fulfill their roles on these committees and feel comfortable on them is vital, hence why accommodations or retention strategies are so important.

Overall, the current state of student representation, representation of equity-deserving groups, and transparency on university governance committees point towards the necessity of provincial support. This would ensure that these issues are addressed by all institutions in Ontario, and that there is a level of regulation for the operations of university boards and senates.

STUDENT VOTING EQUITY ON UNIVERSITY GOVERNANCE

Principle: Students on university governance should have the same voting privileges as any other non-student member of university governance committees.

Concern: Students are often restricted from voting on issues that directly impact them, such as tuition, because it is seen as a conflict of interest.

Concern: Students are often restricted from voting on issues that directly impact them, because they are

⁸ Data from OUSA's 2020 Ontario Undergraduate Student Survey, forthcoming.

⁹ *Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion at Canadian Universities: Report on the 2019 National Survey*, (Universities Canada, October 2019), 10, <https://www.univcan.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Equity-diversity-and-inclusion-at-Canadian-universities-report-on-the-2019-national-survey-Nov-2019-1.pdf>

seen as inexperienced.

Recommendation: The provincial government should amend Ontario University Acts to state that student governors may take part in discussions and vote on matters relating to student issues, including but not limited to tuition and ancillary fees.

Recommendation: The provincial government should mandate that students occupying seats on university governance committees receive adequate training so that they can succeed in their roles.

Students on university governance committees are sometimes unable to vote on matters related to tuition or ancillary fees, as it is considered a conflict of interest. Often, changes made to tuition and ancillary fees are a result of changes to services on campus. There is inconsistency across Ontario post-secondary institutions on the role of students in voting matters, particularly regarding what constitutes a conflict of interest. Queen's University is one example where voting on tuition is clearly defined as not a conflict of interest;¹⁰ yet other institutions do not outline these specificities in their governance regulations leaving conflict of interest matters up to interpretation which can work unfairly against students. In addition, some institutional bylaws for boards clearly indicate that faculty and staff can discuss and vote on matters related to compensation, like the University of Waterloo and Wilfrid Laurier University.¹¹ For example, at Wilfrid Laurier, "Board members who are faculty or staff of Wilfrid Laurier University may participate in the discussion and vote at the Board level on matters related to group remuneration, benefits, terms of employment, and other matters established in a collective fashion, provided that their interest in such matters does not differ from the general interest of their Wilfrid Laurier University faculty and staff colleagues."¹² The clarity in bylaws afforded to faculty and staff for exceptions to potential conflicts of interest regarding compensation should also be applicable to student members and their ability to vote on tuition and ancillary fee matters. Students are the direct consumers of these services, and decisions made regarding tuition and ancillary fees have definitive impacts on students. Given that institutions have established their own individual Acts they are governed by, the provincial government should ensure institutional Acts state that student governors may partake in discussions and vote on matters related to student issues, including student tuition.

In addition, concerns were raised in our consultations with students regarding students on governance committees being restricted from voting as they were seen as inexperienced. This concern could be addressed by providing students on university governance committees with training on topics relevant to their roles. Therefore, OUSA recommends that the province mandate training for students on university governance committees.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

DEGREE EXPECTATIONS

Principle: Undergraduate degree expectation frameworks should adequately define the competencies that students will have by the time they complete their undergraduate degree.

Principle: All University Undergraduate Degree Level Expectations should have equity-based expectations in their framework.

Concern: University Undergraduate Degree Level Expectations remain too vague and subjective, inadequately defining what the learning outcome students should have learned after each level of instruction.

¹⁰ Queen's University Board of Trustees, "Queen's University Board of Trustees Code of Conduct," *Queen's University*, 2019, https://www.queensu.ca/secretariat/sites/uslcwww/files/uploaded_files/Code%20of%20Conduct%202018-19%281%29.pdf

¹¹ *University of Waterloo Act*, s.o. 1959, c. 140; *The Wilfrid Laurier University Act*, s.o. 1973, c. 87

¹² *The Wilfrid Laurier University Act*

Concern: Implementations of University Undergraduate Degree Level Expectations are not currently standardized amongst institutions and lack clarity on what is expected at each degree level.

Concern: University Undergraduate Degree Level Expectations have no equity-based degree expectations in the current framework.

Recommendation: The Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance should revise the University Undergraduate Degree Level Expectations to model Lumina Foundation’s Degree Qualification Profile learning outcomes.

Recommendation: The Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance should consult with equity-deserving students to develop equity-building skillsets as a part of degree level expectations.

Recommendation: The Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance should ensure that student feedback is incorporated during the tuning process of updating University Undergraduate Degree Level Expectations.

Students attending university should attain various knowledge outcomes from their university degree. These students deserve to feel that every degree in a similar program has the same desired knowledge gained, regardless of institution. Currently, the Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance (OUCQA) has developed the underlying University Undergraduate Degree Level Expectations (UUDLEs) framework within their Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) used as the foundation for what students should have learned from their respective undergraduate degrees.¹³

This framework, last updated in February of 2021, outlines six key degree expectations including: (1) depth and breadth of knowledge; (2) knowledge of methodologies; (3) application of knowledge; (4) communication skills; (5) awareness of limits of knowledge; and (6) autonomy and professional capacity.¹⁴ However, these skills are currently up to individual institutions to evaluate UUDLEs for the respective programs they offer to students. This leaves a big area for interpretation of the respective outcomes due to inconsistent standardization and lack of clarity for each degree level.

This vagueness and subjectiveness can be seen within the criteria listed for each degree expectation, which intend to further define the requirements for each expectation for a student to obtain an undergraduate degree. One example of this can be seen in section 6 of the QAF, “Autonomy and Professional Capacity” which outlines that students should gain the “Qualities and transferable skills necessary for further study, employment, community involvement and other activities.”¹⁵ Although this is a key aspect that should be considered when thinking of a degree outcome, within differing disciplines, the qualities and transferable skills are greatly subjective to degree and institutional outcomes. Within this example, the ambiguity surrounding qualities and transferable skills compounds the lack of standardization across the institutional level. To address these concerns within the current UUDLE framework, OUSA recommends that OUCQA adopt the newest Lumina Foundation’s Degree Qualification Profile (DQP) 3.0 as the standard framework.¹⁶ This DQP provides a clear definition of each respective proficiency, and greatly reduces the amount of subjectiveness between institution and degree outcomes. The DQP has five sections: (1) specialized/industry knowledge; (2) broad and integrative knowledge; (3) intellectual skills, (4) applied and collaborative learning; and (5) civic/democratic and global learning.¹⁷ As a point of comparison to the QAF’s “Autonomy and Professional Capacity” expectation, the DQP “Specialized/Industry Knowledge” competency specifically discusses that at a Bachelor’s level, the student should be able to “Define and explain the structure, styles and practices of the field of study or industry

¹³ Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance, “Quality Assurance Framework,” *Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance*, February 2021, <https://oucqa.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Quality-Assurance-Framework-Oct-2021-1.pdf>

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment, “Degree Qualifications Profile,” *National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment*, 2021, <https://www.learningoutcomesassessment.org/dqp/>

¹⁷ Ibid.

using tools, technologies, methods and specialized terms specific to the field.”¹⁸ The contrast in specificity between the two on an employability-based competency further exemplifies the DQP as a strong framework to base degree level expectations on, that better target the learning outcomes needed to succeed after post-secondary. It is critical that student voices are being heard throughout the entire process, given that learning outcomes ultimately have implications for their quality of education. It would also be worthwhile to allow faculty to contribute to the overall process, in order to give them a greater understanding of the framework and the outcomes sought after by students. This would allow for decreased subjectivity between institutions and even across faculty at a given institution.

Student feedback is also necessary to ensure that an equity component is incorporated within the framework. The current UUDLE framework has no equity component which sets a standardization for equity-based learning degree outcomes and individual institutions and leaves many institutions lacking adequate representation and knowledge on equity-based topics. This is especially important since some fields of study may not purposefully integrate equity-based learning, under the assumption that their field is not typically seen as needing a focus on equity. This is why OUSA recommends that equity-building skillsets are incorporated into degree level expectations, and that this new component is developed in consultation with equity-deserving students.

The Champlain College in Vermont offers an example for what an equity-based learning outcomes could look like, using a diversity, equity, and inclusion framework, and states that students should be able to:¹⁹

Competency	Skills
Perspective Taking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Demonstrate openness to new perspectives and diverse others ● Evaluate diverse perspectives, and navigate the ambiguity and complexity that comes with multiple perspectives ● Reassess one’s own personal perspective when appropriate, a process that frequently requires courage and/or humility ● Listen while withholding judgement about the new or unfamiliar
Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Seek points of connection and interact substantively with those who are different from oneself ● Demonstrate communication skills that enable intercultural communication, including effective listening skills ● Interact respectfully and appropriately in a variety of cultural contexts
Collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Harness the power of diversity (through “Perspective Taking” and “Communication”) as a source for creativity, innovation and/or productive collaboration ● Demonstrate professionalism by working inclusively and co-creating an environment where each perspective is considered for the cooperative purpose of making progress toward common goals
Cultural knowledge and self-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Describe various elements inherent to one’s own culture and

¹⁸ “The DQP Grid,” *Lumina Foundation*, 2014, https://www.learningoutcomesassessment.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/1022_DQP-grid_BA.pdf

¹⁹ Wei Chen, Emily Crist, Kelly Thomas, Rowshan Nemazee, Sean Leahy, Ellen Zeman, Noah Goldblatt, and Eric Ronis, “Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Learning Outcomes,” *Champlain College*, 2018, https://champlain.instructure.com/courses/898279/pages/diversity-equity-and-inclusion-learning-outcomes?module_item_id=17066568

awareness	<p>to other cultures: history, values, politics, communication styles, economy, beliefs, practices, etc.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Interpret phenomena within a cultural context ● Recognize and critically reflect upon one’s own cultural biases ● In appropriate situations, consider that some of the norms and practices one espouses and treats as “universal” might actually be culturally dependent ● Interrogate structures of power and institutions from the standpoint of cultural inheritance
-----------	---

INCREASING INFRASTRUCTURE FOR STUDENTS FROM EQUITY-DESERVING GROUPS

Principle: Data regarding the participation of students from equity-deserving groups in the labour market is necessary in order to identify and address potential ways that barriers in post-secondary education impact graduates’ professional outlook.

Principle: The needs of students from equity-deserving groups in the post-secondary environment must be understood in order to improve the accessibility and quality of post-secondary education for these students.

Principle: Access to adequate technology and internet is necessary for meaningful engagement with post-secondary education.

Concern: There is currently a lack of data available to indicate the professional pathways of students from equity-deserving groups, including participation in the labour market upon completion of post-secondary education.

Concern: The needs of under-represented groups are currently not being met with regards to the accessibility and quality of post-secondary education in Ontario.

Concern: Students from low-income backgrounds are disproportionately at risk for not being able to afford high quality internet.

Recommendation: The provincial government should mandate that Ontario universities should, through non-compulsory means, track data regarding the participation, retention, and campus experience of students from equity-deserving groups in post-secondary education.

Recommendation: The Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario should conduct consultations with students from under-represented groups to better inform policy recommendations on the accessibility and quality of post-secondary education in Ontario.

Recommendation: The provincial government should develop a grant, qualified through OSAP, aimed at covering the cost of high quality internet for students from low-income backgrounds.

There is a growing body of evidence which indicates that first-generation students, low-income students, Indigenous students, and students with disabilities are less likely to attend university or to graduate than their peers. In fact, a report by the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO) indicates that despite rapid growth in enrolment numbers at post-secondary institutions, there is little evidence to suggest that this increase in enrolment has led to an increase in the representation of marginalized groups.²⁰ In addition to enrolment, students from under-represented groups also have unique needs with regards to quality assurance in post-secondary education. According to HEQCO, the skills and

²⁰ Fiona Deller, Amy Kaufman, and Rosanna Tamburri, *Redefining Access to Postsecondary Education*, Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, 2019.

competencies students graduate with, as well as the social and economic mobility which post-secondary education allows students, are important factors to consider when measuring the quality of post-secondary education in Ontario.²¹ Understanding these factors requires collecting data regarding the labour market participation of students from under-represented groups upon graduating. In order to increase the accessibility and quality of post-secondary education for individuals from these groups, proper infrastructure needs to be put in place at all universities to ensure these students are supported. Building this infrastructure requires an understanding of the needs of students from under-represented groups.

Data plays an important role in understanding the quality of post-secondary education for students from under-represented groups. Reports by HEQCO, the Council of Ontario Universities, and the Ontario Council of Academic Vice Presidents suggest that tracking an individual's academic journey from entering the education system to entering the workforce is essential for developing evidence-based policies related to the quality of higher education for students from under-represented groups.²² Building evidence-based policy is important for improving the quality of education for individuals from under-represented groups.

A possibility suggested by HEQCO would connect the post-secondary sector to the Ontario Education Number (OEN) system used by primary and secondary schools to track individual academic journeys from kindergarten through the twelfth grade.²³ This would not only allow for recognizing the needs of individuals from under-represented groups in the post-secondary landscape, but also allow for an understanding of how barriers to accessing post-secondary education can present themselves during primary or secondary education. Gaps in literacy and poor academic performance for students from under-represented groups are just some examples of such barriers that stem from primary education and influence whether these students choose to continue on to post-secondary education. This is especially salient when considering academic streaming in Ontario's education system, a practice known to disproportionately affect students from low-income and racialized groups.²⁴ A report by the Toronto District School Board indicated that just 10.2 percent of students in the applied stream, where under-represented students are more likely to be placed, confirmed enrolment in university compared to 67.6 percent of those in the academic stream.²⁵ Improving the accessibility and quality of post-secondary education for students from marginalized groups requires addressing systemic barriers that are present throughout our current educational system, hence why tracking data regarding individuals' journeys in the education system is vital for achieving these goals. In the case of domestic students entering Ontario post-secondary institutions, educational journeys could be tracked by linking their post-secondary journey to their OENs. This is why OUSA recommends the provincial government mandate institutions to track data on the participation, retention, and campus experience of equity-deserving groups. Regardless of how the provincial government mandates this, it is important to note that while post-secondary institutions would be required to track this data, students would not be required to participate in this data collection, meaning that institutions must collect this data through non-compulsory means.

Data collection is vital in order to ensure an awareness of the challenges faced by equity-deserving groups in higher education. Data ensures the perspectives of equity-deserving students are recorded and therefore can be addressed.²⁶ Once this data has been collected, policy recommendations can be formed which directly address the concerns of equity-deserving groups. To facilitate this process, HEQCO should conduct consultations with students from under-represented groups to inform the development of these policy recommendations.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Tianna Follwell and Sam Andrey, "How to End Streaming in Ontario Schools," *Ontario 360*, May 13, 2021, https://on360.ca/policy-papers/how-to-end-streaming-in-ontario-schools/#_edn12

²⁵ R.S. Brown and G. Tam, *Grade 9 Cohort Post-Secondary Pathways, 2011-2016. Fact Sheet 3, November 2017*, (Toronto: Toronto District School Board, 2017), <https://www.tdsb.on.ca/Portals/research/docs/reports/FS3%20Grade%209%20Cohort%20Post-Sec%20Pathways%202011-16%20FINAL.pdf>

²⁶ Janoah Willisie, "When It's Measured, it Matters: Disaggregated Race Data in Canada, Policy. 2020 June 17, <https://www.policymagazine.ca/when-its-measured-it-matters-disaggregated-race-data-in-canada/>

Additionally, infrastructure that students heavily rely on to support their post-secondary education, like internet, may not be as easily accessible to students from equity-deserving groups. Research from ACORN Canada shows that lower-income households (\$30,000 or less) are less likely to have internet access than those with higher incomes (\$60,000 or more), and almost two-thirds of their respondents reported having issues with internet speed.²⁷ This translates to the post-secondary environment as many students are worried about having access to the technology they need, a concern made abundantly evident during the COVID-19 pandemic, where low-income students lost access to free, on-campus digital infrastructure like internet and computers.²⁸ Hence, OUSA recommends that the provincial government develop an OSAP-qualified grant to cover the cost of high quality internet for students from low-income backgrounds.

INCREASING LEARNING INFRASTRUCTURE FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Principle: All students on campus should have equitable access to physical learning spaces alongside hybrid and online learning spaces.

Principle: Physically accessible spaces should follow standards that meet the needs of students with disabilities across all campuses.

Concern: Currently, students with disabilities are given inequitable access to physical spaces on campus, negatively impacting their success in post-secondary education.

Concern: The current *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* framework is not sufficient for student accessibility needs on post-secondary campuses.

Recommendation: The *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* should continue to create a post-secondary education framework that clearly defines standards for physically accessible spaces on campus, including the types and number of spaces that should exist.

Recommendation: Following the completion of the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* framework for Postsecondary Education Standards, the provincial government should adopt all formal recommendations on post-secondary campuses within the timelines identified by the Postsecondary Education Standards Development Committee.

Recommendation: The provincial government should provide envelope funding to institutions to ensure older spaces on university campuses comply with *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* standards.

Recommendation: The provincial government should increase post-secondary special purpose grants to increase accessibility of hybrid learning technology not limited to high-flexibility classrooms, lecture capture technology, and digital learning infrastructure for all students.

Students attending post-secondary institutions deserve to have accessible infrastructure on all areas of campus. Additionally, physically accessible spaces should meet the standards that address the needs and concerns of students who are attending their institution. Following the COVID-19 pandemic, maintenance backlog for individual institutions have been set aside. Many of these much needed infrastructure changes have been neglected, posing challenges for students with disabilities on campus.²⁹ These physical barriers

²⁷ “Barriers to Digital Equity in Canada,” *ACORN Canada*, August 2, 2019, <https://acorncanada.org/resource/barriers-digital-equality-canada>

²⁸ “Quality of Education Campaign Summary: Report on Online Learning,” (Toronto: Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance, 2020); “CASA’s 2021 Pre-Budget Submission: Supporting Post-Secondary Student in the Age of COVID-19,” *Canadian Alliance of Student Associations*, 2020

²⁹ To read more about OUSA’s stance on student accessibility and disability inclusion, please see: Shawn Cruz, Shemar Hackett, Skye Nip, and Brittany Williams. *Policy Paper: Student Accessibility and Disability Inclusion*. (Toronto: Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance, 2019)

include minimal ramps and elevators, inaccessible transportation and washrooms, and heavy doors.³⁰ The implications of this are significant as disabled students, particularly those with learning, mental health, and physical disabilities, are less likely to graduate from post-secondary and often face challenges entering the labour market.³¹

There are five standards set by the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* (AODA) which were combined under the Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation and include: (1) information and communication; (2) transportation; (3) employment; (4) design of public spaces; and (5) customer service.³² Committees are in the process of developing more standards to eliminate barriers that currently exist or remove barriers that current standards do not address. Currently, there is no educational standard that exists to guide the way institutions address barriers in place for students on post-secondary campuses. In 2017, the province established the Postsecondary Education Standards Committee, responsible for identifying barriers and proposing various recommendations³³ to the government that would inform the development of post-secondary education standards under the AODA for students attending university and college.³⁴

With these recent developments, we recommend that these frameworks continue to be developed to ensure that clear educational standards are set for all spaces on post-secondary campuses. Additionally, following the completion of the post-secondary AODA standards, OUSA calls on the provincial government to adopt all formal recommendations within a timely manner set by the Postsecondary Education Standards Development Committee to ensure that students' needs are addressed. In order to facilitate the implementation of these standards, the provincial government should also provide envelope funding to support institutions in their effort to comply with the newly develop standards.

The nature of remote learning throughout the COVID-19 pandemic was beneficial for many disabled students as it increased accessibility of post-secondary education. Recognizing that in-person learning also contributes to areas of the post-secondary experience, it would be prudent to ensure institutions are equipped to facilitate hybrid learning models that cater to the different, varying needs of all students. This would be an important measure that considers how students with disabilities can better engage with their education when given flexible options to do so. However, the digital infrastructure currently in place is not conducive to achieving this goal, posing challenges for inclusion in education as technological tools and resources are lacking.³⁵ This is why OUSA recommends that the provincial government increase post-secondary special purpose grants to support the accessibility of hybrid learning technology. The government already recognizes the importance of flexible learning models through their introduction of the Virtual Learning Strategy in 2020,³⁶ and while this is appreciated, investments in this area can be taken a step further by focusing on the enhancement of hybrid learning versus solely on virtual learning.

QUALITY ASSURANCE MECHANISMS

Principle: Universities should take appropriate measures on an ongoing basis to ensure their undergraduate programs are of the highest possible quality.

³⁰ "Main Barriers to Education for Students with Disabilities (Fact Sheet), *Ontario Human Right Commission*, n.d., <https://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/main-barriers-education-students-disabilities-fact-sheet>

³¹ Ken Chatoor, "Postsecondary Credential Attainment and Labour Market Outcomes for Ontario Students with Students," (Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, 2021)

³² Greg Thomson, "What is the AODA?," *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act*, October 2, 2018, <https://aoda.ca/what-is-the-aoda/>

³³ To read the proposed recommendations published in June 2021, please see: Postsecondary Education Standards Development Committee, "Development of proposed postsecondary education standards – 2021 initial recommendations report," *Government of Ontario*, August 26, 2021, <https://www.ontario.ca/page/development-proposed-postsecondary-education-standards-2021-initial-recommendations-report>

³⁴ Greg Thomson, "AODA Requirements for Educational Institutions," *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act*, August 26, 2019, <https://www.aoda.ca/aoda-requirements-for-educational-institutions/>

³⁵ "Landscape of Accessibility and Accommodation in Post-Secondary Education for Students with Disabilities," *National Educational Association of Disabled Students*, July 2018, <https://www.neads.ca/en/about/media/AccessibilityandAccommodation%202018-5landscapereport.pdf>

³⁶ Ministry of Colleges and Universities, "Ontario Invests in Virtual Learning Strategy," *Ontario Newsroom*, December 11, 2020, <https://news.ontario.ca/en/release/59600/ontario-invests-in-virtual-learning-strategy>

Principle: Student input should be taken into consideration when designing and implementing program reviews, as they have recent lived experience studying in post-secondary programs.

Principle: The provincial government has a responsibility to ensure the quality of undergraduate programs at Ontario's publicly-assisted universities.

Principle: The public has a right to know the results of performance reviews of publicly-assisted higher education systems.

Concern: The current quality assurance mechanisms allow room for bias in the favour of universities.

Concern: Current program reviews do not require feedback from students.

Concern: Data collected from university performance reviews is not currently made available to the public.

Recommendation: The Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance should only approve Institutional Quality Assurance Processes that provide province-wide metrics based on the evaluation of learning outcomes.

Recommendation: The Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance should ensure the team for cyclical program reviews includes at least one student reviewer and that the review process incorporates feedback from current students and graduates.

Recommendation: The provincial government should task the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario to take on the quality assurance mechanisms of the current Quality Council of the Council of Ontario Universities.

Recommendation: The provincial government should ensure data collected from university performance reviews are made available and easily accessible to the public on the Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance's website.

Recommendation: The provincial government should ensure equity-focused perspectives are considered as part of cyclical eight-year reviews of program quality in higher education.

The Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) published by the Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance (OUCQA or the Quality Council) dictates that Institutional Quality Assurance Processes (IQAPs) should be internally developed by universities based on their mission statements and degree level expectations. Additionally, individual universities can select the body that performs external reviews of IQAPs. This process leaves room for institutional bias, hence why OUSA recommends that the OUCQA should only approve IQAPs that provide province-wide metrics based on the evaluation of learning outcomes. This would allow for greater provincial standardization of IQAPs and reduce the chances of bias in the favour of individual institutions.

The intent of IQAPs is to provide standardized processes to measure the quality of post-secondary education in Ontario. The perspectives of students and graduates are vital to properly measure the quality of university education, as these groups have lived experiences with post-secondary education that allow them to provide valuable insights. One measure of this in action is through student feedback for course reviews. Course reviews are conducted by universities each semester, however this feedback is often not implemented. Currently, it is up to the individual discretion of professors to implement student feedback from course evaluations, which is a cause for concern considering that course evaluations are one of the only anonymous feedback mechanisms students have. Further attention should be paid by universities and the provincial government to how course evaluations are conducted and how feedback from evaluations is implemented. Notably, among a set of principles that guide the QAF, "Experience of the Student," is the first one on the list and emphasizes the "centrality of the student experience in Ontario,"

with special attention on student achievement to obtain a degree.³⁷ Ensuring the perspectives of current students and graduates are incorporated into IQAPs is essential for the efficiency of this quality assurance mechanism. In fact, a review of the OUCQA in 2018 highlighted the need for increased student engagement and encouraged the Council to better incorporate student contributions in cyclical program audits.³⁸ Currently, it is at the discretion of IQAPs to involve students in their review committees and thus, there is room for students to be excluded from these processes. The OUCQA should develop regular program reviews that require feedback from current students and graduates in order to solicit the input and feedback from the population who, ultimately, deal with the consequences of potentially poor or low quality post-secondary programs.

The institutionally-driven nature of IQAPs poses potential issues for accountability in quality assurance; while each institution does have unique factors to consider in the development of their IQAPs, the close relationship between them and the overseeing body of the Quality Council, the Council of Ontario Universities, is subject to bias in favour of Ontario universities when handling quality assurance matters. OUSA recommends that the provincial government pass on the responsibility of quality assurance of post-secondary education to HEQCO, which will leave less room for bias in quality assurance processes. The aforementioned review of the OUCQA also recommends more collaboration with HEQCO, suggesting the value in using this stakeholder as an asset in the enhancement of quality assurance at post-secondary.³⁹

Currently, data from university performance reviews is not made available to the public. The accessibility of this data is not only important for the public to understand the quality of educational institutions which their tax dollars are contributing towards, but is also important in order for stakeholders to develop a better understanding of the processes by which these quality assurance reviews are conducted. Thus, the provincial government should mandate the public sharing of data from university performance reviews on the OUCQA website.

Additionally, OUSA recommends that equity-focused perspectives should be considered as part of cyclical eight-year reviews of program quality in higher education. In tandem with our previous recommendations on integrating equity-based learning outcomes, it would be important for quality assurance processes to also evaluate this component of degree outcomes. Incorporating equity-based perspectives into program reviews will allow us to work towards more inclusive post-secondary programs. This is of particular importance when considering disability inclusion in post-secondary education, an area where there is currently a large gap based on a report by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).⁴⁰ On a provincial level, the Ontario Human Rights Commission's policy on accessible education for students with disabilities states, as a part of the duty to accommodate, that an education provider "has a responsibility to design and develop new or revised facilities, services, policies, processes, courses, programs or curricula inclusively," signalling the ways equity can be better considered in program evaluation.⁴¹

CAPACITY EXPANSION

INDIGENOUS STUDENTS' SUPPORT FRAMEWORKS

Principle: Indigenous students have strong connections to diverse communities across Canada and

³⁷ Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance, "Quality Assurance Framework."

³⁸ Roger King, Anna Kindler, and Greg Moran, "Review of the Quality Council (QC) of the Council of Ontario Universities (COU) by an Independent Review Panel, May 2018," <https://oucqa.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Report-on-the-Review-of-the-Quality-Council-May-2018.pdf>

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Serge Ebersold, "Adapting Higher Education to the Needs of Disabled Students: Developments, Challenges and Prospects," *Higher Education to 2030, Volume 1, Demography*, (Paris: Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development), 221-240, https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/higher-education-to-2030-volume-1-demography/adapting-higher-education-to-the-needs-of-disabled-students_9789264040663-9-en

⁴¹ "Policy on accessible education for students with disabilities," *Ontario Human Rights Commission*, March 2018, s.8.6, <https://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/policy-accessible-education-students-disabilities>

deserve to attend post-secondary while preserving these ties.

Principle: Indigenous students should be supported in their post-secondary pursuits through spaces and learning objectives dedicated to Indigenous culture and ways of knowing.

Principle: Indigenous students should have access to diverse program offerings through institutions committed to supporting Indigeneity on campus.

Concern: Most post-secondary institutions in Ontario are in the southern regions which heightens community disconnect for Indigenous students attending university far from their homes.

Concern: There has not been enough support and celebration of Indigenous voices, students, and culture on the campuses of Ontario universities.

Concern: Many post-secondary institutions campuses have historical and ongoing relationships rooted in colonialism and oppression with statues, memorials, and names of physical spaces reflecting figures involved in oppression, system violence, and genocide.

Recommendation: The provincial government should invest in programs focused on Indigenous languages and studies in both publicly funded post-secondary institutions as well as Indigenous Institutes.

Recommendation: The provincial government should encourage post-secondary institutions to remove statues and memorials of problematic historical figures who contributed to the genocide and ongoing abuse of Indigenous communities and Peoples, including those that were complicit in the residential “schooling” system.

Recommendation: The provincial government should provide envelope funding to post-secondary institutions to create memorials and awards celebrating Indigenous leaders to be selected and awarded by Indigenous Peoples.

Recommendation: The provincial government should invest in more transportation between post-secondary institutions and First Nations communities, as well as culturally relevant community and resources centers on post-secondary campuses.

Recommendation: The provincial government should engage in meaningful conversations with Indigenous Peoples, including Indigenous students, faculty, and staff to ensure their needs are met on campuses through a provincial advisory committee which will allow Indigenous Peoples to make suggestions to improve learning.

Recommendation: The provincial government should mandate post-secondary institutions to consult with Indigenous advisory bodies that are directed and controlled by Indigenous students, faculty, and community members.

Over the past two years, Indigenous students have watched as one of the only universities in northern Ontario experienced insolvency and was forced to limit the number of programs offered in an effort to cut costs. Although Indigenous students are not the only young people with vested interest in Laurentian University, the proximity to many local communities allowed for Indigenous students to maintain a sense of physical connection to their traditional territory while also pursuing post-secondary education. Additionally, Laurentian’s previously wide program offerings aimed to serve northern communities and Indigenous Peoples, and minimized the costs associated with attending university.

The pre-existing barriers to university access for Indigenous people have been noted by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission⁴² with distance from community and cost addressed through federal funding of the Post-Secondary Student Support Program.⁴³ That being said, the provincial government has not made the same efforts to work with and support Indigenous students in Ontario. Without post-secondary institutions located near Indigenous communities or adequate transportation supports to facilitate access, Indigenous students are effectively removed from universities across the province due to distance. In fact, a transportation plan is required with proposals under the government's *Major Capacity Expansion Policy Framework*, in an effort to increase student access.⁴⁴ Thus, recognizing the specific challenges faced by Indigenous students and being culturally sensitive to their needs will be critical in the government's push to increase student access under this framework.

Ontario's provincial government needs to take active efforts to not only support but fund institutions to ensure Indigenous students have ongoing access to diverse program offerings as well as opportunities to learn in Indigenous languages at the university level. This can happen by engaging with Indigenous communities and integrating feedback into institutional funding, as well as initiatives aimed toward improving the Indigenous student experience. In addition, the provincial government can make more investments in transportation between post-secondary institutions and First Nations communities. This could be done through modifications to the Ontario Indigenous Travel Grant, which neglects a variety of factors in its calculation including distance and infrastructure barriers, while also excluding students who did not apply or receive OSAP. More information and student concerns about this grant can be found in OUSA's Indigenous Students policy paper.⁴⁵

On campuses across the province, immediate action can be taken toward supporting Indigenous students by encouraging universities to remove statues and memorials of historical figures who were actively involved in colonial practices. The provincial government should encourage post-secondary institutions to consider the long-lasting legacies of controversial historical figures but also the impact of these monuments on the well-being and sense of security for Indigenous students, staff, and community members on campuses. To complement this, the province should provide envelope funding to support the installation of memorials and awards that celebrate Indigenous leaders.

Additionally, the provincial government must develop a provincial advisory committee that would take active measures to ensure Indigenous and non-Indigenous students learn about Indigenous culture, languages, and knowledge systems. The advisory body should be made up of Indigenous students, faculty, and local First Nations representatives from each Ontario university which would allow Indigenous People to directly address their concerns with the provincial government and have an active role in improving university education for Indigenous people. Additionally, the advisory body should work directly with the Ontario Human Rights Commission on the upcoming policy statement directed towards addressing discriminatory names, words, and images in public spaces across the province.⁴⁶ The provincial government and Ontario's universities have an opportunity to take a forefront role in supporting Indigenous students and community members while also actively responding to pre-existing reports and recommendations.

INFRASTRUCTURE TO SUPPORT RURAL AND NORTHERN STUDENTS

Principle: Rural and northern students should have the same level of access to broadband internet, transportation, and university campuses as students living in southern urban areas.

⁴² Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, "What We Have Learned: Principle of Truth and Reconciliation," *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*, 2015, 106, https://ehprnh2mwo3.exactdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Principles_English_Web.pdf

⁴³ Indigenous Services Canada, "Post-Secondary Student Support Program," *Government of Canada*, April 16, 2021, <https://www.sac-isc.gc.ca/eng/1100100033682/1531933580211>

⁴⁴ Ministry of Colleges and Universities, "Major Capacity Expansion Policy Framework," *Government of Ontario*, July 2020.

⁴⁵ Connor Lafortune, Emily DuBois Brooks, and Malek Abou-Rabia, *Policy Paper: Indigenous Students* (Toronto: Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance, 2022)

⁴⁶ Ontario Human Rights Commission, "OHRC engages the public to develop a new policy on the discriminatory display of names, words, and images," *Ontario Human Rights Commission*, September 23, 2021, http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/news_centre/ohrc-engages-public-develop-new-policy-discriminatory-display-names-words-and-images

Concern: Students in rural and northern communities face additional financial barriers to accessing technology, given the increased price of internet in rural and northern communities.

Concern: Private sector internet providers are not effectively incentivized to support access to quality internet service in rural and northern areas.

Concern: Rural and northern students face greater barriers compared to urban students in accessing inter-regional transportation options to their post-secondary institutions and/or experiential learning opportunities.

Recommendation: The provincial government should introduce a Technology Accessibility Grant that is open to rural and/or northern students who require access to technology off-campus.

Recommendation: The provincial government should introduce a Rural and Northern Travel Grant that is open to rural and/or northern OSAP-eligible students, living 40 kilometers or more from the nearest publicly-assisted institution.

Recommendation: The provincial government should engage in strategic partnerships to provide financially accessible, high-speed, and reliable internet to rural and northern communities.

Rural and northern students face unique challenges in the post-secondary sector that often hinders their ability to succeed within these institutions. These challenges are unique to their geographic location and require specific solutions to ensure they are able to have equitable access to a post-secondary education, particularly compared to students living in urban centres.⁴⁷ These challenges often create various financial barriers related to travelling and internet costs. Transportation infrastructure is often less developed between rural and northern locations and the infrastructure lacks in supporting these students attending their closest institution. Relocating to housing near campus along with costs of living away from home has steadily increased over the past seven years. Indicatively, the Consumer Price Index for shelter in Ontario rose 18.6 percent between 2014 and 2020.⁴⁸

Rural and northern students should have the same access to technology and the internet as urban students. Technology and access to adequate internet is crucial in post-secondary education. To compound this issue, the need for adequate internet access has increased during COVID-19. In the 2020-21 school year, all Ontario post-secondary institutions delivered courses remotely, meaning access to the internet and technology became mandatory for post-secondary education. In the 2021-22 school year, many higher education institutions across Ontario remained online for the duration of the year, or have developed a hybrid model. Even so, the majority of in-person post-secondary courses require the internet to complete and submit assignments and course materials. 12 percent of Ontarians live in rural, remote, or northern territories that have no access to internet infrastructure.⁴⁹ In 2016, the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) “declared that broadband Internet amounted to an essential service.”⁵⁰ Despite this claim, 54.4 percent of all Canadians who live in these remote areas do not have access to adequate internet speed, operationalized at 50/10 Mbps.⁵¹ As universities are increasingly relying on the internet as a fundamental component of learning, we must ensure that rural and northern students are not left behind.

⁴⁷ Eric Marr, “Assessing Transportation Disadvantage in Rural Ontario, Canada: A Case Study of Huron County,” *The Journal of Rural and Community Development* 10, no.2 (July 2015): 100-120, <https://journals.brandonu.ca/jrcd/article/view/1171>

⁴⁸ Statistics Canada, “Table 18-10-0005-01 Consumer Price Index, annual average, not seasonally adjusted,” *Government of Canada*, 2021, <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/tables-tableaux/sum-som/101/cst01/econ09g-eng.htm>

⁴⁹ Honourable Laurie Scott, “Up to Speed: Ontario’s Broadband and Cellular Action Plan,” *Government of Ontario*, August 20, 2021, <https://www.ontario.ca/page/speed-ontarios-broadband-and-cellular-action-plan>

⁵⁰ Dan Ruiimy, *Broadband Connectivity in Rural Canada: Overcoming the Digital Divide (Report of the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology)*, 1st sess., 42nd Parliament, April 2018, <https://www.ourcommons.ca/Content/Committee/421/INDU/Reports/RP9711342/indurp11/indurp11-e.pdf>

⁵¹ Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission, “Broadband fund: Closing the digital divide in Canada,” *Government of Canada*, August 4, 2021, <https://crtc.gc.ca/eng/internet/internet.htm>

The provincial government should commit to an action plan that prioritizes high-speed internet and further develops infrastructure to ensure equitable access for rural and northern students. While the federal government has committed to investments in technology access alongside the provincial government, partnerships with large corporations must be prioritized.⁵² Currently, a limited number of corporations are offering services in rural and northern areas, due to lack of incentivization. A 2019 CRTC report saw 12 to 13 internet providers servicing urban centres in Ontario, versus just two to five providers for rural areas, who deliver 50/10 Mbps.⁵³ The provincial government should partner with these corporations, and provide tax based incentives in order to increase access to technology in these areas. Furthermore, internet access in these rural and northern areas tends to have a higher cost. For the former basic standard internet speed, 5/1 Mbps, the highest reported price in urban Ontario centres was \$70 per month while this increased to \$90 per month for rural Ontario.⁵⁴ This poses a financial barrier making internet access inaccessible for these students. To ensure this does not hinder students, the provincial government should create a Technology Accessibility Grant that provides compensation to access internet and technology to those that face additional barriers in rural and northern areas.

Prior to funding changes in 2017, OSAP offered a grant for students who commuted to school from remote and rural areas. The Ontario Distance Grant awarded eligible students living more than 80km away from the nearest publicly-assisted institution a maximum of \$300 per academic year.⁵⁵ However, the 2017 OSAP changes eliminated this grant and consolidated all OSAP grants into the Ontario Student Grants (OSG). In the new model, funding was calculated by assessing distance-related costs as a part of the new grant calculation. Despite this change, students had no transparency into how this funding was calculated and the impact on overall funding. This funding changed again in 2019, at which time the funding became more unclear, and no transparency was given into how (or if) distance-related costs were factored into grants. At this time, the OSG decreased for all students indicating a loss in funding or distance-related costs.

The current model lacks transparency and adequate funding for rural and northern students. A new grant should be created that is modeled after the pre-2017 Ontario Distance Grant. Despite the limitations and issues with this grant, the latter grant has complicated issues around transparency. This new grant should be renamed the Rural and Northern Travel Grant. The grant should be expanded to include explicit requirements and award amounts, and should be accessible to students living more than 40km from their publicly-assisted institution of choice. The expansion of eligibility ensures that those facing transportation barriers are able to attend post-secondary without financial barriers. Furthermore, the grant should consider access to transportation given the lack of transportation infrastructure that exists in rural and northern communities.⁵⁶ The \$300 cap per academic year should also be removed, to ensure that all transportation needs are considered and adequately supported.

INFRASTRUCTURE TO SUPPORT FRANCOPHONE STUDENTS

Principle: Francophone students have the right to engage and participate in their chosen program instructed in the French language and benefit from a diverse post-secondary education sector in Ontario.

Principle: Francophone students should have access to programs instructed in French across Ontario's numerous post-secondary institutions.

Concern: Institutions and programs that offer programs in the French language have not been protected in recent years, and their longevity has not been prioritized by the provincial government.

⁵² Government of Ontario, "Nearly 280,000 Ontario residents to benefit from historic agreement to improve access to high-speed internet," *Ontario Newsroom*, July 29, 2021. <https://news.ontario.ca/en/release/1000626/nearly-280000-ontario-residents-to-benefit-from-historic-agreement-to-improve-access-to-high-speed-internet>

⁵³ Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission, *Communications Monitoring Report 2019*, (Ottawa, ON: Government of Canada, 2020), <https://crtc.gc.ca/pubs/cm2019-en.pdf>

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development, "Ontario Distance Grant," *Government of Ontario*, 2014, <http://chc.wrdsb.ca/files/2014/12/11-OntarioDistanceGrant.pdf>

⁵⁶ Government of Ontario, "FAQs About the New Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP) 2018-2019," *Government of Ontario*, 2017, https://www.uottawa.ca/financial-aid-awards/sites/www.uottawa.ca.financial-aid-awards/files/osap_faq_en_2018.pdf

Concern: Francophone students have very limited options for learning in French and must choose between relocating and learning in another language.

Concern: Post-secondary institutions that offer programs in the French language do not offer a wide-array of diverse courses.

Recommendation: The provincial government should invest in existing programs offered in the French language across all disciplines at Ontario universities in all regions to ensure a wide array of course and program offerings in the French language.

Recommendation: The provincial government should work directly with universities offering programs in the French language to ensure solvency and ongoing financial support for post-secondary institutions that have French language programs and Francophone students have access to diverse programs in the French language.

Recommendation: The provincial government should provide funding to Ontario post-secondary institutions to recruit instructors for French programs to promote the expansion and accessibility of French language programs.

Francophone students are another group of students that are heavily influenced by lack of infrastructure and diversification within the Ontario post-secondary education sector. With the majority of universities in Ontario operating solely in English, Francophone students have limited options when it comes to choosing both a program and a university. Among public universities in Ontario, only L'Université de Hearst and L'Université de l'Ontario français operate fully in French whereas the University of Ottawa and Laurentian University are bilingual and York University less so.⁵⁷ With Laurentian University axing multiple programs due to their 2021 declaration of insolvency, the percentage of post-secondary institutions that offer some degree of French programming is at risk of going below 25 percent. Laurentian is also no longer able to play a vital role in offering French programs to northern Francophone students.⁵⁸ Students who wish to learn in French are now forced to travel significantly farther to cities in southern Ontario. L'Université de l'Ontario français is located in downtown Toronto, whereas L'Université de Hearst has campuses in Timmins, Kapuskasing, and Hearst, which are located between Timmins and Thunder Bay.⁵⁹ The region surrounding the three campuses is densely populated with 25-50 percent of people reporting French as their first official language.⁶⁰ According to Ontario's Ministry of Francophone Affairs, the population of people who report French as their first official language has grown since 2011 which indicates a need for post-secondary institutions to offer programs in French.⁶¹ The provincial government should take an active role in preserving the French language in Ontario by funding programs offered in French and incentivising diverse program offerings. This also includes funding for the recruitment of instructors for French programs, which would promote the expansion and accessibility of French language programs. While the *Major Capacity Expansion Policy Framework* encourages institutions to submit proposals that would diversify academic program offerings, this is directly targeted towards programs that would support anticipated labour market and economic needs through experiential and work-integrated learning (WIL).⁶² This focus may neglect the infrastructure and academic needs of Francophone students.

The lack of diverse programs offered in French creates unnecessary barriers to post-secondary education for Francophone students and the province has failed to step in and provide support for institutions that

⁵⁷ Ministry of Colleges and Universities, "French-language colleges and universities," *Government of Ontario*, 2021 <https://www.ontario.ca/page/french-language-colleges-and-universities>

⁵⁸ Laurentian University, "Laurentian University Academic Senate Votes to Approve Certain Program Closures," *Laurentian University*, June 1, 2021, <https://www.laurentianu.info/program-closures/>

⁵⁹ Université de Hearst, "About l'Universite de Hearst," *Université de Hearst*, 2014. <http://www.uhearst.ca/>

⁶⁰ Alejandro A. Páez Silva, "The French Language in Ontario, 2001-2016: Facts and Figures," *Statistics Canada*, October 16, 2019, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/89-657-x/89-657-x2019012-eng.htm>

⁶¹ Ministry of Francophone Affairs, "Profile of the Francophone population Ontario - 2016," *Government of Ontario*, July 29, 2021. <https://www.ontario.ca/page/profile-francophone-population-ontario-2016>

⁶² Ministry of Colleges and Universities, "Major Capacity Expansion Policy Framework."

cater to Francophone students. For example, over the past several years there were many signs that indicated Laurentian's troubling financial trajectory Laurentian which included declining enrolment numbers and minimal job prospects in northern Ontario;⁶³ despite these indications of impending financial peril, little was done to support the institution and had to resort to program and staffing cuts. Without Laurentian University operating at the same capacity, there is no longer a bilingual midwifery program in northern Ontario, and this funding is being reallocated to McMaster University and X University's⁶⁴ programs that are offered solely in English.⁶⁵ Additionally, Laurentian University discontinued 24 French undergraduate programs while also dissolving the federated universities agreement which ended another two programs.⁶⁶ Although the Laurentian University Senate discontinued 58 undergraduate and 11 graduate programs for historically low enrolment, the decision is significantly more impactful for Francophone students living in northern Ontario. Going forward, the provincial government should work directly with Ontario universities to ensure the province's limited French programs are protected from insolvency by providing ongoing financial support.

DEFERRED CAMPUS MAINTENANCE AND REPAIR

Principle: Physical spaces on university campuses should ensure an accessible and safe space for all students, including, but not limited to those with disabilities, and respiratory conditions.

Concern: There is a significant backlog of maintenance requests across post-secondary campuses, resulting in inaccessible and unsafe learning spaces.

Concern: Currently, no standardized post-secondary *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* education policy is in place to ensure standards for physical spaces on post-secondary campuses.

Recommendation: The provincial government should provide envelope funding to universities' deferred maintenance budgets for the implementation of repairs and enhancements to all campus spaces to increase the overall accessibility of campus for students with disabilities.

Recommendation: The provincial government should work with institutions to ensure accessibility and safety standards are maintained such as the standards outlined in the current *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act*.

Students attending post-secondary education deserve to have safe and accessible spaces within all areas of campus. According to the Facility Condition Index, almost half of the total space on Ontario's university campuses have been deemed in "poor condition."⁶⁷ In 2021, Canadian universities had a drastic backlog of deferred maintenance, totaling over \$17 billion in repairs.⁶⁸ This cost has grown 30 percent over the past seven years, exacerbated by provincial funding cuts to operating budgets.⁶⁹ Within Ontario itself, it is estimated that universities require an annual investment of \$420 million to maintain current building standards,⁷⁰ and concerningly, there is about a \$4.6 billion backlog in maintenance and repairs.⁷¹

⁶³ David Leadbeater, "Laurentian University insolvency reflects a structural crisis in Ontario's neoliberal university system," *Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives*, June 10, 2021, <https://monitormag.ca/articles/laurentian-university-insolvency-reflects-a-structural-crisis-in-ontarios-neoliberal-university-system>

⁶⁴ For context on the use of X University instead of what is formerly known as Ryerson University: <https://yellowheadinstitute.org/2021/05/11/welcome-to-x-university-an-open-letter-to-the-community-from-indigenous-students/>

⁶⁵ CBC News, "Province says it will support midwifery students impacted by Laurentian cuts," *CBC News*, April 30, 2021. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/sudbury/ross-romano-laurentian-midwifery-program-samantha-smith-bird-1.6009575>

⁶⁶ Laurentian University, "Laurentian University Academic Senate Votes to Approve Certain Program Closures," *Laurentian University*, June 1, 2021, <https://www.laurentianu.info/program-closures/>

⁶⁷ Council of Ontario Universities, "Partnering to Support Ontario's Recovery: 2020-21 Pre Budget Submission to Ontario Government," 2020, <https://ontariosuniversities.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/COU-Pre-Budget-2020-21.pdf>

⁶⁸ Nathan M. Greenfield, "Universities start year with massive maintenance backlog," *University World News*, January 9, 2021, <https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20210108142956914>

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Council of Ontario Universities, "Partnering to Support Ontario's Recovery: 2020-21 Pre Budget Submission to Ontario Government."

⁷¹ Ibid.

Specifically, universities account for 75 percent of the backlog within the sector, but disproportionately receive only 56 percent of total funding.⁷²

The urgency to address the backlog of deferred institutional maintenance stems from arising problems in buildings constructed during the university rapid expansion period between the 1960's to 1975; they are approaching the end of their typical lifespan due to quick and poor construction quality at the time, with the average age of buildings among Ontario's universities to be 44 years old.⁷³ These deferred maintenance repairs are not only detrimental to overall learning experience at the institution, but also pose potential barriers towards access for students with disabilities and students with respiratory concerns from poor ventilation.

OUSA is committed to ensuring that post-secondary campuses are accessible for all students. To circumvent these concerns, OUSA recommends that the provincial government prioritize envelope funding to ensure that these maintenance repairs can occur in a timely manner and ensure that all buildings on Ontario campuses are accessible for all. Additionally, OUSA recommends that the provincial government work with post-secondary institutions to ensure accessibility and safety standards are maintained according to those set out by the AODA.

SATELLITE CAMPUS INFRASTRUCTURE

Principle: On-campus culturally-cognizant academic, health, and support resources are key to providing an equitable and accessible post-secondary experience for students, and should be accessible to all students regardless of campus.

Principle: Students should have adequate access to safe, affordable, and accessible transportation in the area of their campus of choice.

Principle: Students' contributions to the services available on campus through ancillary fees should be reflected on their home campus.

Principle: Students should feel confident that programs and offerings from satellite campuses are high quality and on par with main campus standards.

Principle: Satellite campuses should be held to the same standard of accessibility to physical spaces as a university's main campus.

Concern: High quality services and supports are not readily and equally available across institution's primary campuses and satellite campuses.

Concern: The ancillary fees paid by students on satellite campuses are not reflected in the quality of services available on their home campus.

Concern: Commuting to distant university campuses or moving entirely can be inaccessible for post-secondary students who require accommodations not limited but including financial, accessibility, and other needs.

Concern: Most post-secondary students do not have access to private transportation for reasons including, but not limited to, parking availability and accessibility, maintenance and insurance costs, and environmental concerns, which leaves post-secondary students particularly reliant on public transport systems.

Concern: Due to their housing a proportionally smaller population of students, areas that satellite campuses are located in may not be served adequately by safe, affordable, and accessible public transport.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid; Greenfield, "Universities start year with massive maintenance backlog."

Concern: Satellite campuses are often not located in accessible areas for students living in rural and/or northern areas, and lack proper infrastructure to support their students.

Concern: At times, satellite campuses may have a lower priority than main campuses when considering infrastructure improvements that would increase quality and accessibility of programs and offerings.

Recommendation: The provincial government should include a metric in Strategic Mandate Agreements that addresses how institutions will develop and sustain equitable infrastructure for satellite campuses.

Recommendation: The provincial government should encourage post-secondary institutions to prioritize satellite campus infrastructure to the same quality as main campuses.

Recommendation: The provincial government should commit funds towards the expansion of post-secondary access to growing communities through means, including but not limited to, the creation of satellite campuses.

Recommendation: The provincial government should commission the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario to evaluate the efficacy of satellite campuses as a strategy for improving access to post-secondary education for populations in rural and northern communities.

Recommendation: The Ministry of Colleges and Universities should work with the Ministry of Transportation to prioritize underserved satellite campus communities when distributing funding through the Community Transportation Grant Program.

Recommendation: The provincial government should invest in rapid transit projects in municipalities with post-secondary institutions, especially currently underserved satellite campuses.

Recommendation: The provincial government should make additional funding available to post-secondary institutions for projects and initiatives that address existing quality disparities in services, programs, and offerings between campuses.

Recommendation: The provincial government should mandate consultations with various stakeholders, including current and prospective students, when creating new satellite campuses through advisory bodies.

Recommendation: The provincial government should make additional funding available to post-secondary institutions for projects and initiatives that address existing disparities pertaining to accessibility of physical spaces on satellite campuses.

Universities and their campuses tend to vary across Ontario, however post-secondary students should not have to sacrifice access to diverse programs and high quality education because of inequitable campus resources. Although universities tend to allocate services based on funding and campus population, students paying equal fees should have the ability to access equal services regardless of whether they attend the primary or satellite campus. As noted in research by Olds, Keil, and Addie, although satellite campuses have the potential to improve accessibility and add value to smaller communities, a satellite campus does not always offer vital services like “student unions, athletic facilities, [and] libraries.”⁷⁴ When students are unable to utilize resources because of their campus location, accessibility concerns and barriers to education become prominent and the sustainability of the post-secondary sector is compromised. To address this, the province of Ontario should expand the Strategic Mandate Agreement (SMA) criteria to encourage universities to invest in equitable infrastructure with the same level of quality across all their campuses. Although infrastructure needs vary across student populations, provincial

⁷⁴ Jean-Paul D. Addie, Roger Keil, and Kris Olds. “Beyond Town and Gown: Universities, Territoriality and the Mobilization of New Urban Structures in Canada,” *Territory, Politics, Governance* 3, no.1 (2015): 27-50, doi: 10.1080/21622671.2014.924875

funding should be used to make improvements in transit through municipal transportation methods like buses and light rail trains but also towards inter-city travel for students who commute. In communities where satellite campuses are located, access to reliable and safe public transportation may not be as prominent, which may not be bothersome to the higher proportion of non-student residents living in that area who would have access to private transportation. For example, in the past two decades York University has acted as a “major regional ‘mobility hub’” within Toronto, and across Ontario as both bus and subway connections allow for students and members of the community to engage with existing infrastructure to improve the efficiency of transit.⁷⁵ The importance of supporting people already living in one place by investing in infrastructure like satellite campuses and transportation are noted by Olds, Keil, and Addie as 80 percent of Canada’s population are urbanized.⁷⁶ This is where gaps in the *Major Capacity Expansion Policy Framework* lie, as the government seeks to evaluate project proposals based on a set of criteria including enrolment growth and local labour market needs, as prioritized in the current SMA (to be explained a following section)⁷⁷ – this focus on community impact risks neglecting the needs of students currently enrolled at a satellite campus. The framework does offer support for projects aiming to increase ancillary support and services, but the narrative throughout the sector on investing in projects that result in local economic benefits may de-prioritize projects that work to offer support to current students at satellite campuses.

One way to address the needs of satellite campuses is through the Ministry of Colleges and Universities (MCU) working with the Ministry of Transportation to prioritize underserved satellite campus communities through the disbursement of funding via the Community Transportation Grant Program. In the summer of 2021, the Ministry of Transportation extended funding through this program by providing an extra \$14 million to 38 communities⁷⁸ – collaborating with the MCU can ensure that the needs of satellite campuses within these communities are adequately considered. Additionally, wellness resources like medical centers, fitness facilities, and counselling services should be included within universities investments to improve equitable resources and address existing quality and accessibility disparities in services, programs, offerings, and physical spaces between campuses. Lastly, infrastructure to support academics like libraries, the development of Open Education Resources, and study spaces should be reflected in the expansion of Ontario’s SMAs to ensure all students are able to access services but also to reflect investment in their own education through tuition and ancillary fees. It would also be important for the province to commission HEQCO to evaluate the efficacy of satellite campuses in improving post-secondary access in rural and northern communities.

The construction of satellite campuses across Ontario provides the possibility for post-secondary students to pursue educational opportunities from numerous institutions. The expansion of universities to new communities supports differentiation within the post-secondary industry by providing more space for innovative programs, higher enrolment, and increased institutional collaboration. Although *Ontario’s Differentiation Policy Framework for Postsecondary Education* was released in 2013, the publication outlines the importance of components like those aforementioned as well as jobs, teaching and learning, and research opportunities.⁷⁹ Similar sentiments are echoed in Rossi and Goglio’s 2020 article, *Satellite University Campuses and Economic Development In Peripheral Regions*, with an added emphasis on the benefits for both the community and local students.⁸⁰ As the number of satellite campuses increases, the provincial government should encourage the development of campuses within growing communities across Ontario, and mandate consultations with various stakeholders, including students, through advisory bodies to collect insights and recommendations on making sufficient satellite campuses that meet student needs. Although the provincial government has agreed to support Wilfrid Laurier University’s expansion in Milton through funding for the campus’s operations after it welcomes students in 2024, there is a need for funding prior to operation. By supporting the planning and construction of

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ministry of Colleges and Universities, “Major Capacity Expansion Policy Framework.”

⁷⁸ Ministry of Transportation, “Community Transportation Grant Program Recipients and Services,” *Ontario Newsroom*, June 28, 2021, <https://news.ontario.ca/en/backgrounder/1000417/community-transportation-grant-program-recipients-and-services>

⁷⁹ Ministry of Colleges and Universities, “Ontario’s Differentiation Policy Framework for Postsecondary Education,” *Government of Ontario*, 2013, http://www.tcu.gov.on.ca/pepg/publications/PolicyFramework_PostSec.pdf

⁸⁰ Federica Rossi and Valentina Goglio, “Satellite university campuses and economic development in peripheral regions,” *Studies in Higher Education* 45, no.1 (2020): 34-54. doi: 10.1080/03075079.2018.1506917

satellite campuses across Ontario, the province and post-secondary institutes contribute to the diversification of the industry as well as its long-term success.

INTEGRATING MINISTRY OF COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES FRAMEWORKS

Principle: The provincial government must be both transparent and accountable to students through the use of various frameworks created to provide guidance for funding and institutional growth.

Principle: Provincial funding frameworks should work together to support the growth of schools as well student services, and the post-secondary industry as a whole.

Concern: The province's institutional funding framework, tuition framework, and student financial aid framework are utilized separately in an incohesive manner.

Recommendation: The provincial government should review the current frameworks through an advisory body with representation from students, university administrators, and industry professionals to draft a new encompassing framework.

Recommendation: The provincial government should develop clear guidelines stating deadlines for each framework and promote them in an accessible format that's available to students.

The Ministry of Colleges and Universities is responsible for updating the institutional funding, tuition, and student financial aid frameworks for Ontario, yet each is distinct from the others. The institutional funding framework outlines the annual support provided for each institution from the provincial government through Strategic Mandate Agreements (SMAs) which are based on 10 metrics. Similarly, the tuition framework fees framework and ancillary guidelines determine annual increases in tuition, however for the 2019-20 and 2020-21 academic years, the provincial government established a fee reduction followed by a tuition freeze.⁸¹ Distinct from both of the previous, OSAP and the Student Access Guarantee (SAG) work to provide grants and loans to students on a needs basis. The three framework models function distinctly from one another however with multiple models, government transparency and student's understanding of the frameworks is lacking.

A clear example of this is the discrepancy between OSAP, SAG, and Ministry deadlines - the deadline for students to submit an OSAP application is 60 days before the end of their study period.⁸² However, to be eligible for SAG funding, students are required to submit their OSAP application 30 days before their program's SAG payment deadline - the latest date for institutions to release SAG funding (according to Ministry guidelines) is the middle of the second month of the second term.⁸³ This means that students who apply for OSAP during a certain time period (between the 30 day and 60 day deadlines for SAG and OSAP, respectively) will not be eligible to receive SAG funding, despite the fact that this money is allocated for all students to increase post-secondary access. Many students are not even aware about SAG funding and thus, may not realize they are losing additional financial assistance by applying for OSAP at a later date. In October of 2021, the provincial government noted their intention to improve transparency in the tuition model as just one way to remove barriers and cut red tape; however a clear plan has yet to be developed.⁸⁴ The three frameworks should be working with students, university administration, and stakeholders to support students as efficiently as possible while also reflecting the changing post-secondary environment. With student and community needs shifting throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, there is an even greater incentive for the Ministry of Colleges and Universities to develop an

⁸¹ Ministry of Colleges and Universities, "Tuition Fee Framework and Ancillary Fees Guidelines," *Government of Ontario*, 2019, 6, <http://www.tcu.gov.on.ca/pepg/mteu-university-tuition-framework-guidelines-mar2019-en.pdf>

⁸² Ministry of Colleges and Universities, "How to apply for OSAP," *Government of Ontario*, August 26, 2021, <https://www.ontario.ca/page/how-apply-osap>

⁸³ Ministry of Colleges and Universities, "Student Access Guarantee Policy Manual 2020-2021," *Government of Ontario*, July 2020 (unpublished).

⁸⁴ Government of Ontario, "Ontario Removing Barriers to Support People and Businesses," *Ontario Newsroom*, October 7, 2021, <https://news.ontario.ca/en/backgrounder/1000937/ontario-removing-barriers-to-support-people-and-businesses>

advisory body to review and consult with the relevant people to draft a new funding model that can amalgamate the three current systems. Until this can be accomplished, the provincial government should develop clear guidelines for each framework and promote them in an accessible format that is available to students. This would help clarify their understanding of how the financial aid timelines work with one another, and make the government and institutions more accountable in the accurate disbursement of financial aid according to these deadlines.

FUNDING MODELS

SHARED RESPONSIBILITY FOR UNIVERSITY OPERATIONAL FUNDING

Principle: Students should be aware of how tuition and ancillary fees are allocated in their university budgets.

Principle: Undergraduate students are the largest stakeholder in higher education and should be represented in institutional budgeting.

Principle: Operational funding should adequately support needs of students through a combination of performance-based and enrolment-based funding metrics.

Principle: Post-secondary education is a public good in Ontario.

Principle: Ontario university budgets should be funded through contributions from the provincial government, federal government, and student tuition, with students contributing no more than one-third of university operating budgets.

Concern: Students at some universities across Ontario do not have transparency into how their tuition and ancillary fees are allocated in their university budget.

Concern: The cost of higher education has increased disproportionately to public funding, making higher education financially inaccessible.

Concern: Since 2011, tuition fees have accounted for over 50 percent of universities' operating budgets, and student contributions have continued to increasingly outpace government contributions each year.

Concern: Currently, per-student funding does not increase with inflation each year, resulting in students contributing disproportionately more to their higher education than public funding.

Concern: Due to inadequate government funding, institutions in Ontario rely on increasing international tuition, ancillary fees, and revenue-generating campus services to supplement operating budgets.

Recommendation: The provincial government should work in conjunction with the Council of Ontario Universities to create policies that mandate universities communicate detailed tuition breakdowns to their students once per academic term.

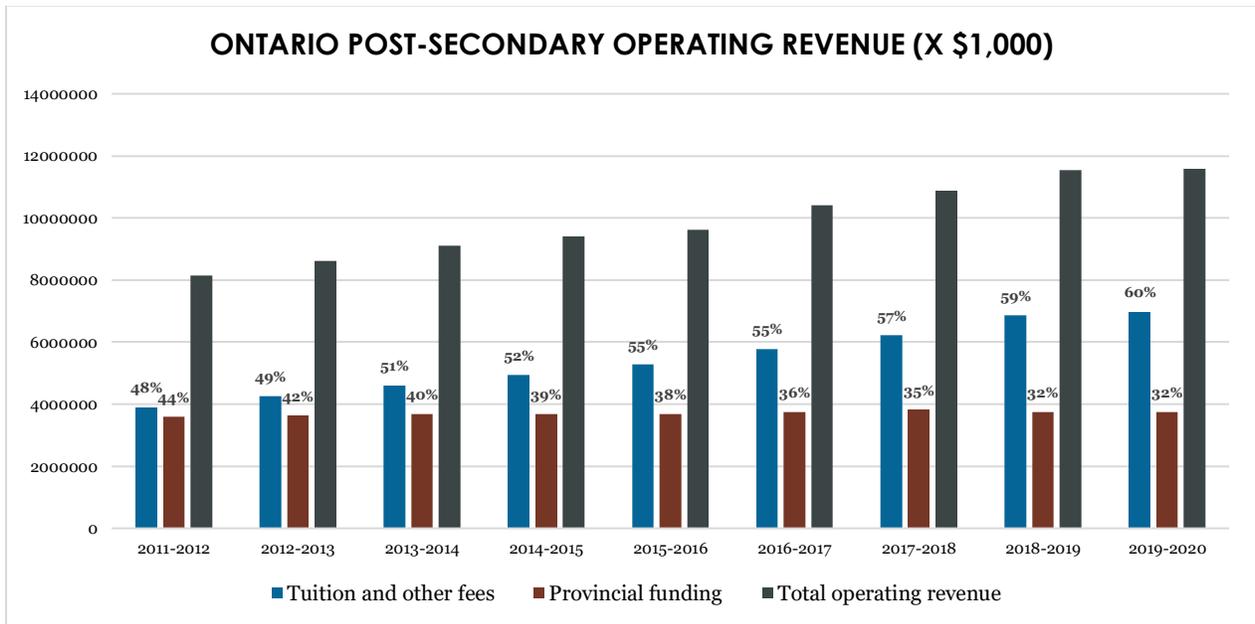
Recommendation: The provincial government should work in conjunction with the Council of Ontario Universities to create policies that mandate student involvement in budget planning.

Recommendation: The provincial government should increase operating grants until students are contributing at most/a maximum of one-third of universities' total operating budget.

Recommendation: The provincial government should index base operating grants to national inflation each year.

An underlying premise of Ontario’s public post-secondary system has long been that it is jointly funded by government and by students. Students across Ontario require transparency into the funding behind post-secondary education to ensure that contribution from all parties is both fair and efficient. The current structure lacks transparency and is financially unsustainable in the long-term. The current system has failed to maintain its financial feasibility, by depending heavily on both domestic and international tuition, ancillary fees, and revenue-generating campus services. Furthermore, students should have knowledge and transparency in to where their tuition and student fees are allocated. The ancillary fee structure is complex and differentiated across various institutions, with most of the student population unaware of how their fees are used. The Council of Ontario Universities (COU) should work to ensure that university funding formulas, ancillary fees, and fee breakdowns are communicated clearly for all students and are in an accessible and open format. The province should also work with the COU to mandate student involvement in budget planning. This would promote and ensure transparency and accountability into the provincial government’s role in post-secondary funding.

While the operational funding model used to have fair contributions from the government and students, student contributions surpassed that of the government in 2011, and this gap has continued to increase each year.⁸⁵ The province has made it evident that it’s financial situation will no longer accommodate substantial annual grant increases to institutions. These developments have shifted the Ontario university sector from being publicly-funded to merely being publicly-assisted. Students believe that their tuition should not be contributing more than one-third of revenue towards operational budgets,⁸⁶ yet in the 2019-2020 academic year, tuition comprised 60 percent of operational revenue compared to 32 percent from provincial grants.⁸⁷



The provincial government should adjust their funding model to ensure that students are contributing, at most, one-third of the universities’ total operating budget, as this poses concerns around financial accessibility for students. Currently, per-student funding does not increase with inflation each year,

⁸⁵ Council of Ontario Finance Officers, “Financial Report of Ontario Universities 2015-2016 Highlights,” *Council of Ontario Universities*, 5.

⁸⁶ This figure was determined by students based on unpublished data from OUSA’s 2017 Ontario Post-Secondary Student Survey. To read more about this, please see: Stephanie Bertolo, Danny Chang, Catherine Dunne, Matthew Gerrits, and Urszula Sitarz. *Policy Paper: Tuition*. Toronto: Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance, 2018.

⁸⁷ Statistics Canada, “Table 37-10-0026-01 Revenues of universities and degree-granting colleges (x 1,000),” *Statistics Canada*, July 29, 2021, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=3710002601>

resulting in students contributing disproportionately more to their higher education than public funding. To that end, OUSA also recommends that the provincial government index base operating grants to national inflation each year.

STRATEGIC MANDATE AGREEMENTS

Introduced in 2014, SMAs are an accountability mechanism implemented by the provincial government to facilitate and increase transparency on how funding is being used by post-secondary institutions, and to highlight institutional priorities. The first iteration of SMAs were in place between 2014-17 and the second iteration between 2017-20. These two phases allocated institutional operational funding mostly based on enrolment.

In 2019, the Ontario government announced that 60 percent of higher education funding from SMAs would be determined based on ten performance-based metrics during their third iteration (SMA3) from 2020-25.⁸⁸ These metrics include:

1. Graduate employment earnings
2. Experiential learning
3. Skills and competencies
4. Graduate employment rate in a related field
5. Institutional strength/focus
6. Graduation rate
7. Research funding and capacity
8. Research funding from industry sources
9. Community/local impact of student population
10. Economic impact⁸⁹

Institutions must allocate funding weights for each metric; the range of weights is set to fluctuate over the course of three years, but stretches from a minimum of five percent to a maximum of 35 percent, and the total of all weights across the 10 metrics must equal 100 percent.⁹⁰

The following subsections will highlight student concerns within the context of SMA3 and the substantial changes made to it from previous iterations.

RE-EVALUATING PERFORMANCE-BASED FUNDING MODEL AND ITS DEVELOPMENT

Principle: The criteria which determines funding for post-secondary programs should be fair to all students and programs.

Principle: Strategic Mandate Agreements should utilize criteria that are proven to improve student success both during their time in school and after graduation.

Principle: Students should be consulted and included in deliberations about performance-based funding metrics within Strategic Mandate Agreements.

Principle: The provincial government's shift to rely on performance-based funding within Strategic Mandate Agreements should be based on proven success over a long period of time.

⁸⁸ Spooner, Mark. "Performance-based funding in Higher Education," *Education Review*. October 2019.

https://www.caut.ca/sites/default/files/caut-education-review-performance-based_funding_in_higher_education.pdf

⁸⁹ Ministry of Colleges and Universities, "College and university Strategic Mandate Agreements," *Government of Ontario*, 2021, <https://www.ontario.ca/page/all-college-and-university-strategic-mandate-agreements>

⁹⁰ Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, "Ontario's Postsecondary Education System: Performance/Outcomes Based Funding – Technical Manual," *Government of Ontario*, September 2019, https://www.uwindsor.ca/strategic-mandate-agreement/sites/uwindsor.ca/strategic-mandate-agreement/files/performance_outcomes-based_funding_technical_manual_-_v1.0_-_final_september_419_en_0.pdf

Principle: Post-secondary education is a public good in Ontario.

Concern: The provincial government’s proposal to increase weighting of performance-based funding within the Strategic Mandate Agreements from 1.6 percent in 2019 to 60 percent by 2025 is a stark change and relies too heavily on these metrics.

Concern: The Ministry of Colleges and Universities has not consulted with post-secondary students on the impact of performance-based funding criteria on student’s experience and expectations.

Concern: As it stands, there is no opportunity for students to provide feedback to the province on problems, highlights, or questions about the current performance-based funding criteria with the Strategic Mandate Agreements.

Concern: Performance-based funding models may put equity-deserving students at a disadvantage.

Concern: The current performance-based funding model, through a dramatic increase in the proportion of performance-based funding, fails to effectively treat universities like a public good and ignores the positive societal externalities that would be lost through unnecessarily decreased funding.

Recommendation: The provincial government should measure the success of performance-based funding within Strategic Mandate Agreements by developing advisory bodies with university administration, students, graduates, and industry professionals.

Recommendation: The Ministry of Colleges and Universities should decrease the annual weight increase of performance-based funding within Strategic Mandate Agreements to between 5 and 8 percent annually rather than 10 percent.

Recommendation: The provincial government should balance the post-secondary funding model more evenly between the Strategic Mandate Agreements envelope, enrolment envelope, and special purpose grants to ensure student concerns are incorporated and institutions are accountable to student needs.

Recommendation: The provincial government should conduct appropriate consultations with students from equity-deserving groups to ensure their needs are met under a performance-based funding model.

Recommendation: The provincial government should measure representation of equity-deserving groups in student and faculty bodies, as well as their success rates (i.e., sense of belonging, faculty and staff duration and tenure rates, etc.) and representation in course syllabi, at post-secondary institutions as a performance indicator.

Recommendation: The provincial government should add a bargaining mechanism to the core of the Strategic Mandate Agreement system that would allow and encourage universities to propose innovative changes to their operations while adapting their Strategic Mandate Agreements to judge performance, and thus calculate performance-based funding, more appropriately.

Performance-based funding (PBF) has been introduced in some post-secondary sectors around the world, with varying degrees of success. In the United States, there was no indication to suggest that PBF increased the number of degrees awarded, however its usefulness was evident for policies that targeted STEM growth.⁹¹ Additionally, results from PBF use in the United States has shown that this funding model is not likely to produce intended outcomes given its minimal impact on government funding.⁹² PBF is a model being slowly discussed and introduced in provinces around the country, and the outcomes of it

⁹¹ Justin C. Ortagus, Robert Kelchen, Kelly Rosinger, and Nicholas Voorhees, “Performance-based Funding in American Higher Education: A Systemic Synthesis of the Intended and Unintended Consequences,” *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 42, no.4 (2020): 520-550, doi: 10.3102/0162373720953128

⁹² Alex Usher, “Funding for Results in Higher Education,” *C.D. Howe Institute*, September 17, 2019, https://www.cdhowe.org/sites/default/files/attachments/research_papers/mixed/e-brief_295.pdf

within the Ontario context must be closely examined to finalize whether or not it is an appropriate funding model going forward. This is why OUSA recommends that the success of PBF in SMAs should be measured by developing advisory bodies.

As it stands, PBF in Ontario's post-secondary sector will be gradually introduced; 25 percent of funding was tied to PBF in 2020-21 and this weight is slated to increase by 10 percent in subsequent years until 2024, where a 5 percent increase into 2025 will take the final PBF weight to 60 percent through the SMAs.⁹³ OUSA believes that raising the PBF weight by 10 percent annually is a stark change given the unknown effects of PBF in Ontario and considering that prior to its introduction in the current iteration of SMAs, PBF was only tied to 1.4 percent of university funding.⁹⁴ More time is needed to roll out PBF as the government, industry professionals, university administrators, faculty, and students learn about its effects. To do this, the provincial government should decrease the annual changes from 10 percent to between five to eight percent.

PBF is just one of the streams of funding under the larger umbrella of the post-secondary funding model. This larger model is comprised of three streams: the differentiation envelope (where PBF sits), the enrolment envelope, and the special purpose grants. Currently, the provincial government has planned that by 2024-25 the differentiation envelope will make up 60 percent of university funding, the enrolment envelope will make up 33 percent, and special purpose grants will make up seven percent.⁹⁵ This disproportionate allocation of funding between the three streams is a cause for concern for students due to the areas of post-secondary that each stream targets. For example, the special purpose grants aim to provide funding that helps institutions reach their goals related to "mental health, French-language supports, and institutional sustainability..."⁹⁶ As highlighted earlier in this paper and in other OUSA policies, these are areas that students would like to see increased funding towards as they directly support the accessibility and quality of the post-secondary experience. Thus, the provincial government should balance the distribution of funding more evenly between the three streams, to ensure that student concerns are incorporated and institutions are accountable to student needs.

The metrics proposed related to job market outcomes are a cause for concern in the case of equity-deserving students, as students from these groups face systemic oppression in employment.⁹⁷ Research from the United States has indicated that the challenges experienced by equity-deserving groups post-graduation has influenced institutions, who operate on PBF, to be more selective in who they admit, focusing on those who are more likely to graduate "on time," and this has worsened funding disparities between institutions.⁹⁸ According to a report from the Social Research and Demonstration Corporation, individuals from equity-deserving groups can face discrimination in hiring practices, and can also earn less than their colleagues in similar positions as a result of the prejudice present in Canadian society.⁹⁹ Therefore, the needs of individuals from equity-deserving groups need to be taken into consideration so that metrics like graduate earnings and the proportion of graduates employed in full-time positions related to their degrees do not pose a bias against individuals from equity-deserving groups. In addition, students from equity-deserving groups have lower graduation rates compared to the student body as a result of systemic oppression in the education system according to data from HEQCO and Statistics Canada.¹⁰⁰ Access to post-secondary for equity-deserving groups continues to be limited, it is important that students from these groups are equitably supported to enter, remain, and graduate from post-

⁹³ Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, "Ontario's Postsecondary Education System: Performance/Outcomes Based Funding – Technical Manual."

⁹⁴ "College and university Strategic Mandate Agreements," *Government of Ontario*, October 26, 2021, <https://www.ontario.ca/page/all-college-and-university-strategic-mandate-agreements>

⁹⁵ Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, "Ontario's Postsecondary Education System: Performance/Outcomes Based Funding – Technical Manual."

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Social Research and Demonstration Corporation. "Barriers to employment and training for equity-seeking groups," May 2021. <https://www.srdc.org/media/553157/training-barriers-for-equity-seeking-groups-final-report.pdf>

⁹⁸ Justin C. Ortagus, Robert Kelchen, Kelly Rosinger, and Nicholas Voorhees, "Performance-based Funding in American Higher Education: A Systemic Synthesis of the Intended and Unintended Consequences," *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 42, no.4 (2020): 520-550, doi: 10.3102/0162373720953128

⁹⁹ Social Research and Demonstration Corporation. "Barriers to employment and training for equity-seeking groups."

¹⁰⁰ Chatoor, *Postsecondary Credential Attainment and Labour Market Outcomes for Ontario Students with Disabilities*; Martin Turcotte, "Results from the 2016 Census: Education and labour market integration of Black youth in Canada," *Statistics Canada*, February 25, 2020, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/75-006-x/2020001/article/00002-eng.htm>

secondary education. Despite general enrolment growth in Ontario after changes to the sector in 2005, there has not been any indication that students from equity-deserving groups have also seen in tandem increases in enrolment.¹⁰¹ SMAs can be a useful tool to track how institutions are using government funding to increase access for students from equity-deserving groups, and makes them more accountable to achieve the goals set out in these agreements. A briefing note by the C.D. Howe Institute also states that PBF should focus on delivering outcomes that are not already being achieved through other tools, like increasing access to equity-deserving groups.¹⁰² The province can engage in a number of actions to address this issue that utilize SMAs in a productive and effective way, including consultations with students from these groups to ensure their needs are being met under PBF, as well as measuring the representation and success rates of equity-deserving groups through a performance indicator.

Lastly, the provincial government should add a bargaining mechanism to the core of the SMA system that would allow and encourage universities to propose innovative changes to their operations while adapting their SMAs to judge performance and therefore calculate PBF more appropriately. The needs of institutions and their students are subject to change as shifts occur in the broader global, political, and socio-economic climates. Being confined to the parameters of a PBF-reliant SMA over the course of five years could lead to institutions missing out on opportunities for more targeted funding that addresses relevant needs. Giving flexibility to institutions to negotiate changes to their SMA as they seek out ways to innovate their local and global contributions would be an important mechanism that can better align with the vision for the post-secondary system.

TEACHING AND RESEARCH

Principle: The learning goals of students should be reflected in post-secondary institutions through innovative and diverse teaching methods.

Principle: Students should feel confident that their tuition fees are being invested in their education and experiences offered to them throughout their degree.

Concern: Research intensive universities receive higher funding from the provincial government, and this contributes to disparities in teaching quality between skilled instructors and researchers required to instruct.

Concern: Post-secondary institutions that promote research funding and opportunities do not prioritize teaching and student learning outcomes to the same high degree.

Concern: Providing increased funding to research institutions discourages differentiations between universities and the programs offered which undermines the sector's long-term sustainability.

Recommendation: The provincial government should adjust the university funding model to reflect the value of teaching-focused institutions.

Recommendation: The provincial government should consult with students through advisory committees at each post-secondary institution to better understand how student needs and learning goals, particularly those from groups deserving equity, can be incorporated within Strategic Mandate Agreements.

Recommendation: The provincial government should utilize feedback from students to adjust Strategic Mandate Agreements to reflect student learning and career goals and hold post-secondary institutions accountable for the use of students' tuition through Strategic Mandate Agreements.

¹⁰¹ Deller, Kaufman, & Tamburri, *Redefining Access to Postsecondary Education*.

¹⁰² Usher, "Funding for Results in Higher Education."

Recommendation: The provincial government should incorporate student learning goals and feedback from consultations to inform post-secondary institutions of gaps in high quality teaching and innovative instructors.

Recommendation: The provincial government should provide grants and other funding opportunities that recognize the value of innovations in teaching, promoting best practices in curriculum and instructional design, and teaching-as-research.

As students transition back to in-person and hybrid learning, there is an emphasis on instructors and universities to reflect upon the student experience. Although students choose their respective post-secondary institutions for a variety of reasons, innovative teaching methods and research opportunities tend to appeal to prospective students. HEQCO noted both teaching and research focused programs as an axis for differentiation in the Ontario post-secondary industry in the publication, *The Benefits of Greater Differentiation in Ontario's University Sector*, but also emphasized the importance of equal value for teaching and research. The authors state that “A movement towards greater differentiation will succeed only if it is clear that the government is placing equal value on at least the following functions – teaching and research, and in some cases, community development. The commitment to equal value must be more than rhetorical; it must be reflected in funding as well,” however SMA3 does not reflect the importance of balanced funding.¹⁰³ From the provincial perspective, research takes priority as research-intensive universities receive the most funding. As a brief example, in a 2014 report, HEQCO categorized McMaster University as a research-intensive institution while Wilfrid Laurier University was considered a “mostly undergraduate” institution.¹⁰⁴ Based on this classification and looking at the allocation of the Ontario Research Fund (both the Research Excellence and Infrastructure streams) for projects approved at both institutions in 2018, McMaster received a total of just over \$12 million from the province while Wilfrid Laurier received just over \$1 million.¹⁰⁵ The province of Ontario’s bias toward research undermines the importance of quality teaching methods and the ongoing improvements in pedagogy. It also discourages differentiation across the sector; as institutions gain higher status due to their research-intensive outputs, others that lag behind in this area may engage in “mimetic isomorphism” to boost their own reputation as research-focused in order to elevate their status and increase their funding, a phenomenon seen with Wilfrid Laurier and Brock University.¹⁰⁶ Across Ontario, post-secondary students should feel that their tuition and the fees they pay are being invested in their education and opportunities rather than solely focusing on labour market trends.¹⁰⁷ The provincial government should adjust the university funding model to reflect the value of teaching-focused institutions, and also provide grants and other funding opportunities that recognize the value of innovations in teaching, and promote best practices in curriculum and instructional design to teaching and learning centers on post-secondary campuses. These centers, foundations, and institutes that receive funding should have systems for accountability that look to students for input and feedback on lived experiences and needs.

While students deserve to know where there are the most opportunities for employment following graduation, the current metrics for the SMAs do not reflect the importance of innovative teaching that constantly improves and evolves to better educate students. Furthermore, the current use of PBF undermines the role of instructors adequately teaching the skills most in demand within Ontario’s job market and fails to recognize the gaps in data surrounding the post-secondary industry’s changing landscape. Ongoing problems with Ontario’s traditional teaching and learning model include “limited innovation in pedagogy; insufficient student supports for career-readiness; [and] weak alignment to

¹⁰³ Harvey Weingarten and Fiona Deller, “The Benefits of Greater Differentiation in Ontario’s University Sector,” *Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario*, 2010, 12. <https://heqco.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/DifferentiationENG.pdf>

¹⁰⁴ Linda Jonker and Martin Hicks, “Teaching Loads and Research Outputs of Ontario University Faculty Members: Implications for Productivity and Differentiation,” *Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario*, March 2014, 13, <https://heqco.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/FINAL-Teaching-Loads-and-Research-Outputs-ENG.pdf>

¹⁰⁵ Data retrieved from an open dataset provided by the Ontario Ministry of Colleges and Universities to the Government of Canada. The dataset was published January 11, 2020 and accessed on December 22, 2021.

<https://open.canada.ca/data/en/dataset/c2c8ad08-45c1-45cf-b611-44a097d04408>

¹⁰⁶ Roger Pizarro Milian, Scott Davies, and David Zarifa. “Barriers to Differentiation: Applying Organizational Studies to Ontario Higher Education,” *Canadian Journal of Higher Education* 46, no.1 (2016): 19-37, doi: [10.47678/cjhe.v46i1.186019](https://doi.org/10.47678/cjhe.v46i1.186019)

¹⁰⁷ Government of Ontario, “Promoting Excellence: Ontario Implements Performance-based Funding for Postsecondary Institutions,” *Ontario Newsroom*, November 26, 2020, <https://news.ontario.ca/en/release/59368/promoting-excellence-ontario-implements-performance-based-funding-for-postsecondary-institutions>

labour market needs.”¹⁰⁸ Ultimately, students are the population group who are affected by teaching quality and innovation, and their input is crucial to ensuring that modes of instruction adequately meet their needs and learning goals. The provincial government should actively seek feedback from students and graduates through advisory committees, to understand how SMAs can better address student learning and career goals and needs, and focus particularly on students from equity-deserving groups. These consultations could also include faculty members and Ontario’s leading employers from growing industries to determine what skills, programs, and knowledge is most beneficial to students. The province should use this feedback to adjust SMAs according to student learning and career goals, and hold post-secondary institutions accountable for the use of tuition through SMAs. Additionally, this feedback should be used to inform post-secondary institutions of gaps in high quality teaching and innovative instructors. By establishing a group to promote ongoing dialogue and research into student educational needs, SMAs can more accurately target the needs of students as it relates to teaching quality.

DATA COLLECTION

Principle: Data collection from the Strategic Mandate Agreement report backs should be utilized to ensure continuous improvement in Ontario’s post-secondary education system.

Principle: Data collected from the Strategic Mandate Agreements should be made publicly available.

Concern: Strategic Mandate Agreement report back data is not centrally stored in a publicly accessible manner.

Recommendation: The provincial government should, publicly by default, centrally store data collected by the Strategic Mandate Agreement report backs.

Data collection and sharing is vital for stakeholders to understand how the changes to the SMAs are affecting post-secondary education. Currently, data regarding the SMAs are stored on individual university websites, which can be difficult to navigate. The same can be seen with SMA data on the provincial website as well, where report back information is stored under each institutional SMA link, making it difficult to view this data in a central manner. The data made available from SMA report backs are vague, listing only historical data, targets, and results, and there is nothing to indicate how the data is used. Improvements can be made to strengthen the clarity and level of detail provided in the report backs. Therefore, OUSA recommends that the government centrally store data collected by the SMA report backs to improve public accessibility of this data.

IMPROVING SMA DEVELOPMENT WITH EQUITY, TRANSPARENCY, AND STUDENT INVOLVEMENT

Principle: Strategic Mandate Agreements should reflect the need for accountability and transparency in the post-secondary education industry.

Principle: University programs should prepare graduates for their future career paths through the development of diverse skills and experiences as determined by students.

Concern: As they exist, Strategic Mandate Agreements do not reflect students’ need for diversity, transparency, and representation in the province’s framework.

Concern: In the development of the current Strategic Mandate Agreements, students and student organizations were not consulted, which diminished Ontario students’ ability to contribute.

Concern: The current Strategic Mandate Agreement structure does not encourage diversification and

¹⁰⁸ André Côté and Alexi White, “Higher Education for Lifelong Learners: A Roadmap for Ontario Post-Secondary Leaders and Policymakers,” *University of Toronto*, 2020, 18.
https://on360.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/ON360_HigherEducation_v3.pdf

differentiation in institutions' program offerings.

Recommendation: The provincial government should ensure that Strategic Mandate Agreements acknowledge potential biases and make efforts to mediate this through ongoing research into pedagogy, barriers to representation at the post-secondary level, and improving accountability.

Recommendation: The provincial government should adjust the Strategic Mandate Agreement development process to include opportunity for student feedback while actively consulting with student organizations.

Recommendation: The provincial government should encourage diversification of program offerings by including consideration for course variety within future Strategic Mandate Agreements.

Recommendation: The provincial government should consult with current students and those who discontinued their studies at each post-secondary institution across Ontario to better incorporate student needs and learning goals within the Strategic Mandate Agreements.

The importance of equity, transparency, and student involvement in the development of SMAs remains critical to accountability within the post-secondary industry. As they remain, the criteria do not take into account the systemic barriers that prevent students from diverse backgrounds from pursuing various programs, campus services, and opportunities within their institutions. Rather, the criteria rely on PBF which utilizes economic factors within Ontario's labour market and research potential without any criteria to encourage diversity within student populations and university admissions. Furthermore, the SMAs do not promote additional support that would reduce barriers for prospective students from marginalized backgrounds. A scan of university mission statements found that "research" was the second most mentioned term among Ontario's 20 universities which was significantly more than "culture", "aboriginal"¹⁰⁹, and "diversity", the last of which ranked as the 89th most used word.¹¹⁰ As for the same terms in the SMAs, "research" is still the second most used term and words like "access", "bilingual", and "diverse" are used less frequently.¹¹¹ Without promoting student involvement and feedback, as well as overall transparency into funding of the post-secondary industry, SMAs are unable to reflect diversity within Ontario's student population. Therefore, the provincial government should ensure that SMAs acknowledge potential biases and make efforts to mediate this through ongoing research into pedagogy, barriers to representation at the post-secondary level, and improving accountability.

From another perspective, the importance of including students from different points of life also emphasizes the need for SMAs that are equitable, transparent, and promote student involvement. In the development of the current iteration of SMAs, where drastic changes to PBF occurred, students were not consulted despite being a key stakeholder within the post-secondary sector. Given the implications of PBF on students, especially those from equity-deserving groups, it would have been prudent to integrate student feedback into the development process of the SMAs. Going forward, the provincial government should work with students and campus community members to reflect student values and needs with the next SMAs. The province should consult with current students as well as those who discontinued their studies to learn more about student needs and learning goals, which can consequently inform the development of SMAs with a student-centric lens. Notably, students have been able to influence change in the past and will continue to do so in the future, as exemplified through the popularity of technical institutes in Ontario from the 1940s to 60s, which, due to student pressure, were reformed into contemporary universities.¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ The term "aboriginal" was referenced within SMAs and was consequently used as a part of the respective research study to identify how access for under-represented students was prioritized in SMAs. OUSA does not endorse the use of this term but has written it as such to accurately convey the methodology used by the study author.

¹¹⁰ Fatima Samji, *Equitable University Access for Under-Represented and Diverse Groups of Students: A Critical Analysis of the Discourse in Mission Statements and Strategic Mandate Agreements*, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (thesis), 2017, 26.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Milian, Davies, & Zarifa. "Barriers to Differentiation: Applying Organizational Studies to Ontario Higher Education."

With universities catering to people from all age groups, courses and programs need to clearly outline the skills and knowledge students will acquire and carry into their careers. The need for a shift in program offerings, funding, and campus services are especially vital to “life-long learners” and people who may be upgrading their skills or degree to further their career.¹¹³ That being said, post-secondary institutions should be offering a variety of programs while still finding ways to uphold their commitments to differentiation and ensure that it continues to benefit students. As previously mentioned, the ten metrics being used under the PBF model focus heavily on labour market and economic outcomes, which diminish opportunities for institutions to diversify and expand their program offerings. The SMAs provide an opportunity for institutions to be more accountable in their variety of program offerings and the provincial government should encourage course variety within future SMAs.

DIFFERENTIATION

WORK-INTEGRATED LEARNING FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Principle: All students on post-secondary campuses should have equal access to experiential learning opportunities.

Concern: International students have additional burdens and barriers when accessing experiential learning and workplace study opportunities on campus.

Recommendation: The provincial government should increase investments to provide targeted support for international students in work-integrated learning programs and better engage international students in these opportunities and to receive feedback from existing programs.

Recommendation: The provincial government should further research work-integrated learning participation rates, barriers to participation, and strategies, to enhance overall rates of participation for these students.

Recommendation: The Ministry of Colleges and Universities should provide envelope funding for post-secondary institutions to retain dedicated work-integrated learning international student advisors.

International student enrolment across Ontario has increased exponentially over the past five years. In the 2018-19 academic year, over 54,528 international undergraduate students studied in Ontario, an increase of 160 percent since the 2009-10 academic year.¹¹⁴ International students face systemic barriers such as tuition, lack of financial assistance, distance from home, expensive healthcare, and lack of community support. These issues in conjunction create unique barriers to accessing WIL at university.

WIL is a broad category of activities which integrate learning experiences between traditional education and practical settings. According to HEQCO, the term is defined as having to “encompass several activities, including field experience, co-op, internship, applied research projects, and service learning.”¹¹⁵ Currently, WIL opportunities are limited for international students, in particular, compared to domestic students. Many workplaces do not hire or provide opportunities for employment (co-op programs) for international students, with many workforces requiring citizenship as a requirement for employment. When opportunities are available, significant cultural issues place a barrier for international students in securing employment. Cultural differences can account for different expectations and customs in the

¹¹³ Côté & White, “Higher Education for Lifelong Learners: A Roadmap for Ontario Post-Secondary Leaders and Policymakers.”

¹¹⁴ Council of Ontario Universities, “Table 6: International Students: Fall Full-time Headcounts by Program of Study (eligible and ineligible), 2009-10 - 2018-19,” *Council of Ontario Universities*, 2019, <https://ontariosuniversities.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Table-6.pdf>

¹¹⁵ Peggy Sattler, “Work-Integrated Learning in Ontario’s Postsecondary Sector,” *Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario*, Toronto: 2011

workplace, and these discrepancies coupled with systemic barriers, inhibit international students from succeeding in WIL programs.

Furthermore, studies have shown that language is a significant barrier in securing WIL opportunities. Lack of English proficiency has led to a lack of communication in the workforce, and prevents international students from succeeding in the workplace. Staff working at WIL offices in post-secondary institutions have noted that non-official language speakers are disadvantaged during the interview process as a perceived reflection of their communication skills.¹¹⁶ In addition to the many challenges that already exist, international students face significant language barriers in securing jobs, post-graduation. In higher education, many programs do not provide the opportunity for students to practice their report writing and therefore, struggle once in the assessment process when having to execute these tasks.

The Ontario government's commitment to differentiation, according to their 2013 policy framework, integrates WIL as a part of the "teaching and learning" component within their model, and lists the "number of students enrolled in a co-op program" as a metric to longitudinally monitor progress.¹¹⁷ If the government and institutions are truly committed to reaching WIL-related goals in their application of differentiation, it is important that the rates of international students in WIL are measured due to the aforementioned barriers and outcomes. Hence, the provincial government should provide targeted funding to support international students in accessing WIL opportunities and invite feedback from international students on their experiences with these opportunities. The government should also further research WIL participation rates, barriers to participation, and strategies, to enhance overall rates of participation for international students, and ensure differentiation does not neglect equitable outcomes for international students. According to HEQCO one of the most impactful ways to improve WIL opportunities is to have dedicated WIL support staff, that are versed in solutions for international students accessing these opportunities. This resource provides a direct line of support to international students.¹¹⁸ This one-on-one setting provides substantial support throughout the entire application process for these students, to ensure they succeed in WIL opportunities. Envelope funding from the provincial government would help institutions implement this as a resource for international students, and would give institutions the proper resources to support the office.

WORK-INTEGRATED LEARNING FOR DOMESTIC STUDENTS

Principle: Work-integrated learning should be integrated into post-secondary education across Ontario post-secondary institutions.

Principle: Work-integrated learning should remain a key focus of the student learning experience moving into a post-pandemic world.

Concern: Post-secondary institutions across Ontario do not have equal work-integrated learning opportunities.

Concern: Currently, there is no way for Ontario post-secondary institutions to address the challenges students face when participating in work-integrated learning opportunities.

Concern: Different Ontario post-secondary institutions use a variety of supports and strategies to address student work-integrated learning accessibility concerns which are not uniform between institutions.

Concern: Currently there are insufficient work-integrated learning opportunities for students across Ontario post-secondary institutions.

¹¹⁶ Wendy Cukier, Mark Campbell, and Lauren McNamara, "Ensuring Equitable Access to Work-Integrated Learning in Ontario," *Diversity Institute, Ted Rogers School of Management*, 2018,

https://www.ryerson.ca/diversity/reports/Ensuring_Equitable_Access_to_Work-Integrated_Learning_in_Ontario.pdf

¹¹⁷ Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, "Ontario's Differentiation Policy Framework for Postsecondary Education."

¹¹⁸ R. A. Malatest & Associates Ltd, *Barriers to Work-Integrated Learning Opportunities*, Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, 2018

Recommendation: The provincial government should further research work-integrated learning participation rates, barriers to participation, and strategies, to enhance overall rates of participation for domestic students.

Recommendation: The provincial government should increase funding to ensure that sufficient work-integrated learning opportunities are uniform across all Ontario post-secondary institutions.

Recommendation: The provincial government should invest in the Career Ready Fund to incentivize employers to increase opportunities for disciplines and programs of study that currently lack work-integrated learning opportunities.

Recommendation: The provincial government should prioritize paid work-integrated learning opportunities through the Career Ready Fund.

WIL is a pivotal part of the post-secondary education experience across Ontario institutions. Within this, it is crucial that WIL remain a key focus moving into a post-pandemic world. These opportunities allow students to gain awareness and network with colleagues to eventually be transpired to post-graduation opportunities and skill development. These experiences lay the foundation for soon to be graduates gaining skills, talent, and innovation that better their skills moving into the workforce.

However, not every post-secondary institution offers equal opportunities for WIL on their campuses and within this, substantial barriers still remain for students looking to obtain these highly-competitive positions. Barriers ranging from employment standards, health and safety, human rights, intellectual property, employment insurance, immigration law and tax expenditures are all issues which pose significant challenges to students applying to these positions.¹¹⁹ Students attending Ontario institutions deserve to have equal, and accessible access to WIL at whichever institution they decide to attend. Among OUSA's eight member institutions, five have allocated either 5 or 10 percent (the two lowest possible weights) to the "experiential learning" metric for the 2022-23 round of their SMA, signalling concern about institutional availability and access to WIL opportunities in the future.¹²⁰

Currently, there are inequities among the availability of these WIL opportunities between differing institutions and no way for them to address the challenges on accessibility brought forward by students. Within this the challenges faced by students are exacerbated for those students within the arts.¹²¹ While not statistically significant, trends emerging from OUSA's 2020 Ontario Undergraduate Student Survey suggest that among students who participated in WIL, those in Agriculture, Natural Resources, and Conservation programs as well as those in Visual and Performing Arts, and Communications Technologies programs had lower participation than those in other fields of study like Business, Management, and Public Administration, Engineering, Architecture, and Related Technologies, and Health and Related Fields.¹²² It is important that institutions offer WIL in fields of study that cater to their institutional strengths, capitalize on pre-existing partnerships, and commitment to differentiation, but it is equally important that other fields of study like arts and humanities, which are often under-funded and ignored in WIL supports, are prioritized in the allocation of WIL opportunities, especially considering that those who participate in WIL are more likely to secure employment in their field of study.¹²³

¹¹⁹ Joseph F. Turcotte, Leslie Nichols, and Lisa Philipps, *Maximizing Opportunity, Mitigating Risk: Aligning Law, Policy and Practice to Strengthen Work-Integrated Learning in Ontario*, Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, 2016.

¹²⁰ Information gathered from respective institutional 2020-2025 Strategic Mandate Agreements: [Brock University](#), [Laurentian University](#), [McMaster University](#), [Queen's University](#), [Trent University](#), [University of Waterloo](#), [Western University](#), and [Wilfrid Laurier University](#)

¹²¹ Xin Li, "The Importance of Work Integrated Learning Experiences For Students Choosing Careers in the Arts," *University of Victoria*, 2016, https://dspace.library.uvic.ca/bitstream/handle/1828/7428/Li_Xin_MEd_2016.pdf?sequence=1

¹²² Britney De Costa and Malika Dhanani, *Quality: Results from the 2020 Ontario Undergraduate Student Survey*. Toronto: Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance (forthcoming).

¹²³ Diane Galarneau, Mark Kinack, and George Marshall, "Work-integrated learning during postsecondary studies, 2015 graduates," *Statistics Canada*, May 25, 2020, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/75-006-x/2020001/article/00003-eng.htm>

The Ontario government needs to ensure that students have equal access to these opportunities across all campuses in Ontario. As such, they should continue research within the WIL field, ensuring they have accurate data on participation rates, barriers to participation, and strategies to enhance these experiences following the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, the provincial government should increase funding for the implementation of sufficient WIL across all post-secondary campuses. Lastly, the provincial government should increase funding to the Career Ready Fund, in order to incentivize employers to increase opportunities for all disciplines, but especially those students in the arts and humanities field of studies.

WORK-INTEGRATED LEARNING FOR STUDENTS WITH SYSTEMIC BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION

Principle: All students should have the ability to participate in work-integrated learning opportunities.

Principle: Students should not face discrimination when seeking and undertaking work-integrated learning opportunities.

Concern: Some student populations including mature students, racialized students, Indigenous students, and students with disabilities face additional barriers when accessing work-integrated learning opportunities.

Concern: A student's functional limitations may limit them from working while studying, which prevents them from gaining work experience during their studies.

Concern: Students may experience covert and overt racism or religious discrimination when searching for work-integrated learning or while working as a result of their racial and/or religious identity.

Recommendation: The Ministry of Colleges and Universities should partner with post-secondary institutions and businesses to increase work-integrated learning opportunities that are equally available to students with limited work-integrated learning opportunities to meet the current student demand.

Recommendation: The provincial government should prioritize work-integrated learning opportunities, including research grants, for students who have limited access to these opportunities.

WIL opportunities are crucial in providing a comprehensive higher education. WIL has emerged as an essential "pedagogical strategy to enhance student learning and development."¹²⁴ These opportunities are crucial in success at the post-graduate level and often help shape the trajectory of students' careers in the workforce.

However, students from equity-deserving groups may face systemic barriers that limit and hinder their participation in WIL. A study by the Diversity Institute at X University¹²⁵ found that within Ontario WIL processes at an institutional level, staff in these offices were unaware of the diversity and equity issues experienced by students, and were unlikely to challenge employers who exercised discrimination and/or bias in their recruitment process.¹²⁶ Further, in their push to establish relationships with employers, these staff also did not make "proactive efforts" to alleviate the challenges faced by these student groups in their WIL workplace/experience.¹²⁷

In the current framework for WIL at higher education institutions, it is an extremely competitive environment with limited opportunities for students. Currently, institutions have different programs in place to match students up with WIL opportunities, with some processes requiring the student to work almost independently. Certain privileges and personal networks of students make these opportunities

¹²⁴ Ashley Stirling, Gretchen Kerr, Jenessa Banwell, Ellen MacPherson, and Amanda Heron, "A Practical Guide for Work-integrated Learning," *Higher Education Equality Council of Ontario*, 2016, 4

¹²⁵ For context on the use of X University instead of what is formerly known as Ryerson University:

<https://yellowheadinstitute.org/2021/05/11/welcome-to-x-university-an-open-letter-to-the-community-from-indigenous-students/>

¹²⁶ Cukier, Campbell, & McNamara, "Ensuring Equitable Access to Work-Integrated Learning in Ontario."

¹²⁷ Ibid.

easier to secure at the undergraduate level.¹²⁸ This means that those without pre-existing relationships must face additional barriers to secure these opportunities. The provincial government should work to ensure that adequate frameworks exist to ensure the hiring process for these opportunities are equitable and accessible for all students.

For students with financial barriers, low-income students, and first-generation students, paid WIL opportunities are the only option. The pool of opportunities decreases with these barriers in place and leave students with no options for secure WIL opportunities. With low-income students already disadvantaged when entering the workplace, these additional barriers create larger gaps between students at the post-graduate level. Staff at WIL offices have shared that low-income and first-generation students have more family and part-time work responsibilities, which pose as a barrier to participation in WIL.¹²⁹ Students should be appropriately rewarded and paid for their contributions to the workplace, and should be treated as an equal part of the workforce. This means that students should be adequately compensated for the time that is put into these opportunities. The Ministry of Colleges and Universities should work alongside institutions and organizations to ensure that paid opportunities exist across a diverse set of workplaces. As a part of *Ontario's Differentiation Policy Framework for Postsecondary Education*, "student population" is included as a component for institutions to consider, where the number and proportion of "under-represented" students, including Indigenous, first-generation, disabled and Francophone students will be measured.¹³⁰ Institutions have the option to provide three additional metrics "related to improving access, retention, and success for these and other groups of students."¹³¹ Therefore, in line with the objectives of this framework, expanding opportunities for WIL for these student groups would integrate an equity-based component to differentiation as it pertains to student success.

In addition to income, race and religious identity can factor in to being able to secure a WIL opportunity. Racial and religious inequality is still pervasive in the workforce and leads to disparities in occupation and opportunity. Individuals from diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds face systemic obstacles in securing employment opportunities. The government of Ontario must acknowledge the way these barriers play into WIL for students and work alongside the Ministry of College and Universities to fund additional support systems and resources for these students.

OMBUDSPERSON OFFICE & MEDIATION OFFICES

OMBUDSPERSON OFFICE/MEDIATION OFFICE FINANCING

Principle: Students should not have to bear the financial cost of dispute resolution mechanisms on their campuses.

Principle: Different forms of mediation offices serve a crucial information sharing function for all members of campus communities.

Concern: At many institutions, students are forced to bear either most of the cost or partial cost of dispute resolution mechanisms on university campuses.

Recommendation: The provincial government should provide institutions with the funding necessary to adequately run Ombudsperson offices or mediation offices on university campuses, including satellite campuses, following an enrolment-based model.

¹²⁸ Abacus Data, *Work-integrated Learning and Post-Secondary Education: What Students Think*, (Ottawa, ON: Abacus Data, 2016).

¹²⁹ Cukier, Campbell, & McNamara, "Ensuring Equitable Access to Work-Integrated Learning in Ontario."

¹³⁰ Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, "Ontario's Differentiation Policy Framework for Postsecondary Education."

¹³¹ Ibid.

Currently, higher education institutions across Ontario do not have standardized procedures in place to fund student mediation offices. Only 10 out of 21 of Ontario’s universities have formalized ombudsperson offices, and differ from one another in mandate and responsibilities. Certain institutions have other forms of student mediation offices but no ombudsperson person offices. Despite this, they should still receive funding to ensure that these individuals' mediation offices are able to effectively deal with conflict resolution at the student level.

Similar to the Ontario Ombudsman, the offices remain separate from the institution, to ensure that the office works as a neutral third party. Each offices’ overarching goal is to provide confidential, objective and impartial advice to those suffering with different forms of grievances. The majority of ombudsperson offices are funded as joint ventures between undergraduate student associations, graduate student associations, and university administrations, and are funded unilaterally or bilaterally.

Table 3: Funding Arrangements of Ombudsperson Offices at OUSA Member Institutions (2020-2021)¹³²

Funded by	Institution	
Student Association & University	Brock University McMaster University Western University	
Unknown	Queen’s University	
N/A (No Ombudsperson)	Laurentian University	Mediation office
	Trent University	Special Appeals Committee
	University of Waterloo	Respective faculty, Conflict Management and Human Rights Office, or Student Resource Office
	Wilfrid Laurier University	Office of Human Rights and Conflict Management

Some institutions have no mediation offices at all leaving students in a position where they are to be supported through grievance processes by the same parties accusing them of misconduct. Student mediation offices are a necessary service on campus and involvement from the university and student government yields to the ability to have bias in cases and disputes. The Annual Report of the 2020-21 of the Office of the Ombudsman of Ontario recommends that all universities establish independent and impartial ombudsman offices.¹³³ While the funding of universities and student governments have been essential in the operation of these offices, the government should provide adequate funding through an enrolment-based model to institutions to run their respective offices, including those on satellite campuses. The Ontario government would be the only neutral third party that is equipped to fund these offices. This will allow all members of the institution to rely on the office to solve any grievances they might have through an objective, independent body with in-depth knowledge of their institution. However, it is important to acknowledge that funding is not the only barrier to the establishment of student mediation offices, and that access to additional resources may be needed to support this initiative.

¹³² Information gathered from respective institutional websites except for Queen’s University, where information was unavailable: [Brock University](#), [Laurentian University](#), [McMaster University](#), [Trent University](#), [University of Waterloo](#), [Western University](#), and [Wilfrid Laurier University](#)

¹³³ Office of the Ombudsman of Ontario, 2020-2021 Annual Report, (Toronto: Office of the Ombudsman of Ontario, 2021), 11.

INCREASED STUDENT REPRESENTATION

Principle: Students should have adequate representation within institutional ombudsperson offices and mediation offices.

Concern: Student representation is not mandated across university ombudsperson offices/mediation offices, despite being a significant stakeholder in post-secondary education.

Recommendation: The provincial government should mandate at least 20 percent of ombudsperson office, or mediation office, by case, seats to students in their undergraduate degrees.

The current Ontario Ombudsman began oversight within all publicly funded universities in the post-secondary sector in 2016.⁶⁵ Between 2020-21, over 213 cases were handled by this office, however students have little interaction with the decisions and processes involved within this office.⁶⁵ Common reports seen range from admissions, academic appeals, financing, and lastly, student services. With the extent of student ranging issues, the lack of student representation is extremely concerning at the institutional and provincial level.

Students deserve the right to have representation within the institutional mediation offices to ensure that complaints are being addressed. Within this, current ombudsperson offices are currently not mandated to have adequate student representation within them, despite being a significant stakeholder in post-secondary education. The Ontario Ombudsman “encourages universities and colleges to have their own ombudsman to resolve issues at the local level” as their primary intervention with post-secondary matters is connecting students to their institutional ombudsperson.

OUSA is dedicated to ensure that student concerns are addressed and that adequate student representation is allotted when dealing with such large student facing issues. Due to this, OUSA recommends that the provincial government mandate that at least 20 percent of mediation office seats are allocated to students in their undergraduate degree. Through this, this recommendation serves to bridge the missing gap seen in the past with concerns not being addressed and allows students to have further input into the work done by their respective institutional student mediation office.

CONNECTION TO ONTARIO OMBUDSMAN

Principle: Students should have easy avenues to contact the provincial Ombudsman office at the institutional level.

Concern: The number of academic and non-academic issues have increased in the last three years, with a lack of appropriate dispute resolution processes.

Concern: No formalized connection exists between Ontario Ombudsman and institutional ombudsperson offices, resulting in inconsistent reporting standards across different university offices.

Recommendation: The Ontario Ombudsman should establish a student committee with an elected (by students) undergraduate and graduate representative from each Ontario post-secondary institution.

Recommendation: The Ontario Ombudsman should establish a formalized connection with institutional student mediation offices through the Ministry of Colleges and Universities.

Recommendation: Individual student mediation offices at institutions should release accessible and transparent reports at the end of each academic year with a summary of the aggregated data.

Currently, no formalized relationship exists between the Ontario Ombudsman and individual student mediation offices within institutions. This has resulted in a lack of standardized reporting procedures across institutions, as each institution follows their individual internal policy. With a lack of standardized

procedures in place across the province, institutional student mediation offices are unable to operate as an unbiased segment of the university.

The Ontario Ombudsman has a formalized connection with the Ministry of Colleges and Universities (MCU) and is equipped to deal with complaints at the post-secondary level. Using this pre-existing connection, OUSA recommends that the Ontario Ombudsman establish a formalized relationship with each institutional student mediation office. The Ontario Ombudsman's ties to the MCU provides them with the capacity to have an official relationship with each individual institutional office. This would facilitate the development of standardized reporting structures between institutions. With this oversight from Ontario Ombudsman, individual institutions would be able to operate as an unbiased third party, separate from the university. Formalizing this connection improves the ability for individual ombudsperson offices to operate as an unbiased support and reporting system for students.

POLICY STATEMENT

Whereas: Equitable representation of students on university governance is vital for the successful operation of university governance.

Whereas: As key stakeholders, students have a right to be involved in their university's governance and decision-making processes.

Whereas: Students provide valuable insights on how a university's actions, values, and operations are experienced by students, and thus are vital to a university's effective governance.

Whereas: University governance bodies are most effective if all members are able to engage to their full potential.

Whereas: University bodies and committees are most effective when their membership is comprised of a diverse range of perspectives and experiences.

Whereas: Transparent information regarding the activities of university boards should be made available to stakeholders, including but not limited to, university community members.

Whereas: Students on university governance should have the same voting privileges as any other non-student member of university governance committees.

Whereas: Undergraduate degree expectation frameworks should adequately define the competencies that students will have by the time they complete their undergraduate degree.

Whereas: All University Undergraduate Degree Level Expectations should have equity-based expectations in their framework.

Whereas: Data regarding the participation of students from equity-deserving groups in the labour market is necessary in order to identify and address potential ways that barriers in post-secondary education impact graduates' professional outlook.

Whereas: The needs of students from equity-deserving groups in the post-secondary environment must be understood in order to improve the accessibility and quality of post-secondary education for these students.

Whereas: Access to adequate technology and internet is necessary for meaningful engagement with post-secondary education.

Whereas: All students on campus should have equitable access to physical learning spaces alongside hybrid and online learning spaces.

Whereas: Physically accessible spaces should follow standards that meet the needs of students with disabilities across all campuses.

Whereas: Universities should take appropriate measures on an ongoing basis to ensure their undergraduate programs are of the highest possible quality.

Whereas: Student input should be taken into consideration when designing and implementing program reviews, as they have recent lived experience studying in post-secondary programs.

Whereas: The provincial government has a responsibility to ensure the quality of undergraduate programs at Ontario's publicly-assisted universities.

Whereas: The public has a right to know the results of performance reviews of publicly-assisted higher education systems.

Whereas: Indigenous students have strong connections to diverse communities across Canada and deserve to attend post-secondary while preserving these ties.

Whereas: Indigenous students should be supported in their post-secondary pursuits through spaces and learning objectives dedicated to Indigenous culture and ways of knowing.

Whereas: Indigenous students should have access to diverse program offerings through institutions committed to supporting Indigeneity on campus.

Whereas: Rural and northern students should have the same level of access to broadband internet, transportation, and university campuses as students living in southern urban areas.

Whereas: Francophone students have the right to engage and participate in their chosen program instructed in the French language and benefit from a diverse post-secondary education sector in Ontario.

Whereas: Francophone students should have access to programs instructed in French across Ontario's numerous post-secondary institutions.

Whereas: Physical spaces on university campuses should ensure an accessible and safe space for all students, including, but not limited to those with disabilities, and respiratory conditions.

Whereas: On-campus culturally-cognizant academic, health, and support resources are key to providing an equitable and accessible post-secondary experience for students, and should be accessible to all students regardless of campus.

Whereas: Students should have adequate access to safe, affordable, and accessible transportation in the area of their campus of choice.

Whereas: Students' contributions to the services available on campus through ancillary fees should be reflected on their home campus.

Whereas: Students should feel confident that programs and offerings from satellite campuses are high quality and on par with main campus standards.

Whereas: Satellite campuses should be held to the same standard of accessibility to physical spaces as a university's main campus.

Whereas: The provincial government must be both transparent and accountable to students through the use of various frameworks created to provide guidance for funding and institutional growth.

Whereas: Provincial funding frameworks should work together to support the growth of schools as well student services, and the post-secondary industry as a whole.

Whereas: Students should be aware of how tuition and ancillary fees are allocated in their university budgets.

Whereas: Undergraduate students are the largest stakeholder in higher education and should be represented in institutional budgeting.

Whereas: Operational funding should adequately support needs of students through a combination of performance-based and enrolment-based funding metrics.

Whereas: Post-secondary education is a public good in Ontario.

Whereas: Ontario university budgets should be funded through contributions from the provincial government, federal government, and student tuition, with students contributing no more than one-third of university operating budgets.

Whereas: The criteria which determines funding for post-secondary programs should be fair to all students and programs.

Whereas: Strategic Mandate Agreements should utilize criteria that are proven to improve student success both during their time in school and after graduation.

Whereas: Students should be consulted and included in deliberations about performance-based funding metrics within Strategic Mandate Agreements

Whereas: The provincial government's shift to rely on performance-based funding within Strategic Mandate Agreements should be based on proven success over a long period of time.

Whereas: Post-secondary education is a public good in Ontario.

Whereas: The learning goals of students should be reflected in post-secondary institutions through innovative and diverse teaching methods.

Whereas: Students should feel confident that their tuition fees are being invested in their education and experiences offered to them throughout their degree.

Whereas: Data collection from the Strategic Mandate Agreement report backs should be utilized to ensure continuous improvement in Ontario's postsecondary education system.

Whereas: Data collected from the Strategic Mandate Agreements should be made publicly available.

Whereas: Strategic Mandate Agreements should reflect the need for accountability and transparency in the post-secondary education industry.

Whereas: University programs should prepare graduates for their future career paths through the development of diverse skills and experiences as determined by students.

Whereas: All students on post-secondary campuses should have equal access to experiential learning opportunities.

Whereas: Work-integrated learning should be integrated into post-secondary education across Ontario post-secondary institutions.

Whereas: Work-integrated learning should remain a key focus of the student learning experience moving into a post-pandemic world.

Whereas: All students should have the ability to participate in work-integrated learning opportunities.

Whereas: Students should not face discrimination when seeking and undertaking work-integrated learning opportunities.

Whereas: Students should not have to bear the financial cost of dispute resolution mechanisms on their campuses.

Whereas: Different forms of mediation offices serve a crucial information sharing function for all members of campus communities.

Whereas: Students should have adequate representation within institutional ombudsperson offices and mediation offices.

Whereas: Students should have easy avenues to contact the provincial Ombudsman office at the institutional level.

Be it resolved that: The provincial government should mandate that undergraduate student representatives be provided with adequate training and support to enhance their abilities to provide useful feedback and insights to governing bodies.

Be it further resolved that (BIFRT): The provincial government should establish a report that evaluates students' influence within university governing bodies across Ontario and renew this report every 3 years.

BIFRT: The provincial government should mandate that each university board implement a regular internal reporting process in which they share their activities and decisions to stakeholders, including but not limited to, university community members.

BIFRT: The provincial government should mandate university governing bodies to implement recruitment and retention strategies to increase the representation of equity-deserving groups in their senior leadership and governing bodies.

BIFRT: The provincial government should work with university governance committees to implement recruitment and retention strategies to increase the representation of marginalized groups (those historically disadvantaged by their race, gender, class, or other aspects of their background) in their senior leadership.

BIFRT: The provincial government should amend Ontario University Acts to state that student governors may take part in discussions and vote on matters relating to student issues, including but not limited to tuition and ancillary fees.

BIFRT: The provincial government should mandate that students occupying seats on university governance committees receive adequate training so that they can succeed in their roles.

BIFRT: The Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance should revise the University Undergraduate Degree Level Expectations to model Lumina Foundation's Degree Qualification Profile learning outcomes.

BIFRT: The Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance should consult with equity-deserving students to develop equity-building skillsets as a part of degree level expectations.

BIFRT: The Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance should ensure that student feedback is incorporated during the tuning process of updating University Undergraduate Degree Level Expectations.

BIFRT: The provincial government should mandate that Ontario universities should, through non-compulsory means, track data regarding the participation, retention, and campus experience of students from equity-deserving groups in post-secondary education.

BIFRT: The Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario should conduct consultations with students from under-represented groups to better inform policy recommendations on the accessibility and quality of post-secondary education in Ontario.

BIFRT: The provincial government should develop a grant, qualified through OSAP, aimed at covering the cost of high quality internet for students from low-income backgrounds.

BIFRT: The *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* should continue to create a post-secondary education framework that clearly defines standards for physically accessible spaces on campus, including the types and number of spaces that should exist.

BIFRT: Following the completion of the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* framework for Postsecondary Education Standards, the provincial government should adopt all formal recommendations on post-secondary campuses within the timelines identified by the Postsecondary Education Standards Development Committee.

BIFRT: The provincial government should provide envelope funding to institutions to ensure older spaces on university campuses comply with *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* standards.

BIFRT: The provincial government should increase post-secondary special purpose grants to increase accessibility of hybrid learning technology not limited to high-flexibility classrooms, lecture capture technology, and digital learning infrastructure for all students.

BIFRT: The Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance should only approve Institutional Quality Assurance Processes that provide province-wide metrics based on the evaluation of learning outcomes.

BIFRT: The Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance should ensure the team for cyclical program reviews includes at least one student reviewer and that the review process incorporates feedback from current students and graduates.

BIFRT: The provincial government should task the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario to take on the quality assurance mechanisms of the current Quality Council of the Council of Ontario Universities.

BIFRT: The provincial government should ensure data collected from university performance reviews are made available and easily accessible to the public on the Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance's website

BIFRT: The provincial government should ensure equity-focused perspectives are considered as part of cyclical eight-year reviews of program quality in higher education.

BIFRT: The provincial government should invest in programs focused on Indigenous languages and studies in both publicly funded post-secondary institutions as well as Indigenous Institutes.

BIFRT: The provincial government should encourage post-secondary institutions to remove statues and memorials of problematic historical figures who contributed to the genocide and ongoing abuse of Indigenous communities and Peoples, including those that were complicit in the residential "schooling" system.

BIFRT: The provincial government should provide envelope funding to post-secondary institutions to create memorials and awards celebrating Indigenous leaders to be selected and awarded by Indigenous Peoples.

BIFRT: The provincial government should invest in more transportation between post-secondary institutions and First Nations communities, as well as culturally relevant community and resources centers on post-secondary campuses.

BIFRT: The provincial government should engage in meaningful conversations with Indigenous Peoples, including Indigenous students, faculty, and staff to ensure their needs are met on campuses through a provincial advisory committee which will allow Indigenous Peoples to make suggestions to improve learning.

BIFRT: The provincial government should mandate post-secondary institutions to consult with Indigenous advisory bodies that are directed and controlled by Indigenous students, faculty, and community members.

BIFRT: The provincial government should introduce a Technology Accessibility Grant that is open to rural and/or northern students who require access to technology off-campus.

BIFRT: The provincial government should introduce a Rural and Northern Travel Grant that is open to rural and/or northern OSAP-eligible students, living 40 kilometers or more from the nearest publicly-assisted institution.

BIFRT: The provincial government should engage in strategic partnerships to provide financially accessible, high-speed, and reliable internet to rural and northern communities.

BIFRT: The provincial government should invest in existing programs offered in the French language across all disciplines at Ontario universities in all regions to ensure a wide array of course and program offerings in the French language.

BIFRT: The provincial government should work directly with universities offering programs in the French language to ensure solvency and ongoing financial support for post-secondary institutions that have French language programs and Francophone students have access to diverse programs in the French language.

BIFRT: The provincial government should provide funding to Ontario post-secondary institutions to recruit instructors for French programs to promote the expansion and accessibility of French language programs.

BIFRT: The provincial government should provide envelope funding to universities' deferred maintenance budgets for the implementation of repairs and enhancements to all campus spaces to increase the overall accessibility of campus for students with disabilities.

BIFRT: The provincial government should work with institutions to ensure accessibility and safety standards are maintained such as the standards outlined in the current *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act*.

BIFRT: The provincial government should include a metric in Strategic Mandate Agreements that addresses how institutions will develop and sustain equitable infrastructure for satellite campuses.

BIFRT: The provincial government should encourage post-secondary institutions to prioritize satellite campus infrastructure to the same quality as main campuses.

BIFRT: The provincial government should commit funds towards the expansion of post-secondary access to growing communities through means, including but not limited to, the creation of satellite campuses.

BIFRT: The provincial government should commission the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario to evaluate the efficacy of satellite campuses as a strategy for improving access to post-secondary education for populations in rural and northern communities.

BIFRT: The Ministry of Colleges and Universities should work with the Ministry of Transportation to prioritize underserved satellite campus communities when distributing funding through the Community Transportation Grant Program.

BIFRT: The provincial government should invest in rapid transit projects in municipalities with post-secondary institutions, especially currently underserved satellite campuses.

BIFRT: The provincial government should make additional funding available to post-secondary institutions for projects and initiatives that address existing quality disparities in services, programs, and offerings between campuses.

BIFRT: The provincial government should mandate consultations with various stakeholders, including current and prospective students, when creating new satellite campuses through advisory bodies.

BIFRT: The provincial government should make additional funding available to post-secondary institutions for projects and initiatives that address existing disparities pertaining to accessibility of physical spaces on satellite campuses.

BIFRT: The provincial government should review the current frameworks through an advisory body with representation from students, university administrators, and industry professionals to draft a new encompassing framework.

BIFRT: The provincial government should develop clear guidelines stating deadlines for each framework and promote them in an accessible format that's available to students.

BIFRT: The provincial government should work in conjunction with the Council of Ontario Universities to create policies that mandate universities communicate detailed tuition breakdowns to their students once per academic term.

BIFRT: The provincial government should work in conjunction with the Council of Ontario Universities to create policies that mandate student involvement in budget planning.

BIFRT: The provincial government should increase operating grants until students are contributing at most/a maximum of one-third of universities' total operating budget.

BIFRT: The provincial government should index base operating grants to national inflation each year.

BIFRT: The provincial government should measure the success of performance-based funding within Strategic Mandate Agreements by developing advisory bodies with university administration, students, graduates, and industry professionals.

BIFRT: The Ministry of Colleges and Universities should decrease the annual weight increase of performance-based funding within Strategic Mandate Agreements to between 5 and 8 percent annually rather than 10 percent.

BIFRT: The provincial government should balance the post-secondary funding model more evenly between the Strategic Mandate Agreements envelope, enrolment envelope, and special purpose grants to ensure student concerns are incorporated and institutions are accountable to student needs.

BIFRT: The provincial government should conduct appropriate consultations with students from equity-deserving groups to ensure their needs are met under a performance-based funding model.

BIFRT: The provincial government should measure representation of equity-deserving groups in student and faculty bodies, as well as their success rates (i.e., sense of belonging, faculty and staff duration and tenure rates, etc.) and representation in course syllabi, at post-secondary institutions as a performance indicator.

BIFRT: The provincial government should add a bargaining mechanism to the core of the Strategic Mandate Agreement system that would allow and encourage universities to propose innovative changes to their operations while adapting their Strategic Mandate Agreements to judge performance, and thus calculate performance-based funding, more appropriately.

BIFRT: The provincial government should adjust the university funding model to reflect the value of teaching-focused institutions.

BIFRT: The provincial government should consult with students through advisory committees at each post-secondary institution to better understand how student needs and learning goals, particularly those from groups deserving equity, can be incorporated within Strategic Mandate Agreements.

BIFRT: The provincial government should utilize feedback from students to adjust Strategic Mandate Agreements to reflect student learning and career goals and hold post-secondary institutions accountable for the use of students' tuition through Strategic Mandate Agreements.

BIFRT: The provincial government should incorporate student learning goals and feedback from consultations to inform post-secondary institutions of gaps in high quality teaching and innovative instructors.

BIFRT: The provincial government should provide grants and other funding opportunities that recognize the value of innovations in teaching, promoting best practices in curriculum and instructional design, and teaching-as-research.

BIFRT: The provincial government should, publicly by default, centrally store data collected by the Strategic Mandate Agreement report backs.

BIFRT: The provincial government should ensure that Strategic Mandate Agreements acknowledge potential biases and make efforts to mediate this through ongoing research into pedagogy, barriers to representation at the post-secondary level, and improving accountability.

BIFRT: The provincial government should adjust the Strategic Mandate Agreement development process to include opportunity for student feedback while actively consulting with student organizations.

BIFRT: The provincial government should encourage diversification of program offerings by including consideration for course variety within future Strategic Mandate Agreements.

BIFRT: The provincial government should consult with current students and those who discontinued their studies at each post-secondary institution across Ontario to better incorporate student needs and learning goals within the Strategic Mandate Agreements.

BIFRT: The provincial government should increase investments to provide targeted support for international students in work-integrated learning programs and better engage international students in these opportunities and to receive feedback from existing programs.

BIFRT: The provincial government should further research work-integrated learning participation rates, barriers to participation, and strategies, to enhance overall rates of participation for these students.

BIFRT: The Ministry of Colleges and Universities should provide envelope funding for post-secondary institutions to retain dedicated work-integrated learning international student advisors.

BIFRT: The provincial government should further research work-integrated learning participation rates, barriers to participation, and strategies, to enhance overall rates of participation for domestic students.

BIFRT: The provincial government should increase funding to ensure that sufficient work-integrated learning opportunities are uniform across all Ontario post-secondary institutions.

BIFRT: The provincial government should invest in the Career Ready Fund to incentivize employers to increase opportunities for disciplines and programs of study that currently lack work-integrated learning opportunities.

BIFRT: The provincial government should prioritize paid work-integrated learning opportunities through the Career Ready Fund.

BIFRT: The Ministry of Colleges and Universities should partner with post-secondary institutions and businesses to increase work-integrated learning opportunities that are equally available to students with limited work-integrated learning opportunities to meet the current student demand.

BIFRT: The provincial government should prioritize work-integrated learning opportunities, including research grants, for students who have limited access to these opportunities.

BIFRT: The provincial government should provide institutions with the funding necessary to adequately run Ombudsperson offices or mediation offices on university campuses, including satellite campuses, following an enrolment-based model.

BIFRT: The provincial government should mandate at least 20 percent of ombudsperson office, or mediation office, by case, seats to students in their undergraduate degrees.

BIFRT: The Ontario Ombudsman should establish a student committee with an elected (by students) undergraduate and graduate representative from each Ontario post-secondary institution.

BIFRT: The Ontario Ombudsman should establish a formalized connection with institutional student mediation offices through the Ministry of Colleges and Universities.

BIFRT: Individual student mediation offices at institutions should release accessible and transparent reports at the end of each academic year with a summary of the aggregated data.