Volume 16

Educated Solutions

Where Do We Go From Here?
The Future of Post-Secondary in Ontario

THE ONTARIO UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT ALLIANCE

Land Acknowledgement

The Home Office of the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance is situated on the traditional territory of the Huron-Wendat, the Haudenosaunee, and most recently, the Mississaugas of the Credit River, and is covered by Treaty 13 of the Upper Canada Treaties.

Across the province, the Lands we study, work, and live on as a part of our post-secondary communities all have rich histories of Indigenous livelihood and tradition that predate European settlements. The impacts of colonization are prevalent and have permeated throughout the sector from teaching pedagogies to commemorative statues.

Recently, a significant change in Ontario's post-secondary decolonization efforts was the renaming of Ryerson University to Toronto Metropolitan University. The previous namesake, Egerton Ryerson, was a key figure in the development of the residential school system that inflicted cultural genocide and years of inter-generational trauma upon Indigenous communities. In his work to reform the Canadian education system, Ryerson wrote about the "benefits" of segregating Indigenous children, assimilating them into Euro-colonial culture, and converting them to Christianity.[1] Consequently, he was recruited to design residential school operations, where he proposed religious education as a means to "integrate" Indigenous children into Euro-colonial society.[2] Ryerson's recommendations shaped the residential school system that tore families apart, prevented inter-generational cultural transmission, and catalyzed the harmful effects felt by Indigenous communities for generations to come.

The rebrand to Toronto Metropolitan University indicates a shifting mindset within the sector when taking action on decolonization and Indigenization. The momentum from this move must continue if institutions are truly and genuinely committed to Indigenous liberation.[3] The renaming of an institution, while a small step, serves as impetus for wider, far-reaching change within the sector that can be actively felt by Indigenous members of campuses. However, this work must be done with careful intention, and be mindful that settlers have constantly extracted emotional labour from Indigenous communities. And so, as post-secondary institutions look to decolonize their campuses, it is critical that meaningful and equitable consultations are held that hold space for emotion, healing, and accountability.

Thus, when we acknowledge this Land, especially in the post-secondary sphere, we acknowledge that our institutions prioritize the celebration of Euro-colonial legacies and figures over the reparation and healing process for Indigenous communities. We acknowledge that the Land our institutions operate and profit off of is at the cultural, emotional, spiritual, psychological, and financial expense of Indigenous populations.

We also acknowledge that the activism to Indigenize our post-secondary spaces has been championed and strongly carried by Indigenous students and community partners/leaders. As Indigenous Peoples reclaim their culture and restore their communities, the work that has been poured into decolonization on campuses by these activists should not go unnoticed. Indigenous students and community members continue to call settlers to action, rightfully so, as more promises and commitments are made towards Indigenous liberation.

We echo these calls of action and urge all settlers to explore their relationship to the Land in all the spaces we occupy. We must take the time and effort to educate ourselves and our peers about the histories of the Land we live, work, and study on. We should think critically about how we, as individuals, and our organizations and communities can take initiative to enact changes that make post-secondary campuses an inclusive and decolonized place for Indigenous students, faculty, and community members. As we look towards envisioning the future of post-secondary education and turn to the promises and commitments made in the name of Indigenous liberation, we must ask ourselves: where do we go from here?

1   Neil Semple, "Egerton Ryerson," The Canadian Encyclopedia, last updated May 2, 2022, https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/egerton-ryerson
2   Ibid.
3   The term "liberation" has been intentionally chosen over "reconciliation" as the latter perpetuates colonial notions of healing. Please see Andrea Landry's thread on the importance of distinguishing the two terms: https://twitter.com/andrealandry1/status/1564267021877276678?s=21

Educated Solutions

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Minister's Foreword

I want to thank the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance (OUSA) for the opportunity to address your members in this year's *Educated Solutions*. I am delighted to have been re-appointed Ontario's Minister of Colleges and Universities, as it allows me to continue to work with your organization as the government works to implement the plan to rebuild our province's economy through strengthening our postsecondary education sector.

Our goal is to bring quality jobs back to Ontario – and that starts with ensuring you, and all students, are equipped with the skills you need to fill those jobs. Today's employers are looking for graduates who not only have a strong academic background, but also hands on work experience. I am confident you will learn those in-demand qualities at our postsecondary institutions.

Ontario's postsecondary institutions play a key role in preparing students for the challenges of a rapidly changing world. Students of today will be the nurses, playwrights, engineers, medical researchers, and creative entrepreneurs of tomorrow.

In the months ahead, I look forward to working with all our partners in the postsecondary education sector to ensure our students get the skills they need to pursue a rewarding career. I want to end by wishing all students, both new and those returning to campus, a very successful, safe and happy school year!

Jill Dunlop, Minister of Colleges and Universities

Jill Dunlop has been the member of provincial parliament for Simcoe North since 2018. Born and raised in the Town of Coldwater in Simcoe North, Jill witnessed the importance of community and small local businesses early on as her grandparents owned and operated Dunlop Plumbing, and her parents were actively engaged community members.

Prior to being elected, Jill attended Western University, and later joined the faculty of Georgian College. She is also the mother of three postsecondary aged daughters, all giving her unique insights into the world of higher education. In 2019, Jill was appointed Associate Minister of Children and Women's Issues in the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services. In 2021, she was appointed Minister of Colleges and Universities, and was re-appointed to the post in June 2022.

Editor's Note

Over the past few years, the post-secondary sector has undergone multiple changes that have questioned the strategic vision that governments, stakeholders, institutions, faculty, and students wish to see for their campuses and communities. A global pandemic and increased student activism on various issues have catapulted discussions about post-secondary in ways that reimagine what classrooms and campus cultures could look like. In the pursuit of making a more accessible, affordable, accountable, high quality education system in Ontario, these conversations are necessary to enhance the student experience in the coming years.

That's why, for this 16th edition of *Educated Solutions,* our contributors explore what the future of post-secondary entails. Indubitably, the world has changed over the past couple of years, and the ways in which institutions are preparing and supporting students must also change. Given that the post-secondary experience is multi-faceted, the changes needed are spread across all areas of post-secondary. Equipping students with in-demand market skills, strengthening student financial aid, and expanding French-language programming are a few examples of measures that can be taken to help shape the future of post-secondary with post-graduation implications. However, critical issues that affect students in-study like sexual and gender-based violence, student healthcare, and mental health services, deserve equally substantial attention as we think about the direction of post-secondary education in Ontario.

These issues, plus more, are among the topics our contributors write about in this year's edition. We are extremely grateful for their perspectives and insights about the trajectory of post-secondary in the province, and for their thoughtful remarks to answer the question, "Where do we go from here?"

We are also very appreciative of all the work that our authors do for Ontario's post-secondary sector. Your continued commitment to improving higher education is valued, and we look forward to continuing to work with you to better the experiences of students across the province.

Malika Dhanani (she/her)
Research and Policy Analyst
Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance

President's Note

Slowly but surely, the world is transitioning into a new era of the pandemic. Society was pushed to reinvent the ways we work, learn, and connect with others. The post-secondary education sector is no different; the last two years saw students and instructors work together to adapt to the online learning environment, advocate for continued high quality education, and foster meaningful connections outside of the physical classroom.

The pandemic showed me that we have the ability to grow in the ways we learn and teach. Prior to March 2020, if you told me that I would graduate with nearly half of my courses taken online, I would not have believed it. I also wouldn't have known about the benefits of hybrid learning, the accommodation measures that can be implemented to increase accessibility, the option to receive healthcare and mental health care remotely, or, most importantly, the power of collective action beyond physical boundaries.

Despite the shift online, students mobilized across Ontario to continue advocating for a high quality, accessible, and affordable post-secondary education experience in the form of student financial aid, efforts against gender-based violence, career readiness, and so much more. This year's publication of *Educated Solutions* discusses the future of post-secondary education, highlighting the invaluable lessons we've learned throughout the last few years and the many perspectives of sector stakeholders and students across Ontario. These pieces are beyond empowering and provide a glimpse at what stakeholders and students ultimately seek from the post-secondary sector in the future.

As institutions seek to reimagine campus environments in the coming years, it is our hope that the insights provided from this year's contributors are considered and valued as priorities that will shape the future of post-secondary education. As such, these lessons will ideally shape the strategic vision of the sector and, ultimately, provide students with the most comprehensive and fulfilling post-secondary experience.

Jessica Look (she/her)
Vice President External Affairs
University Students' Council
Western University

POSSIBILITY SEEDS

Addressing and Preventing Campus Sexual Violence: 10 Recommendations for Post-Secondary Institutions and the Ontario Government

Anoodth Naushan (she/her), Farrah Khan (she/her), Britney De Costa (she/her)

POSSIBILITY SEEDS is a leading social change consultancy dedicated to gender justice, equity, human rights and inclusion. Possibility Seeds leads the Courage to Act project, a multi-year national initiative to address and prevent gender-based violence (GBV) at post-secondary institutions (PSIs) in Canada.[1]

Introduction

Decades of tireless activism by survivors, student leaders, community organizers, frontline workers, researchers, and unions have brought issues of sexual violence at post-secondary institutions (PSIs) to the fore. This year alone, we witnessed large student walkouts across the country with demands for safer campuses, tailored action plans, comprehensive standalone sexual violence policies, and institutional accountability, among others.[2]

Unfortunately, institutions and all levels of government have become marooned in a cycle of crisis response. The nature of these crises mean that responses tend to be short-term, reactive, and rooted in fear and risk mitigation, often exacerbating the issue. Institutional accountability is needed to address the full scope of campus sexual violence. This must be accompanied by evidence-based sustainable long-term action that addresses policy, procedures, prevention and data collection, and includes meaningful collaboration between all levels of government, PSIs, survivor advocates, grassroots movements, and community organizations.[3]

Prevalence and Severity of Campus Sexual Violence Against Students

Sexual violence is an epidemic on Canadian campuses:

- In 2019, 71% of students witnessed or experienced unwanted sexualized behaviours in a post-secondary setting.[4]

- In 2014, 41% of all self-reported incidents of sexual assault were reported by students, 90% of which were reported by women.[5]

- In 2019, 1 in 10 students who were women were sexually assaulted in a post-secondary setting.[6]

- In 2019, gay, lesbian, and bisexual students reported being subjected to discrimination based on gender, gender identity or sexual orientation at 2 times the rate of heterosexual students. Transgender students (40%) also reported disproportionate rates of this type of discrimination compared to cisgender students (17%).[7]

- In 2019, 80% of women and 86% of men who had experienced unwanted sexualized behaviours stated that the person who had harmed them was a fellow student.[8]

Sexual violence on campus will not be eradicated if we do not have appropriate intervention and prevention mechanisms in place, if we ignore the social structures that underpin the perpetration of sexual violence, and if we continue to treat it as an inevitable part of the student experience.

Calls to Action for All Stakeholders

1. Adopt an Intersectional Lens in Addressing Campus Sexual Violence

Addressing the intersections of sexual violence and other forms of systemic oppression like racism, misogyny, ableism, classism, homophobia, and transphobia is critical to building more nuanced conversations and impactful interventions. An individual's social location impacts the sexual violence support services they can access, if they are believed and how they are treated within their campus and broader community.[9]

Black students and Indigenous students are especially impacted by this. Black students are regularly criminalized, overpoliced, and pushed out of PSIs for speaking out against anti-Black racism and sexual violence, and do not have access to appropriate programming and services.[10] PSIs must update their Action Plans to address the needs of Black students and the impact of anti-Black racism on students' safety, including freedom from sexual violence.

Additionally, there is no end to sexual violence on campuses without addressing the impacts of settler colonialism. The Ontario government and PSIs must work with Indigenous communities to implement the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action and the over 230 Calls for Justice in *Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.*[11]

2. Endorse Comprehensive Consent Education in Schools and a National Consent Awareness Week

Many students enter the post-secondary space with prior experience(s) of sexual violence, with 47% of sexual assault incidents committed against young women aged 15 to 24.[12] Moreover, those who experienced sexual abuse as children report sexual and physical assault later in life at rates three times higher than those who did not experience childhood sexual abuse.[13] These statistics underscore the need for conversations about sexual violence and consent even before students arrive on campus.

Currently, only 28% of Canadians fully understand consent.[14] We must support comprehensive education on consent and sexual violence for K–12 students, regardless of whether they participate in a health class. Intersectional, affirming and age-appropriate conversations must start in elementary school, and be sustained all the way through secondary school.[15]

Possibility Seeds is working with key stakeholders from across the country to establish a national Consent Awareness Week during the third week of September, chosen specifically because the first six weeks of school are the Red Zone when there is a significant increase in sexual violence. This week is an important opportunity to reflect, champion, and celebrate consent as a cornerstone of all relationships, not just intimate ones. Consent Awareness Week is meant to engage the whole community and it is our collective hope that all school boards, PSIs and governments will endorse an annual Consent Awareness Week, making Canada

the first country in the world to commemorate a week to ensure that everyone feels respected and safe wherever they live, work, study, and play.

Calls to Action for Post-Secondary Institutions

> **3.** Implement Sustainable Well-Resourced Campus-Wide Education Plans

Prevention education is critical in addressing campus sexual violence. However, it is often deprioritized as PSIs focus on crisis response. Presently, only five of the seven provinces across Canada (British Columbia, Alberta, Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia, and PEI) that legislate or require PSIs to have standalone policies that address sexual violence and harassment include a provision on sexual violence prevention education; and these provisions are limited, broad and confusing.

Prevention education needs to be ongoing, adaptable and consider the lived experiences of campus community members, delivered through multiple programs, tools, pedagogical approaches, and techniques. Students, faculty and staff should be exposed to consistent prevention education, developmentally sequenced both in method of delivery and content.

Broadly speaking, PSIs should also:

- Instate campus-wide curricula, role-specific training, education task force, and a comprehensive campus action plan informed by all campus stakeholders, especially students.

- Support cross-campus collaboration on education programming, including e-learning, professional development, and training.

- Develop comprehensive programming for those who have caused harm, and create more options for survivors, including but not limited to restorative justice programs.

- Explore minimum standards for education on campuses regarding sexual violence

with key stakeholders like the Council of Ontario Universities, and College and Institutes Canada.

> **4.** Apply Trauma-Informed Practices, Procedural Fairness and Harm Reduction Principles to All Sexual Violence Complaint Processes

Making a complaint can be retraumatizing for survivors, especially when the complaints process does not meet the foundational standards of procedural fairness, trauma-informed practice, and harm reduction. While PSIs are typically aware of the need for procedural fairness for respondents to a complaint, they rarely apply the same rights to survivors, and there is a misconception that procedural fairness and trauma-informed practice exist in opposition or tension to each other. In reality, when applied to both parties – and complemented with harm reduction measures – procedural fairness and trauma-informed practice work together to create a stronger, more humane process.

TRAUMA-INFORMED PRACTICE

PROCEDURAL FAIRNESS

HARM REDUCTION

HUMAN RIGHTS AND EQUITY
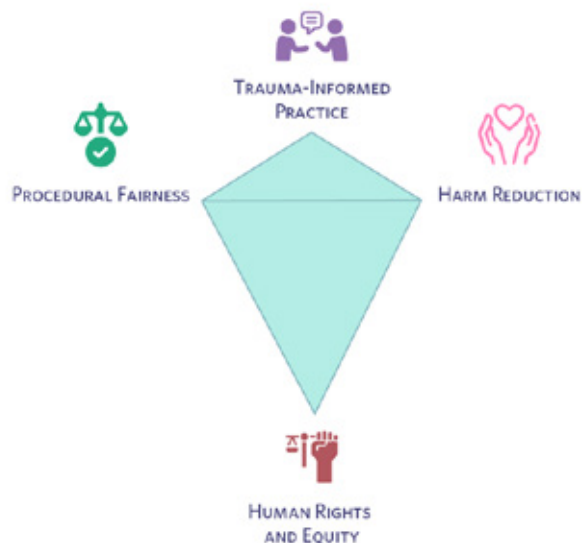
Additionally, post-secondary institutions need to offer equally valid non-adjudicative options for justice and accountability to truly honour the principles of trauma-informed practice and harm reduction. Bureaucratic processes with punitive outcomes should not be considered universally appropriate or safe, given the harms inherent in these processes and their role as reproductive power structures.

5. Center Survivor Voices in Institutional Policymaking in Meaningful Ways

As PSIs move towards institutionalizing their responses to sexual violence, it is essential that they draw upon the experience and expertise of students and survivors by centering them in decision-making and protecting them from retaliation. In provinces with legislation or regulatory measures to address sexual violence, post-secondary institutions have a wide range of requirements, such as having working groups that oversee the implementation of legislative requirements for policy development, regular review, and reporting processes. While not all provincial legislation or regulatory measures include such a requirement, institutions must still ensure meaningful student engagement, providing accessible channels to give feedback and input.[16]

Calls to Action for the Ontario Government

6. Establish Guidelines for a New, Recurring and Trauma-Informed Campus Sexual Violence Climate Survey

Campus sexual violence climate surveys are important tools to understand the prevalence, conditions, and student experiences of sexual violence, as well as the effectiveness of institutional responses to take action against it and establish improved supports for survivors. Ontario is one of the only provinces to conduct such a survey region-wide, but there are notable areas of improvement for the next iteration.

The new climate survey ought to be administered every three years to align with Ministry requirements to review sexual violence policies. Each in-

stitution should also convene a task force to address critical issues that emerge from this data. The climate survey could build off other evidence-based survey instruments like MacEwan University's climate survey tool and be informed by policy papers like OUSA's Gender-based & Sexual Violence Prevention & Response paper.[17] In addition to questions about sexual violence on campus, it ought to include:

- *Intimate partner violence:* More than half (52%) of all sexual assaults are committed by a survivor's friend, acquaintance, or neighbour.[18] The absence of questions about intimate partner violence obscures a significant aspect of gender-based violence, limiting the efficacy of interventions developed in response to survey findings.

- *Adverse Childhood Experiences* (ACEs): Several studies demonstrate relationships between ACEs, including gender-based violence and future violence victimization and perpetration.

- *Trust in provincial law and policy on sexual violence*: This question will allow for a more fulsome understanding of student's attitudes towards their campus policies and the local laws/policies about sexual violence.

7. Create a Provincial Charter to Address and Prevent Sexual Violence at PSIs in Ontario

A provincial charter to address and prevent sexual violence at PSIs would generate broader cultural change and support PSIs in their commitment to providing a healthy, safe and empowering educational environment. A provincial charter would also provide a blueprint for other provinces and territories as they work to mandate stand-alone sexual violence policies at their respective post-secondary institutions.

The Okanagan Charter (2015) is a promising practice upon which a provincial charter can be modeled.[19] The Charter is an international instrument for the advancement of health and wellbeing-related best practices and initiatives at PSIs. It provides institutions with a common language, principles, a framework, and calls to action. The Charter also

sets out required steps for its adoption by a PSI and requires that signing institutions set out how they will implement the Okanagan Charter in their environments.

8. Strengthen Ontario's Provincial Legislative and Regulatory Framework to Address Sexual Violence on Campus

Minimum standards are a growing request nationally, especially from student leaders and create an opportunity to build trust with all stakeholders, including respondents and complainants. These standards could be based on existing legislation requirements and PSI sexual violence policies, and would form the foundation for a legislative and regulatory framework to address sexual violence on campus.

While some PSIs have sexual violence prevention legislation, there is currently no legislative or regulatory framework governing *prevention education*, creating large gaps and discrepancies across the province. In Ontario, the lack of a strong regulatory framework, coupled with serious underfunding, has resulted in students and student unions disproportionately carrying the burden of prevention education, which should, at a minimum, be a shared responsibility between students and administration. The provincial government must lay the foundation for effective, meaningful prevention education by building a robust legislative and regulatory landscape built from student and community input.

It is also important that the Ontario government strengthens legislation on *responding to* sexual violence at post-secondary institutions. This is a necessary complement to prevention legislation because it will help to address discrepancies across institutions and support a comprehensive approach to addressing sexual violence at post-secondary institutions.

Legislation must include guidance for institutions to:

- Develop mandatory sexual violence policies with students and community input that meets a set of minimum standards;
- Build robust funding plans for addressing

sexual violence from adequately funded response offices to student campaigns and education programs;

- Mandate a committee with adequate student representation at every PSI that oversees the implementation of the legislation;[20]
- Address sexual violence in experiential learning opportunities by implementing legislative and regulatory recommendations collaboratively developed by students; experiential learning professionals, faculty, and staff; and sexual violence experts.[21]

9. Ensure Consistent Annual Reporting about Sexual Violence

The Ontario government must set minimum standards for province-wide data collection on reporting sexual violence to ensure that each campus collects consistent data. Currently, reports vary amongst institutions. Consistent data will help us tell a cohesive story, and better understand the scope of sexual violence and the effectiveness of interventions.

The government must also facilitate annual information sharing between PSIs on sexual violence response, support, and education to allow information to be made quickly available for advocacy and media relations, as well as provide an overarching understanding of the work being done on each campus.

10. Ensure Sustainable Funding for PSI Sexual Assault Services and Community Sexual Assault Centres

Campus sexual violence support offices and community sexual violence support centres are critical for survivors to access support, and require dedicated sustainable funding to support staffing, service delivery and data collection.

A multi-year funding commitment with performance evaluations on PSI programming would help alleviate some of the burden that has been displaced onto students, allow for long-term planning, and increase the effectiveness of anti-sexual violence programs at PSIs. This funding should

be given directly to offices dedicated to addressing sexual violence and have clear terms of reference for funding use. The Ontario government must also support the Ontario Universities Sexual Violence Network, a provincial network of every university campus' sexual violence centres.

Community services that work with people that have caused harm are also vital in supporting safer campuses. Unfortunately, many within the sector have named that they are stretched thin with limited resources. It is critical that these services receive long-term sustainable support and funding from the Ontario government.

Conclusion

PSIs and the Ontario government can strengthen their commitment to addressing the epidemic of campus sexual violence with concrete action. The recommendations laid out in this article are a call to action, and an important reminder that we all have a role in ending campus sexual violence. Sexual violence does not need to be a part of the student experience.

Farrah Khan (she/her), Possibility Seeds CEO & Courage to Act Executive Director

Anoodth Naushan (she/her), Courage to Act Project Director

Britney De Costa (she/her), Courage to Act RIA Co-Lead & Experiential Learning Project Lead

CANADIAN ALLIANCE OF STUDENT ASSOCIATIONS (CASA)

Hanging by a Thread: Ontario's Student Financial Aid System

Trevor Potts (he/him), Esha Mahmood (she/her)

Background

The Canadian student financial aid system largely operates as a joint-venture shared by both federal and provincial governments. The federal government operates its own national program, called the Canada Student Financial Assistance (CSFA) program, while each province or territory has its own student aid program. Nine provinces and one territory operate their programs in tandem with its federal counterpart, with the exception of Quebec, Nunavut and the Northwest Territories, who have opted out and instead receive compensation which they use to fund their own autonomous programs.[22]

Ontario, like many other provinces, operates its student financial aid system in a joint-funding model together with the federal government.[23] Through this model, the province manages the distribution of funds through the Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP); OSAP is funded through provincial contributions, as well as those from the federal government's national program, the CSFA, which includes both the Canada Student Grants (CSG) program and Canada Student Loans program (CSLP).[24]

Currently, these programs work together to provide students with a mix of repayable loans and non-repayable grants in order to fund their post-secondary education, with the federal government contributing approximately 60% of funding, and the province 40%.[25] The calculations that determine the amount of each that a student will receive is decided by multiple factors, which include students' tuition and living costs, mandatory fees, and family income.[26] In the most recent year of available data, 441,000 (of a total of 864,834) post-secondary students in Ontario accessed OSAP, totalling to approximately $1.7 billion in OSAP funding distributed.[27]

Changes to OSAP

In recent years, changes to the Ontario student financial aid system have caused a considerable level of uncertainty and instability for the future of Ontario post-secondary education.[28] At first in January 2019, the Ontario government announced a series of changes to student financial aid for the following academic year, eliminating flexible funding options such as the targeted-free tuition (TFT) program in favour of a 10% tuition cut.[29] Additionally, the province made significant revisions to reduce OSAP expenditures, including increasing expected spousal and parental contributions, revis-iting the definition of an independent student, and eliminating the interest-free grace period. and implementing a 33% cut to its total OSAP budget, removing a total of $400 million in funding. Shortly after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in April 2020, the federal government announced it would increase funding towards all provincial programs, including OSAP, by doubling CSG; in response, the Ontario government implemented a 33% cut to its total OSAP budget as a cost-savings mechanism, removing a total of $400 million in funding.[30] These changes resulted in a net zero increase for Ontario students' financial aid, as the province instead supplemented its reduced investment in OSAP with federal funds, as shown below.[31]

Figure 1: Proportion of Federal and Provincial OSAP Funding after Doubling of CSG in 2020-21
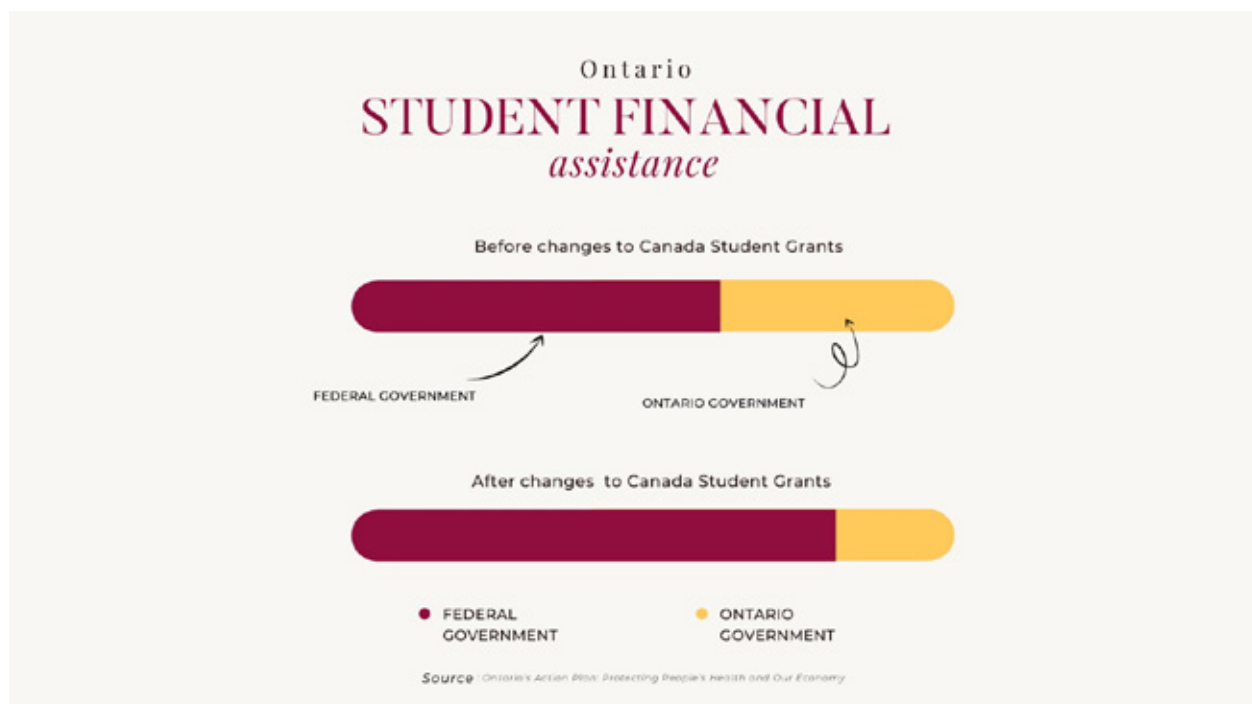
In late 2021, while there was promise of a return to 2019-20 levels of OSAP funding, the 2022 budget revealed that the province continued to underspend in student financial assistance and have continued the clawbacks.[32] Ontario post-secondary student financial aid remains critically underfunded, and as a whole, is heavily reliant on federal funding.[33] Most recently in the 2022 provincial budget, the Ontario government indicated that it plans to continue this trend across the sector, showing a $685 million drop in the amount of post-secondary funding spent in 2021-22.[34] This overreliance on federal funding to supplement OSAP will soon prove a serious challenge for Ontario post-secondary education, as the federal government's doubled CSG investments are set to expire in July 2023.[35]

Rise in Student Debt, Borrowing

These recent changes to the Ontario student financial aid system have also had direct impacts on post-secondary student outcomes. To help supplement gaps in student financial aid, students in Ontario have increasingly turned to alternative sources of funding. In 2022, nearly half of all post-secondary education was funded through a combination of students' personal and parental savings – up 8 percentage points from 2021.[36] Students also reported an increasing reliance on loans and employment income to fund their post-secondary education in 2022.[37]

While overall the amount of student financial aid has nearly tripled in the past 25 years, and the Canadian student financial aid system is less loan-based than in previous decades, it is important to note the alarming rate of increased student lending, up 24% since 2018.[38] For students, lending is not simply replacing types of non-repayable assistance (e.g. grants), but instead supplementing it, which has led to a 15% increase in the number of student borrowers of loan-based financial aid.[39]

Besides turning to personal sources of income and loans, Ontario post-secondary students, particularly those from low- and middle-income families, have increasingly turned to OSAP to provide a significant portion of their student financial aid. In the most recent year with available data, for 2017-18, 79% of students who received OSAP were from low- and middle-income families.[40] With 864,834 students attending post-secondary institutions in Ontario, this represented approximately 40.3% of all students who accessed OSAP.[41]

Finally, given the significant proportion of students accessing repayable loans, student debt continues to steadily impact a substantial portion of the Ontario student population. Between 40-45% of university students graduate with various levels of government debt, with the average Ontario debt level sitting at approximately $30,000 for university graduates.[42] Numerous recent studies have demonstrated that student debt has a substantial negative impact on student mental health and well-being, academic performance, career choice, and long-term financial health.[43]

Increase in Financial Pressures, Tuition

Gaps in the Ontario student financial aid system and increasing rates of student debt have further been impacted by shifting financial pressures. In Ontario, students face an average annual cost of living of $25,552, which has continued to rise significantly over the past year.[44] Student monthly expenses continue to grow, as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Estimated Monthly Student Expenses[45]

Monthly Expenses	Amount ($)
Monthly Tuition & Fees*	962.5
Monthly Housing & Utilities	795
Monthly Food	280
Monthly Textbooks & Course Supplies*	125
Monthly Transportation	143

Furthermore, unprecedented new financial costs are negatively impacting students. The Consumer Price Index (CPI) has risen a record 7.7% since last year, making it the highest annual increase since 1983 and the highest inflation rate seen in Canada since 1991.[46] In Ontario, inflation skyrocketed to 6.9 percent in May 2022, continuing to inflame all student expenses, including food, shelter, clothing, transportation, and healthcare.[47]

Lastly, post-secondary tuition in Canada has continued to consistently climb, rising over 400 percent in the past 30 years to a current average cost of $7,938 per year.[48]

As it stands, Ontario has the highest tuition in Canada.[49] With tuition and other living costs increasing at an ongoing alarming rate in 2022, as well as a strong student reliance on both OSAP funding and student borrowing to fund education, these trends will present significant problems for post-secondary education in Ontario in the coming years. Despite these challenges, there are impactful steps that can be taken by both the federal government and the province of Ontario to better achieve CASA's vision of an accessible, affordable, high quality post-secondary education system.

Figure 3: CPI Increase Among Various Components Between April to May 2022[50]
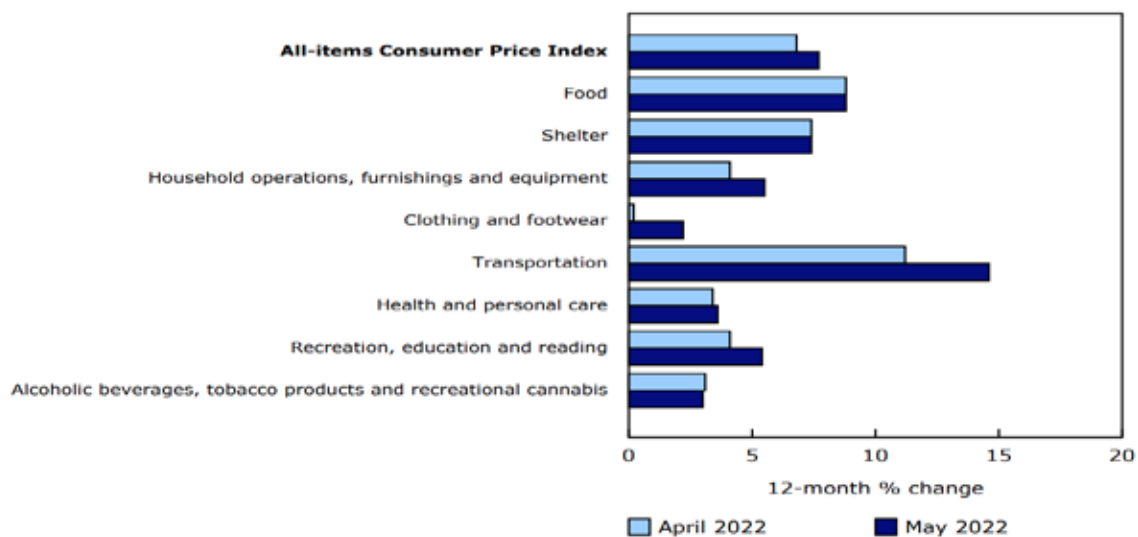
Source(s): Table 18-10-0004-01.

Recommendations

First, to alleviate some of these challenges, the Ontario government can encourage several initiatives. The provincial government should move to eliminate the requirement of income-based parental contributions on all OSAP loans. The Alberta student financial aid system, under the Alberta Student Aid (ASA) program, currently does not require these parental contributions on any provincial loans, which subsequently has allowed more students access to post-secondary funding.[51] Alberta has also invested more heavily in funding the ASA program,

currently funding 55% of all loans accessed by students, which is significantly higher than the national average (33%).[52]

To support the intensification of student debt and borrowing, particularly among low- and middle-income students, the province should move to reinstall a targeted free tuition (TFT) program. In 2014, New Brunswick moved to eliminate its tax credit system (designed to refund tuition fees to graduates for staying in the province) and instead re-invested these funds into a TFT program. This enabled the province to raise a much higher proportion of needs-based grants in the long term, as shown in Figure 4.[53]

Figure 4: Indexed Change in Total Real Provincial Loans and Grants Disbursed, New Brunswick vs. Other 9 Provinces, 2011–12 to 2019–20 (2011–12 = 100)[54]
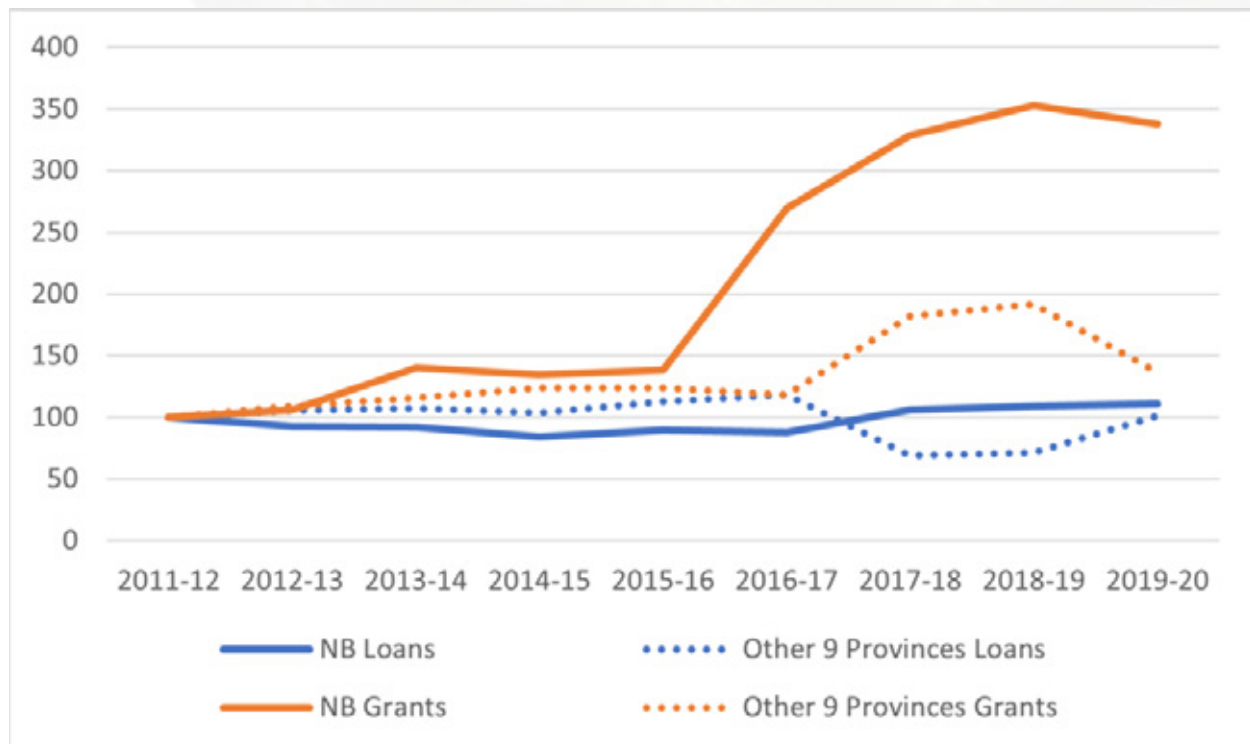
Conversely, to help improve existing federal student financial aid policies, there are also steps that the Government of Canada can take.

The needs of post-secondary students in Ontario have changed dramatically in recent years, and the federal government has a responsibility to ensure that its programs are student-centric. To improve the effectiveness of the CSLP, the federal government should first adjust the allowable costs assessment criteria for single independent students to include accommodation costs at the market value of a single occupancy rental apartment. Second, in order to better reflect the financial timelines imposed on students by post-secondary institutions, the federal government should change the disbursement date of financial aid to be prior to the commencement of courses. Third, the federal government should increase the grace period for the Repayment Assistance Program (RAP) from 6 to 24 months, which has been shown to better allow students to alleviate student debt.[55] Additionally, to better match the changing financial needs of students, the federal government should transform remaining tax credits to upfront needs-based grants, as well as introduce a CPI index-matched component to CSG program grants.

To better address the needs of underrepresented students, the federal government should broaden its criteria for CSLP so that all students with accessibility concerns can have access to the supports they need to attend PSE, including broadening the definition of disability to mirror the *Proposed Accessible Canada Act* which recognizes the episodic nature of disabilities, and following the Ontario Human Rights Commission's call to eliminate the requirement of a formal diagnosis on the basis that a disclosure is a human rights concern.

Lastly, in order to safeguard the long-term efficacy and sustainability of student financial aid in Ontario, the federal government should perform a thorough review of its student financial aid programs, including the CSG and CSLP, to examine their adequacy and effectiveness. Furthermore, the federal government should further commit to extending and increasing investments into student financial aid, particularly through CSG.

Ultimately, both the federal government and the province of Ontario have a responsibility to ensure that the student financial aid system in Ontario is effectively impacting those who need assistance the most: post-secondary students.

Summary Conclusion

Under the government of Ontario's joint-funding model for student financial aid, there has been an increasing reliance on federal funding in order to uphold OSAP. The onset of the pandemic prompted the federal government to invest more money into student financial aid, and consequently, the province of Ontario clawed back millions of dollars of contributions, exacerbating the effects of previously enacted modifications to OSAP including increasing parental and spousal contributions, redefining an independent student's status, and general cuts to OSAP's provincial funding.[56] The subsequent rise in student debt and borrowing, increased economic and financial pressures, and overreliance of OSAP on federal funding has strongly impacted post-secondary education system in Ontario. With federal funding set to expire next July 2023, the Ontario post-secondary system will be in dire straits, particularly for low- and middle-income students.[57] However, there are significant, actionable steps that both the provincial and federal governments can make that will safeguard the vision of Ontario post-secondary education for generations to come.

Trevor Potts (he/him) works as the Policy and Research Analyst for the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations (CASA), the federal national voice for Canada's post-secondary students.

Esha Mahmood (she/her/hers) is a 4th year UBC International Relations student and Summer Research Intern at the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations (CASA).

The Future of Student Accessibility in a Post-Pandemic World

Kayla Han (she/her)

In March 2020, people all over the globe were forced into digital spaces to complete daily tasks and responsibilities online. As a result, the academic experience became more technology-dependent and the impact of the pandemic has created avenues and opportunities to increase student accessibility that have not yet been explored. The way the world has transitioned has highlighted accommodations for differently abled students. Often these students were left behind and had to fight for the appropriate accommodations that best fit their learning needs, including flexible deadlines or recorded lectures.[58] Students with physical accommodation needs may also have difficulty receiving what's required to address their lingering health risks. Students with learning disabilities have found that the pandemic has been able to introduce accommodations that fits their needs and helps excel in their learning.[59] Therefore, the ways in which post-secondary students are able to navigate accessibility while utilizing digital resources and tools warrants further considerations by governments,

institutions, and stakeholders.

The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the resilience of post-secondary students and institutions, but has also identified clear gaps in academic delivery. The Government of Ontario's Post-Secondary Education Standards Development Committee has outlined further recommendations under the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act*, which has highlighted barriers that inhibit equitable access to assessments, curriculum, and instruction.[60] As pandemic restrictions continue to be loosened and fully in-person classes are re-introduced, there are a few takeaways from remote learning at the post-secondary level that can be adapted to ensure the continued success of all abled and differently abled university students in a post-pandemic world.

Alternative Examination Methods

The pandemic shifted how traditional examinations measure students' learning, one of which was how students were examined and proctored. At Wilfrid Laurier University in Waterloo, students in certain faculties were required to install Respondus Lockdown Browser and Monitor in order to complete their examinations, which incorporated a camera recording of the student while they completed the test. Students were instructed to give a 365-degree scan of their environment that they were writing the exam in, including the desktop. Specifically, students in the Faculty of Math publicly released a five-page document of instructions that they were required to follow during examinations to avoid academic misconduct.[61] This included rules prohibiting bathroom access during the allotted time frame and the requirement to use an external mouse to take the exam. The intrusiveness of the tools used for academic conduct brought stress and anxiety for many students on the Laurier campus.[62]

Institutionally, the Lockdown Browser and recording are used to secure academic integrity. However, throughout the pandemic, alternative formats of test-taking have proven to also be effective in exemplifying students' learning during the pandemic. The Faculty of Law at the University of Cambridge conducted online essay-style open-book exams. Other universities including the University College London have also adopted alternative assessments including 24-hour open book exams and long-term assignments.[63] Examinations in the form of take-home exams were implemented to replace proctored exams. Embedding flexibility throughout the entire curriculum was another method to assess students' learning throughout the pandemic. Some classes have adapted more project-centered methods and have a higher emphasis on collaborative action. At the Vancouver Community College, the Alternative Assessment Toolkit was developed to support students with remote learning during the pandemic.[64] The Toolkit was structured to have instructors choose their own teaching adventure and incorporate their own knowledge and relevant teaching goals to assess academic integrity. Throughout the pandemic, faculty has exemplified that there are varying types of assessments that would cater to various learning styles for student rather than traditional test-taking examinations.

Accommodations for Different Environments

The pandemic has exemplified how our living and learning environments are critical for student success. Students were no longer permitted on campuses across the country and many were forced to go home, which can be inconducive to learning because of varying circumstances. Geographic location has a sometimes overlooked impact on student academic pursuits as those studying outside of urban or central metropolitan areas often lack the necessary infrastructure such as affordable and reliable high-speed internet. According to the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission, approximately 55% of rural Canada has internet coverage and 44% of northern Canada.[65] This shows that over a million Canadians do not have proper internet services in their own home. This problem has been brought to the federal and provincial governments, with joint investments being made to achieve 100% connectivity in the province by the end of 2025.[66] This issue has also impacted international students who may have returned back to their home country without proper internet access and devices to engage and participate in their classes throughout the pandemic.

Home-learning environments also result in less autonomy or study time when living with family members or peers. Due to the competing priorities of home environments, post-secondary students must deal with multiple distractions and responsibilities that may not be present while living away. Various strategies can be employed to accommodate these external responsibilities, like class lectures being recorded on Zoom for students to revisit when convenient for them to learn. Lectures can also be transcribed and provided to students who request accommodations. However, instituting these accommodations has presented challenges in several universities, including the University of Toronto Faculty of Law program.[67] The program dismissed disability accommodation requests, for which the faculty has received backlash. Students at the institution have vocalized that accommodations for remote learning or missed classes has been a continuously growing issue; however, the university has not provided adequate explanation for the lack of support for the accommodations.

As mentioned, home-learning environments con-

tain distractions and competing priorities that reduce the focus needed for learning. However, some students' home-learning environment can actually be more conducive to learning. We must consider how remote learning and studying has also been proven to be helpful for students who wish to continue studying remotely. Students from McMaster University have advocated to keep remote learning for students and faculties with disabilities. Some McMaster students have expressed that they would rather be in a learning environment that is safe for them and that prevents disadvantages within their environment when they return to the classroom.[68] Hybrid options of having students attend classes in-person and remotely has provided students with opportunities to be flexible within their own learning and provides a promising option that best suit their needs to increase accessibility to post-secondary education going forward.

Exhibiting Empathy in Stressful Times

The pandemic has ultimately impacted everyone in a different way, making it difficult to succeed in academic work. As a result, some post-secondary institutions have considered the credit option for students while facing such disruption. The credit option would allow students to complete course work without receiving a quantitative grade, but rather an indication of a pass or fail grade, which would not affect grade point averages for the students' transcript. The University of Guelph, Wilfrid Laurier University, and the University of Toronto were among the few universities that adopted the credit model during the pandemic to relieve the stress of many students within their respective institutions. The credit model also presents unknown challenges and trade-offs, as a credit grade rather than a numerical grade can hinder students' acceptances into certain programs at the graduate level. Credit grades can also be a barrier to employment if companies or internal organizations would like to view transcripts prior to hiring.

During the pandemic, traditional methods of teaching were also altered to accommodate students in a stressful academic time, and instructors have become more lenient with grading and attendance. The stories that have emerged from the pandemic demonstrate how trust can build between students and instructors since everyone has been experiencing the pandemic together and may have shared struggles. Faculty staff will have many shoes to fill

between acting as a motivator and a teacher to enable student success. Building a positive rapport with students has been critical during the pandemic when students have felt a great disconnect from their studies and their own success through online learning.[69] Hopes of graduating from university can be instilled in students, even from the first day of class, if professors can foster a relationship that encourages students to succeed in their work.[70] Curricula have been reconsidered to increase accessibility to the average online post-secondary student in which various teaching methods can still achieve the same goals. For example, the University of Waterloo has encouraged a flipped classroom model, where students engage with lecture and course work outside of class in preparation for an active engagement activity within class time, including group work.[71]

During the pandemic, despite the difficulty to connect, institutions have been able to witness connections through the online world between students and faculty. Zoom calls and virtual coffee chats have helped students innovate their own initiatives during the pandemic. At Western University, three students created Shed Red, a platform to tackle period poverty in marginalized communities that have limited access to menstrual products.[72] Another community project included Bags of Promise, an organization that helps local youth facing homelessness within the Kingston community.[73] Our university experiences are not limited to academia; they also provide us with opportunities to thrive within our communities. While navigating through the pandemic, institutions must recognize that the pandemic provided increased accessibility through flexible learning options, and that these options can be enhanced to improve the collective experience of post-secondary education.

As the world finally transitions out of the pandemic, this upcoming academic school year presents possible opportunities to apply the lessons learned from the pandemic. Students, regardless of disability or not, could all benefit from the extra support offered during the pandemic. Moving forward, institutions can continue to implement different methods that have benefited both students and faculty to be included and engaged in the learning process, while simultaneously exhibiting the empathy that strengthened campus communities in a difficult time.

Kayla Han (she/her) is the Vice President of Government and Stakeholder Relations at the Wilfrid Laurier University Students' Union and a recent graduate within Laurier's Department of Political Science.

Entering Postsecondary in a Pandemic: The Experiences of First-year Students in Ontario in 2020–21

Natalie Pilla (she/her), Dr. Jeffrey Napierala (he/him)

The transition from high school to postsecondary education (PSE) is typically a challenging time for students. But those who made this transition in the fall of 2020 were the first cohort to move to PSE during the COVID-19 pandemic; these students faced unique challenges due to emergency remote learning in both high school and postsecondary. Knowing that pandemic disruptions in high school will continue to affect entering cohorts for several years, researchers at the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO) set out to learn directly from those students who entered Ontario colleges and universities from high school in fall 2020. We surveyed 565 students from this cohort in the summer of 2021 after they completed their first year of PSE. The full research report is available on HEQCO's website.[74]

Our results found that students faced a variety of pandemic-related challenges, and experienced these challenges differently based on their demographic backgrounds and disciplines.[75] This article summarizes these challenges as well as the supports students indicated as aiding their success. It also lists the recommendations that HEQCO made to institutional leaders and the provincial government (namely, the Ministry of Colleges and Universities) in light of our research and acknowledges that many of the pandemic's impacts will be long-lasting. Recognizing that students also play a major role in ensuring PSE experiences are equitable and fulfilling, our article provides a new set of recommendations to Ontario students navigating the enduring impacts of the pandemic.

What Personal Challenges did Students Encounter?

The pandemic introduced or magnified several personal challenges outside the virtual classroom. Over half of the students surveyed reported difficulties with making new friends and maintaining

their mental health. Students also indicated that they faced physical health and financial struggles. Students from low-income backgrounds disproportionately experienced these challenges — they were three times more likely to report an illness in their family and four times more likely to report a loss of income. These findings align with other research documenting equity gaps during the pandemic.[76]
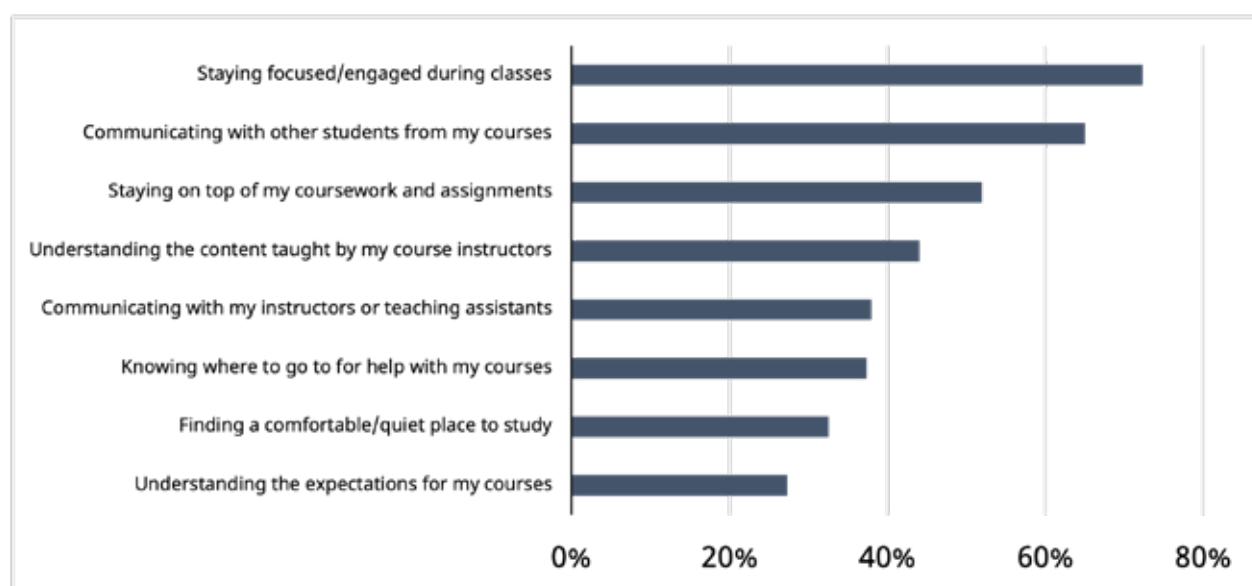
Perhaps because of these challenges, students in low-income households had different preferences about course delivery methods than those in middle- or high-income households. Students overall expressed an openness to *some* online learning after the pandemic, with over half preferring a mix of online and in-person courses, or hybrid courses that involve both online and in-person components. While students from more affluent backgrounds tended to prefer in-person classes, those from lower-income households were more likely to prefer a mix of online and in-person courses and features. With these diverse preferences in mind, we should view flexible course offerings, and the ability to choose between them, as mechanisms to increase accessibility, allowing students to balance their studies, work and family responsibilities as

needed.

What Academic Challenges did Students Encounter?

Our survey also explored academic challenges within the virtual classroom. Students emphasized concerns related to their skills and the new learning environment: about 40% identified challenges with transferrable skills, like time management and organization, which are key to success in a remote context. More than half found it difficult to stay focused or engaged during classes, to stay on top of coursework and to communicate with other students from their courses. Students also mentioned some content-related challenges. About 50% of students indicated that they did not learn the expected content for their PSE courses during high school and that they had difficulties recalling the content that was covered. Students enrolled in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) programs were more likely to report these challenges and were also more likely to report challenges with understanding course content during their first year of PSE.

Figure 1: Main Challenges to Students' Academic Success Encountered in Courses

Perhaps because of the variety of these personal and academic challenges, students overall reported a low satisfaction rate with their first-year learning experiences, which is concerning given that student satisfaction is a predictor of retention.[77] Those who reported that a fully online environment negatively affected their learning to a great or moderate extent were more likely to report low satisfaction (in other words, those who found fully remote courses challenging were also less satisfied). These students may have had gaps in the skills needed to excel in online learning and/or had gaps in their skills and knowledge due to pandemic restrictions.

What Supported Student Success?

Despite these challenges, students indicated some bright spots — positive outcomes that institutions can use to inform the future of PSE in Ontario. When asked about what features enabled their success, most students indicated that flexibility was key: having recorded lectures, open-book exams, multiple low-stakes assessments and multiple options to complete assessments were extremely or very helpful. These features align with Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles, which aim to reduce barriers and optimize learning by providing multiple means of engagement, representation and expression.[78]

Recommendations for Institutions and Students

Government and institutions must find ways to address these gaps and implement solutions that help all students succeed. Ontario should not aim to return to "normal"; we should strive to improve equity and outcomes for students navigating an ever-changing world. Considering what we heard from students in our survey, HEQCO made a series of recommendations to college and university leaders, summarized below alongside some suggestions for students to consider for themselves.

Institutions: extend options for online and hybrid learning in a post-pandemic context.

Students: consider course format (and the best ways you learn) when making course selections.

Though most of the students we surveyed felt that fully online learning negatively affected their experiences, many students, particularly those from low-income households, prefer having *some* online and hybrid courses and features. Offering students the flexibility to select course formats empowers them to make decisions that will support their unique learning needs and accommodate competing priorities. This flexibility can also improve access for equity-seeking students and ensure that students can access course content and engage with their learning in ways that work best for them.

Students in Ontario have more access to online and hybrid education options than ever before; the Ontario government and PSE institutions have made significant investments to expand the availability of online learning programs.[79] This expanded access gives students the opportunity to consider which combination of formats will serve their needs best. Students may want to consider which format will support their focus and motivation best, to what extent they want or need in-person interaction with their instructors or peers, and whether they want to access academic support and mental health support online or in-person.

As mentioned above, students from our survey indicated that recorded lectures, open-book exams, multiple low-stakes assessments, and multiple options to complete assessments were extremely or very helpful course features. These features align with UDL principles in that they reduce and remove learning barriers, support learning variability, and enable more welcoming learning environments. HEQCO recommends that institutions across Ontario adopt the UDL framework, and our survey results reaffirm the importance of this recommendation.[80] Students can also find ways to support the integration of UDL principles (for example, describing what's on your slides in a presentation) and advocate for the implementation of UDL in courses and school activities.

About half of the students we surveyed mentioned that they lacked important transferrable skills. In particular, students enrolled in STEM programs indicated that they did not cover relevant content during high school or that they did not understand or recall that content. Institutions should develop and advertise curricular and co-curricular programming intended to address these gaps. One strategy to support these students is to expand and market existing bridging programs, which can be used as an opportunity to revisit foundational concepts. Students can seek out these opportunities for skill development and content revision at their institutions to strengthen their skills and brush up on content they might have missed or not retained.

Looking Ahead

Our findings and recommendations remind us that one size does not fit all. The decisions students make about whether they continue studying, and where, may be deeply impacted by their preferences for course delivery formats, the supportiveness of their learning environments, and skill development opportunities — all of which can impact PSE students' access, satisfaction, and success. Recognizing that the results from this survey represent students' perspectives at one point in time, HEQCO also recommends that institutions utilize the student data they collect on a regular basis to monitor outcomes and identify issues as they arise. Students continued to learn in uncertain environments during the 2021-22 school year, with challenges and opportunities that may have intensified or otherwise changed.[81] Ongoing efforts to understand and address the needs of students are necessary to support their success.

As students, there may be opportunities for you to share your feedback and experiences with institutions or researchers. We encourage you to take advantage of these opportunities whenever they arise. HEQCO will continue to gather this kind of feedback and make recommendations to ensure our post-secondary system supports student success, now and in the future.

Natalie Pilla is a Researcher at the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario with over three years of experience in academic, applied and community-based settings. She has supported research focused on education, mental health, and housing. At HEQCO, she supports projects related to equity, access and student well-being in higher education.

Dr. Jeffrey Napierala is a Senior Researcher at the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario with more than 15 years of research experience in applied and academic settings. The primary focus of his research has been on measuring and understanding different forms of inequality. His work has been published in journals such as Demography and Child Indicators Research, and through non-profit organizations such as the Foundation for Child Development. At HEQCO, Jeffrey has focused on issues related to access to higher education and internationalization.

STUDENTS' GENERAL ASSOCIATION, LAURENTIAN UNIVERSITY

Protecting French-Language Rights Begins with Protecting French Post-Secondary Education

Ana Tremblay (she/her)

I grew up in the town of Kapuskasing in Northeastern Ontario. The town has a population of approximately 8,200, with around 66% of people claiming French as their first language, including myself. The region of Northeastern Ontario accounts for 4.1% of the total population, but 22.6% of the Francophone population.[82] The majority of services in Kapuskasing are offered in English and French. I can go see a doctor, a dentist, or an optician and be able to speak my first language. There are also twice as many French-language schools as there are English-language schools in the area.

When considering the impact that a shortage of French professionals has on French speakers, I think of my friends and family who cannot speak or who have a very weak grasp of English. In order to properly serve the Franco-Ontarian community, it is essential to protect French post-secondary education (PSE). Without the protection of the French PSE, Ontario's French-speaking population is in grave danger.

A report from the Ontario Ministry of Colleges and Universities demonstrated that the total number of post-secondary enrollment for students whose mother tongue is French increased by roughly 4% from 2018 to 2020.[83] However, a study using the Ontario Universities' Application Centre (OUAC) revealed that between 1998 and 2006, less than 60% of Francophone students were enrolled in French-language post-secondary programs. The Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario also released a report in 2013 that stated roughly 40% of graduating students from a French-language school board enrolled in a bilingual university, while roughly 10% enrolled in an English university. This report did not distinguish between the language of the program for students enrolled in a bilingual university.[84]

While these statistics may not be completely representative of the current distribution of French students enrolled in French programs, it is important to consider why French-speaking students would choose to enrol in English programs and what

can be done to attract more students to study in French. Providing access to quality, French-language programs within Ontario is crucial for the retention of French-speaking Ontarians within the province and is especially important for professions and businesses required to provide French services under the *French Language Services Act* (1990) and the *Official Languages Act* (1969).

To better serve the areas of Ontario that have a significant French population, the government passed the *French Language Services Act* in 1990, which ensures that provincial government services are offered in French within 26 designated areas across the province.[85] The act doesn't cover public agencies including hospitals, nursing homes, and the Children's Aid Society. However, these organizations may request official Cabinet designation as French-language service providers.

In addition to Ontario's *French Language Services Act*, Franco-Ontarians also have federal rights under Canada's *Official Languages Act (1969)*. This is a federal statute that made English and French the official languages of Canada and requires all federal institutions to provide services in English and French. The Act also gives the right to citizens to be heard by a judge who understands French during civil proceedings before federal courts other than the Supreme Court of Canada,[86] and gives everyone the right to use either English or French in Parliament.[87] All Acts of Parliament must also be enacted, printed, and published in both official languages.[88] Additionally, children whose parents are French-language rights holders have the right to receive primary and secondary school instruction in French.[89]

As it stands, the Act does not guarantee access to post-secondary education in French even though access is a vital part of ensuring that Ontario residents are able to access services in French. If post-secondary sector programs such as teacher education, nursing, law, and medicine are not provided in French, a severe lack of access to services for Franco-Ontarians will remain for years to come.

Although there are many positive initiatives that are currently in place to promote French post-secondary education, there is still much to be done and these steps must be highlighted.

Enhancing and Creating French Professional Programs

French professional programs must be both created and enhanced in order to meet the current needs of the population. This includes increasing the seating capacity of second-entry programs like medicine, law, and education.

The University of Ottawa reserves 48 seats for French speakers in the Doctor of Medicine program (MD), and 80 within their Juris Doctor (JD) program. These two programs are the only professional French MD and JD programs available in Ontario.[90] Although this does not mean that professionals graduating from these programs are the only ones available to serve the public in French, they are the only ones who are formally trained in the language. It is also important to note that it is extremely hard for Ontario students to receive acceptance in MD and JD programs outside of Ontario, which drastically limits their ability to study in French. Professional schools from other provinces often limit the number of out-of-province students they accept, or do not accept them at all.

A current estimate suggests that an additional 750 Francophone pharmacists will be needed in Canadian pharmacies outside of Quebec by 2026.[91] The University of Ottawa's School of Pharmaceutical Sciences, which expects to begin accepting students in the fall of 2023, will be the first ever French undergraduate Doctor of Pharmacy program in Canada outside of Quebec. Until the Doctor of Pharmacy program is open, students wishing to study pharmacy, along with dentistry or optometry in French cannot do so in Ontario. While the University of Ottawa's efforts to combat the pharmacist shortage is important, the program will only be accepting 50 students yearly, which

is not enough. The government must put in place better measures to ensure that more French-speaking pharmacists are being trained to meet Ontario's needs.[92] The Ontario-Quebec Health Study program was created to help increase the number of French professionals in the fields of pharmacy, dentistry, and optometry by reserving 5 spots each for Ontario students in programs within Quebec; however there is still a major concern of accessibility and continuity.

Laurentian University was also home to the only French language midwifery (sage-femme) program in Ontario prior to its cut in April 2021. The program cut was not an isolated event; as part of the university's restructuring process after they filed for creditor protection in February 2021, Laurentian cut a total of 58 undergraduate programs, including 24 French-language programs. The cuts led to a mass migration of students to other universities around the province and greatly affected the accessibility of French-language programs in Ontario.

Although French education is protected under the *Official Languages Act*, the lack of qualified French teachers is a major cause for concern. During the 2020-2021 school year, the shortage of French teachers forced more than 500 unqualified teachers to be granted Letters of Permission, which enable unqualified individuals to teach in French language district school boards.[93] The shortage of French-language and French as a second language

(FSL) teachers in Ontario was addressed by the provincial government in 2021 when they released a four-year French Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy (2021-2015) plan to attract and retain more French teachers in Ontario schools.[94] This action plan states that they intend to remove barriers to teacher training programs, improve flexibility of teacher training programs, and build awareness of teaching pathways, which includes the recruitment of French teachers internationally. However, this plan fails to acknowledge that one of the main reasons there is such a shortage of French teachers is that the province increased the teacher training program from a one to two year program. The last cohort of students from the one year program was in 2015, and the province saw a record number of 866 newly licensed teachers. In 2016, this number plummeted to 104, and went back up to 332 in 2017. The number of newly licensed teachers from Ontario remains between 300 and 450. Out-of-province educated teachers add around 100 new teachers to Ontario annually.[95]

The shift to a two year Bachelor of Education program was drastic and turned many people away from teaching with the fear of increased debt and more time in the post-secondary sector. Reinstating the one year teacher training program may be worth consideration in order to incentivize the participation of prospective French teachers in PSE . Further to this, the allocation of French language teaching programs and supports to access education are warranted specifically in northern Ontario, given the large number of Franco-Ontarians who reside there and the growing need for French teachers.

Increased French Remote Learning Options

A report from 2016 showed that fewer Francophones aged 25 and 64 had completed a university credential compared to the total population (33.2% vs. 34.3%).[96] However, Francophones are more likely to have completed a college or a non-university credential (27% vs. 24.7%). When comparing these numbers per region, the data demonstrates that in all parts of Ontario, except for the Central and Southwestern regions, Francophones are less likely to have a university degree. It also demonstrates that the largest discrepancy lies in North-

eastern Ontario, where 10.9% of Francophones have a university degree while 14.1% of the total population does.[97] Although it is impossible to know why there is such a discrepancy between the two, it is reasonable to assume that one barrier lies with access to French programs.

One of the ways to make French post-secondary education more accessible to French students, and northern students specifically, would be to offer more programs completely online. It is estimated that 19% of the French-speaking population of Ontario live in rural areas, and nearly 25% live in northern Ontario.[98] Students having to relocate to large city centres to access French education is an extremely intimidating process that will likely deter many.

Additionally, providing students with the option to complete their post-secondary education remotely in French would allow for the recruitment of more mature and part-time students. It is often not feasible for individuals who currently have a family and/or secure employment to relocate to complete their studies, but providing remote learning opportunities allows them to work towards a university degree from home. The provincial government would also need to support remote French learners, especially northern students, with broadband infrastructure that supports online learning.

Laurentian University is currently the only university that offers online first-entry undergraduate programs in French within Ontario. The university offers four French programs completely online, one of them being the Baccalauréat spécialisé en service social (social work). This program has increased in popularity in recent years, going from 36 to 71 students from 2018 to 2020.[99]

Make French Materials More Accessible

Although creating new programs in French is essential, it is also important to prioritise the enhancement of current programs and resources offered to French students. A common complaint from students studying in French is the lack of materials they are offered in French. It is common for students to have to use English scholarly resources for research or even to be given reading materials in English for their French courses. In 2018, 98%

of the library budget at Laurentian University was allocated for English materials.[100] This left 2 percent for French materials, even though around 1 in 4 students at the university is in a French program.

Key Takeaways

It is clear that the lack of programming available in French at post-secondary institutions has a long-standing impact on the accessibility of French-language services for Ontarians, and more specifically Northern Ontarians. To ensure that French-language rights and services are adequately supported in Ontario, more French professional programs must be both created and enhanced, additional remote learning options in French must be made available, and French materials must be more accessible.

Without appropriate programs which allow students to thrive in a French-first setting, there have been and will continue to be shortages in skilled workers who can offer French services and this problem will only live on. Not only does the inability to access services in their first language isolate Franco-Ontarians, they are often also unable to access timely and quality care that affect both their health and wellbeing. Although the *French Language Services Act* and the *Official Languages Act (1969)* protects the rights of French-speaking Ontarians, the provincial government must consider the implications of not providing enough opportunities to train French professionals within Ontario. The future of French post-secondary needs to be considered amongst the Ontario government's plans before any more harm is done to an important piece of Ontario's history and current population.

Ana Tremblay is the Vice President Education of the Laurentian University's Students' General Association (SGA). She is pursuing a Bachelor of Arts at Laurentian University, majoring in History and minoring in Human Resources Management.

Breaking Down Barriers: Anti-Oppressive Practice and the Future of Student Mental Health

Cecilia Amoakohene (she/her/they/them)

The post-secondary experience is filled with a variety of ups and downs that are part of what can be defined as a life-changing and life-augmenting experience for many students. Sometimes students, whether they're in up or down periods, may experience issues with their mental health. When students experience mental health issues, the first place that they turn to find help is on campus. In these moments, the reality that hits some of our students, particularly students from equity-deserving groups, is that there are barriers in their way preventing them from accessing the mental health services and supports they need in trying times. According to Canadian Reference Group data from the 2019 National College Health Assessment, 4.6% of students identify as Indigenous, 4.7% identify as Black, and 16% identify as 2SLGBTQ+.[101] These students don't make up a large majority of the student population but there has been a consistently steady increase in their enrollment numbers. In order for them to have a psychologically safe post-secondary experience, post-secondary

campuses must adopt anti-oppressive practices to ensure that these students don't face those barriers when accessing supports for their mental health.

The barriers students from equity-deserving groups face vary widely but may include not being able to access providers who speak the same language they do, or who can relate to their particular experiences.[102] There may not be services available that fit their needs, nor easily determinable means of getting a referral into community mental health services.[103] This leaves post-secondary institutions in a situation where many of the students who could most benefit from mental health supports are going without them. Research has shown time and time again that these students are already facing an uphill battle, both in the world and on campus, and additional barriers to supports don't make that experience any easier. Students from equity-deserving groups live and learn in spaces that are rooted in discriminatory sentiments like racism, sexism, homophobia, and ableism. These intersecting forms of discrimination can weigh on students

and even lead to increased mental health issues.[104] After a while, this can take a toll and have impacts on students' overall well-being and sense of self by increasing self-doubt and making them question their self-worth and where they belong on campus.[1052]

In order to make sure that all of our students have access to the mental health supports and services they need, we need to rework campus mental health services and how they're offered. One of the best tools that can help us to do this is anti-oppressive practice. Anti-oppressive practice is an approach that works to break down barriers and enable equitable access for all. It does this by focusing on how our systems reinforce the power and privilege that are allotted to some in our spaces over others.[106] Anti-oppressive practice opens our eyes to the fact that oppression exists within spaces in our society, including our campuses, and that different forms of oppression can be intersecting.[107] It works to combat this oppression through both systemic changes and changes in individual actions. The goal of anti-oppressive practice is to rectify the imbalances that exist in power and privilege that allow barriers to stay in place.[108] One of the means through which we can do this is providing culturally-relevant mental health supports to students. There is a bevy of research that shows differences in access to mental health services for students from equity-deserving groups. Particularly, we know that they are much less likely to receive mental health supports, even though when those students are dealing with mental health issues, the issues tend to be more persistent.[109] Through actions such as providing staff with cultural humility training, implementing critical reflection practices at the individual and system level, and hiring providers that reflect the make-up of the student population, we can not only make students feel like they're able to access services, we can also ensure they'll be provided appropriate services by providers who have a deep understanding of their intersecting identities.

The use of anti-oppressive practices in campus mental health allows us to take varying perspectives into account and doesn't value any particular perspective over another.[110] When we better understand the perspectives of others, we can better understand their experience in relation to our own and comprehend why they may not be the same. Consulting varied perspectives also helps us to understand how our post-secondary campuses impact student groups in different ways. With this knowledge, we can work to address gaps on systemic, program, and individual levels based on the lived experiences of students.

Ensuring that all students have access to mental health services on campus is of the utmost importance. This is why The Centre for Innovation in Campus Mental Health continues to work to support Ontario's universities and colleges in their commitment to students' mental health and well-being. Recently, we've worked with our stakeholders to co-create a toolkit around anti-oppressive practice. The first chapter of this toolkit, which is currently available on our website, helps to lay the foundation for anti-oppressive practices in post-secondary environments by providing an understanding of what anti-oppressive practice is.[111] It also pinpoints how anti-oppressive practice and mental health intersect, through the implementation of practices that reduce the barriers to accessing mental health supports, and the importance of this intersection. Finally, it speaks to the practical aspects of anti-oppressive practice and why it is important for faculty and staff at all levels of post-secondary institutions to be implementing anti-oppressive practices in their work. This first chapter of the toolkit is accompanied by tangible tools for users as well. There are self-reflection questions that can be utilized on an individual and group level to help users think critically about their own practices, as well as the environments they work in.[112] This includes questions like "How does what happened in my situation compare with what I intended to do or what I assumed I was doing?" and "How can I frame my practice theory so that what I have learnt from this situation is useable in other contexts?" There is also an upcoming explanatory webinar on the importance of the collection of demographic data and how it can effectively be used to promote student mental health.[113] Further chapters of this toolkit will focus on the history of oppression on post-secondary campuses, how this has impacted their structures and policies, and how these structures and policies impact students on campus in the present day.

Student mental health is at the forefront of the post-secondary student experience. It's a major part of the lens through which a student's time at university or college is seen and how it is remem-

bered. Our collective goal should be to elevate the mental health and well-being of the students who learn, live, grow, and engage on our campuses and in their local communities. A major component of making sure that elevation happens is ensuring that students have access to mental health supports and services that can meet a variety of needs. The best way for post-secondary campuses to achieve this goal is though anti-oppressive practice. Anti-oppressive practice allows us not just to see oppressive systems and understand how they operate; it enables us to reinvent them for the better. Anti-oppressive practices help us to thoroughly examine and understand the gaps in our post-secondary mental health system and develop tangible solutions that can be implemented to significantly advance mental health supports and services on campuses. Anti-oppressive practice empowers us to evolve campus mental health into the inclusive, barrier-free system that students deserve.

Cecilia Amoakohene
Community Partnership Lead
The Centre for Innovation in Campus
Mental Health (CICMH)

The Future of Healthcare on Post-Secondary Campuses

Stephanie Ye-Mowe (she/they), Matthew Nicholas Schwarze (he/him)

Post-secondary students, like any subset of our population, have unique and specific healthcare needs. University is a rewarding and exciting time in a student's life, but is also demanding and stressful, and can take an immense toll physically, emotionally, mentally, and socially. While students have options to tend to these needs, they are concerned about securing timely and quality healthcare. Moreover, as barriers to access for historically marginalized groups are being addressed, universities must now consider whether services are reflective of the diverse populations that exist within it. Needless to say, healthcare is not one-size fits all and society at large is realizing the importance of readily available trans- and culturally-competent practices.

Given the migratory nature of students, addressing the specific healthcare needs of students often becomes challenging. And as campuses continue to expand, we're finding that not only are there calls for overall better healthcare, there is also a growing need to adopt a "whole-of-community" approach that seamlessly coordinates the efforts of government ministries, post-secondary institutions, student associations, and community-based service providers.

Admittedly, to address this issue it's easy to ask: Why don't they just hire more people?

While this may solve some of the issues surrounding student healthcare, there are still various gaps that exist which cannot be filled simply by increasing the number of healthcare professionals. For example, when examining mental health services, students have called for increases to the number of allocated counselling sessions per year, diverse modalities and staff, and raising awareness about how to access the services available to them.[114] The use of standardized approaches ignores how lived experiences are influenced by intersectionality, and without long-term options, students are not receiving adequate quality or access to care that comprehensively addresses their immediate needs. These barriers discourage students from seeking

further support, jeopardizing all aspects of their health and wellbeing.

Students have also vocalized the need for different modes of service delivery, such as instant messaging, phone calls, and in-person options. Telehealth and digital options offer flexible ways for students, particularly those in transit-isolated communities, to get the on-demand support they require, while also reducing the anxiety some students experience when initiating contact to get help. As will be discussed later, companies providing this type of support exist, but there are pros and cons to weigh in their implications to students and the general public.

There is also growing concern among students in cases where providers are being recruited and pulled from the broader community. As local communities hope to retain graduates in their regions, depleting community-based healthcare resources to funnel them into campus-based resources only continues the cycle of disjointed access to healthcare post-graduation. Historically, universities have been conceptualized and created as a community within a community. And while we've started to move away from emulating gated campuses and have moved towards campuses as part of a community (as a social and economic hub), there are still expectations that campus communities provide certain amenities of easy access to students. Therefore, improvements to post-secondary healthcare must start within the sector, ensuring students get access to comprehensive and timely care. Every student deserves a practitioner that they can meaningfully connect with. However, the lack of cultural understanding and diversity, along with an unawareness of trans health needs and rampant transphobia and misogyny does not make healthcare equitably accessible for all students.

Thus, what duty do post-secondary institutions and student groups have in ensuring the well-being of students, while still being conscious of their role within Ontario's public health system. What are the consequences of a lack of a coordinated approach from the province? How do we prioritize the wellbeing of students without causing detrimental impacts to wider society?

With the current disconnect between student expectations and on-campus healthcare realities, many student associations are trying new ways to meet their members' expectations outside their university services. Student associations for many years have offered health insurance plans that provide their members with levels of healthcare coverage over and above that of OHIP and UHIP—these are called "supplementary" plans, and are similar to what many employers provide. These plans require students to be eligible for OHIP and UHIP to cover primary care costs at their campus health services, hospitals, off-campus clinics, and elsewhere. When students incur costs for prescription medication, dental or mental health services, or many other services not covered by OHIP/UHIP, then the supplementary plan kicks in to reimburse a portion of the costs.

This system has existed as described above for decades, but in the past few years, there has been growing pressure to expand beyond traditional insurance to providing telehealth services through contracted private firms—pressure from both students internally and from companies offering such products externally. There are examples of private companies that provide students with unlimited access to counselling and therapy sessions over phone or video for upfront price charged alongside the insurance premiums. The model works by pooling student funds across all participating schools, allowing for affordable access to otherwise very expensive mental health services without charging the central health plan offered by the student association.

This model works great for services that students would otherwise be paying for out-of-pocket (or out of their insurance plan), but ethical and practical questions arise when considering new companies that seek to offer privatized primary care directly to students. Companies like Maple and Telus Health are recognized for providing services like this to the general public, but other players that don't even offer services to the general public are starting to try to enter the student market. They operate on the same model of an upfront fee granting unlimited, 24/7 hour access to appointments within hours with doctors able to provide advice, suggest treatment, and prescribe medications.[115] It's a slick, fast service that is easy to use—but the hidden social cost is worth considering.

For example, one of these private companies has promised a response from a health profession-

al within two hours, and they employ over 500 doctors, nurse practitioners, and psychotherapists to achieve this.[116] This means that over 500 in-demand health professionals are standing by to provide near-instant privatized service to strictly a student population, while emergency rooms struggle to remain staffed and the most vulnerable spend years on waitlists for family doctors.[117] Most Canadians are strongly in favour of our universal, public healthcare system and are hesitant of any mention of two-tiered healthcare or "jumping the queue." However, to some, it may be perceived as though students are receiving faster care through these private service providers.

Some private health providers are already being challenged on the basis of two-tier healthcare: Telus Health is now facing investigation in British Columbia after many people were finding their family doctors moving exclusively to the private care LifePlus program that doesn't accept provincial health insurance—only out-of-pocket payments in the thousands of dollars.[118]

Privatized care is certainly to the immediate benefit of students individually, but student associations need to consider if they have any responsibility to the society beyond the campus. Students' lifestyles are often transformed when they enter university, and given the various experiences they have within post-secondary, their healthcare needs are specific to them as a subset of the general population. As students balance busy academic and social lives, we cannot understate the necessity of timely, accessible, quality, comprehensive healthcare. However, meeting these unique needs may be coming at a cost to the general healthcare system. Under-resourcing the broader community, a place that students will eventually become active participants of, only seeks to exacerbate current access inequities and staffing shortages. It is evident that contracting out privatized healthcare companies to fill in student healthcare service disparities only serves as a bandaid solution to a much larger problem. Between institutions, student associations, the provincial government, and community-based providers, student healthcare has many players that must actively collaborate and coordinate their roles, through a whole-of-community approach, in order to provide students - along with the rest of society - with an accessible, affordable, and high quality system that does not rely on the private

market to supplement these services. Focusing on student healthcare necessitates urgent and localized attention, but as a community within a community, campuses cannot knowingly prioritize the needs of their own while ignoring how their actions affect the society around them.

Stephanie Ye-Mowe is VP-Finance of OUSA and Vice President Education of the Waterloo Undergraduate Student Association (WUSA). She is pursuing a Bachelor of Knowledge Integration with a specialization in Science, Tech, and Society at the University of Waterloo.

Matthew Nicholas Schwarze is the outgoing Vice-President, Operations & Finances at the Waterloo Undergraduate Student Association (WUSA). He will be continuing on WUSA's Board of Directors for the 2022/23 year while studying Mathematics at the University of Waterloo and Business Administration at Wilfrid Laurier University.

COUNCIL OF ONTARIO UNIVERSITIES (COU)

Preparing Students to Graduate Job-Ready and Resilient

Steve Orsini (he/him)

As our social, economic and technological landscape continues to evolve at a rapid pace, equipping today's university students with a diverse set of skills during their time on campus will help them navigate a changing world after their studies.

Amidst this change, Ontario's universities are working to ensure a university education in Ontario equitably benefits all students and helps them grow, thrive, and adapt – not only throughout their post-secondary education, but also throughout the course of their post-graduation lives.

Over the last two years, we have seen students, Ontario's "Future Makers," demonstrate tremendous resiliency in the face of great change and uncertainty.[119]

To help foster this resiliency, universities continue to innovate and transform programs, student supports, and ways of teaching and learning to best serve the needs of students. They are also responding to labour market demands to ensure students graduate with the hard and soft skills that are vital to employers.

A solid foundation, as well as life-long skills, innovative learning opportunities and a strong network of career and mental health supports will continue to help students adapt as the way we live, work, and learn continues to change.

Ontario's universities continue to take a transformative approach in operating more flexibly and innovatively to allow our students to emerge on a stronger footing from today's challenges and brace for those of the future.

Skilled, Adaptable Graduates Ready to Shape the Future

The future of the economy, work, and education are inseparable. As in-demand skills across diverse roles and occupations continue to evolve, employers will need a strong workforce to fill the jobs of today and adaptable talent that can navigate the

shifting economies of tomorrow.

A university education will continue to help students advance in-demand fields and industries – and create new ones by driving the research and innovation that leads to new jobs and companies.

Across the board, Ontario's university students are graduating job-ready and resilient. According to the latest Ministry of Colleges and University's Graduate Survey, nearly 93% of university graduates are employed two years after graduating, with more than 90% of graduates finding work that was either closely or somewhat related to the skills they developed at university.[120] This timely data demonstrates that the adaptable skills developed on campus are critical to ensuring students find meaningful work once they graduate.

Preparing Students for Career Success in High-Growth Fields

As changes in occupations, career paths, and industries become the norm, Ontario's universities are equipping students with the adaptable skills required for high-demand fields and changing labour market demands.

Various sectors and industries will see unprecedented growth in the coming decades. For example, recent data shows Ontario is seeing an increase in demand amongst certain STEM and non-STEM occupations that typically require a university degree, such as engineers, computer programmers, and health-care professionals. In fact, a recent study conducted by Stokes Economics projects that from now until 2030, there will be more than 233,000 job openings in STEM and nearly 148,000 job openings in the health-care sector that will require a university education.[121]

Not only is there a labour market demand for skilled talent across STEM and health-care, but data shows students are eager to fill these in-demand jobs and join these fast-growing fields. According to Ontario's universities' enrolment data, universities have seen a more than 65% enrolment increase in STEM and a more than 35% enrolment increase in health care between 2010 and 2021.[122]

By offering programs that provide students – Ontario's future engineers, scientists, health-care heroes and community leaders – with the experience and skills needed to be competitive in today's job market and enter these fast-growing fields, Ontario's universities are ensuring students can seize these opportunities and help solve big challenges.[123] For example, as cyberattacks become more sophisticated, Ontario will need a highly skilled cybersecurity workforce to manage these threats. Several universities have partnered with technology companies to create an on-campus cybersecurity and safety hub that will help train students in data analytics, deep learning, privacy and security to help fight cyberattacks affecting corporate and home networks.

Ontario's universities will continue to provide the innovative programs and opportunities that will benefit all students, ensuring they are equipped with the critical skills and life-long foundation to adapt as the work landscape continues to change throughout their careers.

Student Entrepreneurship and Innovation to Fuel the Future Labour Market

Notably, Ontario's universities are not only adapting and responding to labour market demands – they are also helping students create new industries, inspiring them to bring their creative and transformative ideas to life.

Students across the province continue to demonstrate their exceptional ability to identify critical challenges across sectors and develop the innovative solutions the province needs to transform industries and improve the lives of Ontarians. To help fuel their passions, universities across the province are ensuring students are connected with the resources and networks they need by becoming hubs of ideation and innovation.

For example, many Ontario universities have launched nationally recognized incubator and accelerator programs to help students design, develop, and launch their innovations. Through these programs, students can access opportunities to work with industry experts, prototyping equipment that help them reimagine, refine, or commercialize their ideas. Many Ontario universities have also developed specific incubator and accelerator programs for their alumni so they can continue their entrepreneurial journey even after graduation.

In fact, between 2014 and 2016, more than 280,000 students used campus-linked accelerators and incubators. These students created or supported more than 2,200 start-ups, which directly resulted in more than 4,700 jobs in Ontario during this time, according to the UBI Global Impact Study, Ahead of the Curve.[124]

Ontario's universities are also supporting the commercialization of intellectual property developed by students, researchers, and graduates. Through venture financing and private-public sector partnerships, universities have recently issued commercialization mandate statements to help foster job creation and economic growth in all regions of the province.

By creating environments that spark an entrepreneurial mindset, our students are well-prepared to enter, and be competitive in, Ontario's growing innovation ecosystem, helping create the jobs of the future and becoming life-long problem solvers – able to identify and make the most of opportunities and overcome unexpected setbacks. Of note, several universities have developed on-campus clean energy incubator programs. As Ontario works to limit the impacts of climate change on people and businesses, it will need transformative clean technology solutions in electric vehicles, renewable energy and energy storage to help reduce greenhouse gas emissions across the province. Through these incubator programs, universities are providing students with access to the tools and resources they need to bring their Ontario-made clean technology innovations to market, such as industry experts, research labs and coworking spaces, to help address environmental challenges and fuel the green economy.

Future-Proofing Students for a Changing Ontario

Through community partnerships, work-integrated learning (WIL), reskilling and upskilling programs, and mental health supports, Ontario's universities are providing flexible and innovative programs that are designed to build resilience and adaptability for a changing future.

Developing Innovative Work-Integrated Learning Programming

Ontario's universities continue to innovate the nature of WIL, partnering with local industry to offer a range of programs such as co-ops, internships, and externships, ensuring students continue to benefit from these hands-on learning opportunities and gain critical work experience.

Through these experiences, students become exposed to diverse and dynamic workplace environments where they can develop critical hard and soft skills, such as collaboration, critical thinking, and problem-solving, that according to the Business+Higher Education Roundtable Ontario's employers are consistently in search of.[125] This combination of skills not only enables students to remain adaptive, collaborative, agile, and resilient in response to industry disruption, and changing workplace and skill demands, but helps students develop leadership and make meaningful contributions to their workplace and communities.

By providing WIL for students in a variety of programs, including in high-demand areas, such as nursing, engineering, and computer science, we can ensure they graduate with the adaptable skills required to address the health-care needs of Ontarians, retool industries, and rebuild our province.

For example, Ontario's nursing programs are streaming students to high-needs clinical areas, such as critical care and long-term care, as part of their clinical placements to gain the knowledge and skills necessary to practice in these areas after graduation. Nursing programs are also developing additional pathways to graduate nurses with a Bachelor of Science in Nursing in as little as 19 months.

Innovative and responsive programs such as these are helping students meet an identified and immediate labour market need. As our hospitals continue to face mounting staffing shortages, students will be prepared to graduate with the skillset needed to join the health-care workforce and provide front-line care to patients.

These work-integrated learning experiences help strengthen and enrich the student experience, while ensuring students can continue to develop the skillset they need to join their field of study after they graduate.

Encouraging Life-Long Learning

Today's universities have an important role to play throughout a student's journey – whether they are right out of high school, mid-career, or want to enter an entirely new profession.

Through a range of short-duration programs and certificates, Ontario's universities continue to adapt to help the modern learner become a life-long learner. These learners are seeking out life-long learning opportunities through more flexible, part-time, online, and industry-tied models and micro-credential programs. Ensuring all students and learners have access to reskilling and upskilling opportunities across a variety of subject matters and industries helps build the resiliency and adaptability needed to progress in their current workplace or even enter an entirely new industry.[126]

In 2020-21, Ontario's universities offered more than 4,300 continuing education courses and more than 820 continuing education programs, according to data from Ontario's universities. Based on enrolment data from 13 universities, 119,000 students were enrolled in continuing education pro-

grams at Ontario's universities in 2020-21 – an increase of 28% since 2017-18.[127]

With access to continuing education programs developed in partnership with local industry, students can reskill and upskill to meet the changing needs of employers. Ontario universities have entered into more than 670 industry partnerships to do just that, delivering continuing education programs and courses that directly meet a labour market need.

For example, one Ontario university recently launched an artificial intelligence and cloud computer continuing education program in partnership with local industry. Through the program, students from all backgrounds can participate in short-duration courses in areas such as software management and advanced coding. These courses are equipping students from all academic and professional backgrounds with new and adaptable skills that not only meet the shifting needs of employers, but help them take their career to the next level.

Helping Students Build Resiliency through Mental Health Programming

Students arrive on university campuses with varying life experiences, which both adds to the rich diversity of our campus communities and also creates highly unique and individualized experiences.

Across the province, Ontario's universities are increasing student mental health services as the need for supports continues to increase, partnering for the mental health and well-being of our students and communities.[128]

Since the pandemic, a recent Canadian Alliance of Student Associations survey found that, overall, 84% of students reported the pandemic added new or exacerbated existing mental health challenges. In addition, since last year, at 71%, there has been a 10-point increase in those who say they are overwhelmed.

Recognizing the growing need for student mental health supports, universities continue to develop hybrid approaches, new and existing services, and events and courses to ensure students can access the resources and services they need to support their academic success and well-being.

Throughout the pandemic, many universities adopted virtual strategies and platforms that provide students with 24/7 support through a smartphone or web app. These platforms allow students to connect one-on-one with a counsellor or work on challenges independently and in real-time through downloadable or interactive resources. One example is Good2Talk, a free, confidential support service for post-secondary students in Ontario.[129]

Another way universities and colleges are working to improve access to mental health services is through the Centre for Innovation in Campus Mental Health (CICMH).[130] CICMH works with all 44 campuses and more than 100 community partners to share resources that help campus mental health workers on the frontline address student needs.

With 75% of mental health illnesses beginning before the age of 24, post-secondary students are particularly vulnerable to these experiences. Ontario's

universities will continue to partner with student groups, sector partners, and government to find new ways of delivering high-quality supports and services and promote the mental health and wellness of our students, faculty, staff and communities.[131]

Partnering for a Better Future

The world is changing rapidly and to keep pace with these changes, Ontario's universities remain focused on continuing to transform in real-time in order to respond to the changing needs of our students.

The success of our students and graduates, as well as Ontario's economic prosperity, requires innovative and flexible programs, services, and approaches that address student needs across the skills continuum and complement the development of resiliency in a fast-changing economy.

Our universities will continue to provide the high-quality education, experiences, services, and spaces that benefit all students, helping them collaborate across disciplines, approach work with a creative mindset, and problem solve real-world challenges.

Graduating with an adaptable skillset and a strong foundation for resilience, Ontario's university students will be well-equipped to become the leaders of today and tomorrow, ready to build a brighter future, for everyone.

Steve Orsini
President and CEO
Council of Ontario Universities (COU)

The Future(ing) of Post-Secondary Education in Ontario

Rocío Chávez Tellería (she/her)

"All of us who grew up before the war are immigrants in time, immigrants from an earlier world, living in an age essentially different from anything we knew before."

– Margaret Mead (1970)[132]

Nearly fifty years after Margaret Mead described the profound changes brought on by World War II, her words continue to capture the experience of an ever-changing and adapting word. Much like Mead, we live in a time of profound change amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. The post-secondary education sector has adapted and responded with resilience and transformation to these forces of change and uncertainty.

After the World Health Organization declared the expanding virus a pandemic in March 2020, many of our lives became predominately digital for the first time; post-secondary education in Ontario was no exception. As all publicly-assisted Indigenous

Institutes, colleges, and universities transitioned to emergency remote teaching and learning,[133] the Ontario Ministry of Colleges and Universities launched the Virtual Learning Strategy (VLS)[134] to drive growth and advancement in high-quality virtual and hybrid learning totalling $70 million with two rounds of funding so far.[135] eCampusOntario, a provincially-funded non-profit organization that leads a consortium of the province's publicly-assisted Indigenous Institutes, colleges, and universities, was entrusted with leading the implementation of the VLS.

In conjunction with the implementation of the VLS, eCampusOntario recognized the need to strengthen and support the sector's ability to anticipate potential disruptions and prepare for *digital by design* educational futures. Thus, eCampusOntario started a new Research and Foresight Unit to support the post-secondary education sector in this navigation, with a shared language to explore shared visions of the future.

Making Sense of Change

The future is often presented as if it is pre-determined and can be predicted. However, the practice of foresight does not predict. Rather, we assume the future is dependent on the choices that are made today and that many different futures might be possible. "Strategic foresight is the ability of an organization to constantly perceive, make sense of, and act upon different ideas of the future emerging in the present."[136] The intention of foresight is to use the information or evidence of change in the present to extrapolate what is possible in the future, by understanding the bigger picture and the greater context to inform decision making today.

Between 2021 and 2022, the Research and Foresight Unit published its first collection of foresight reports that included overviews of maturing trends (evidence of change sustained over a period of time) within the post-secondary education sector. These reports help inform present-day action by identifying patterns of change that may have significant lasting impacts for post-secondary education. This article provides a high-level overview of the futures-focused questions that were explored, the key trends and insights that emerged from the research, and the work that Ontario post-secondary institutions have undertaken through the VLS to create stronger foundations for digital-by-design futures.

The five key questions that led the foresight exploration were:

1. When would learning happen in the future?

2. What type of supports would future learners need to succeed?

3. What approaches would best meet future learning needs?

4. What external influences are driving change in post-secondary education needs?

5. How might we co-create better futures through education?

Some of the main insights that emerged in response to those questions included:

Engaging in a lifelong cycle of learning, un-

learning, and relearning is essential in a world in constant flux. New "unbundled" learning options, like micro-credentials, are emerging as pathways to education that are flexible, cost-efficient, and meet diverse needs through dynamic, personalized, and adaptable lifelong learning journeys. These are enabled through technologies such as adaptive learning, machine learning, and artificial intelligence.

Innovations in hybrid wraparound supports (online and in-person) designed to enrich holistic learner growth, success, and wellness promote rich and flexible access and engagement in post-secondary education. This is through delivery models such as hybrid, a combination of hybrid (blend of online, whether synchronous or asynchronous, and in-person instruction[137]) and HyFlex teaching and learning (class sessions that allow students to choose whether to attend classes face-to-face or online, synchronously or asynchronously[138]).

Shifts in social values are powerful drivers of change, as many learners and educators engage in a self-reflective journey of purpose finding, seeking clarity, and meaning during times of change, which may provoke lasting changes in the way they decide to engage with professional learning. Additionally, evolving economic labour market demands and changes in workplaces reinforce the need for equitable, effective, and timely skilling, upskilling, and reskilling.

Collaboration amongst Ontario post-secondary institutions has been growing. The resulting networks help amplify equitable and meaningful impact of innovative interventions to improve digital learning. Collaboration will continue to be increasingly important to co-create better futures through education.

More about our findings can be found in the reports published at https://vls.ecampusontario.ca/reports/.

Creating the Conditions for Thriving Futures: Three Lenses

Reflecting on the results of eCampusOntario's first foresight exploration led to further important questions: What is the end goal of these trends

and innovations? What do we mean when we talk about "better futures?" How can we continuously engage in co-creating those futures? Our response: a post-secondary education system that creates possibilities for thriving for every learner. "Possibilities for thriving grow when people are invited to (1) recognize themselves as someone who is entitled to thrive, (2) imagine what their thriving can look like, and (3) receive affirmation and resources to support their vibrant, present *and* future dreaming and designing."[139] To create the conditions that allow every learner to thrive, the Research and Foresight team identified, through this foresight exploration, three key lenses that will serve as principles for action: creating an inclusive campus, upholding intersectional perspectives, and supporting learner agency.

Lens 1: Creating an Inclusive Campus

Creating an inclusive campus requires capacity for inclusive participation and engagement, ensuring content and systems are accessible, and setting the conditions for those in the digital spaces to affirm a sense of belonging, community, and identity among community members, whether in in-person, online, or hybrid environments.

An example of work undertaken by Ontario institutions and supported by the VLS to advance capacity for inclusive participation and engagement in digital learning are the Digital Capacity – Targeted Supports projects. This funding was designed to support member institutions achieve excellence in virtual teaching and learning by bridging capacity gaps to design, develop and deliver high-quality online learning for students. There are over 40 Digital Capacity – Targeted Supports projects[140] in both rounds of the VLS. A key objective of these projects is to promote equity in the post-secondary sector to deliver high quality online learning by providing funding to institutions with demonstrated need for additional support. Of the province's publicly-assisted post-secondary institutions, 3 Indigenous Institutes, 21 colleges, and 19 universities are participating in Digital Capacity-Targeted projects.

Furthermore, to ensure accessibility of digital content and systems, digital content funded through the VLS is required to be produced in accessible formats in accordance with the requirements of the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act*, 2005. For example, images must be described using alternate text and videos must be captioned. Project teams were also encouraged to submit an accessibility statement with their projects to demonstrate how the content was made accessible.

Finally, reflection, literacy, fluency, evaluation, and accountability are key elements to build affirming and brave spaces, in online, in-person, and hybrid environments. Brave spaces build upon safe spaces by emphasizing strength and courage or expressing one's own vulnerability.[141] Brave spaces also increase accountability for learning, action, and justice, and affirm lived experiences.

Lens 2: Upholding Intersectional Perspectives

Intersectionality is a "a lens through which [one] can see where power comes and collides, where it interlocks and intersects."[142] It argues that "classifications such as gender, race, class, and others cannot be examined in isolation from one another; they interact and intersect in individuals' lives, in society, in social systems, and are mutually constitutive."[143] Designing thriving futures for all requires an intersectional approach that considers how complex and ever-evolving identities shape educators' and learners' educational, cultural, economic, social, and lived experiences.

Examples of approaches that address intersectionality in post-secondary education include initiatives to strengthen age-inclusive institutions and intergenerational learning experiences. Age-inclusive learning supports a shared educational environment, in which learners of all ages can learn together and from one another, especially as we foster lifelong learning journeys. Post-secondary institutions in Ontario are committing to being age-friendly institutions by joining the Age-Friendly University Global Network.[144] Designing age-inclusive learning spaces and strategies can enable active social participation and exchange of knowledge among a wide range of life stages, phases, experiences, and backgrounds.

Decolonization and Indigenization are other important aspects of intersectionality. The Truth and

Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) emphasize the vital role that education plays in reconciliation and highlights the importance of decolonizing and Indigenizing institutions. Decolonization refers to the process of dismantling colonialist systems that perpetuate racism and hinder the cultural, psychological, and economic freedom for Indigenous Peoples. Indigenization is the inclusion of Indigenous perspectives, cultures, laws, and values into existing social, economic, political, and educational infrastructures, while moving beyond tokenistic gestures. Examples include "providing the necessary funding to post-secondary institutions to educate teachers on how to integrate Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods into classrooms,"[145] and restoring and preserving Indigenous cultures and traditions.

Over 100 projects in the first round of the VLS involved an equity, diversity, inclusion (EDI), and decolonization focus. Over 45 of those projects involved Indigenous subject matter, Indigenous communities, and/or Indigenous Institutes. Examples of VLS projects that focused on EDI and decolonization in round one includes *Exploring Indigenous Foods and Food Sovereignty* and *In the Wings: Role Play Exercise for Black, Indigenous and People of Colour Resurgence and Allyship*.[146] In the second round of the VLS, over 20 projects reported that they are engaging Indigenous communities (including Elders and Traditional Knowledge Keepers), Indigenous ways of knowing, Indigenous pedagogies, and/or traditional knowledge.

Lens 3: Supporting Learner Agency

To ensure that visions of the future of education resonate with diverse learners, intentional initiatives that emphasize learner agency and engage them as co-creators and partners across all levels of the education experience are essential. Involving learners in co-creating educational experiences can include: learner engagement in a broad range of activities to increase learner interest and motivation, such as surveys and questionnaires; involving learners as co-creators; and seeing learners as partners as a fully collaborative and reciprocal process through which opportunity for contribution is equally provided for all.

In the second round of the VLS, projects creating digital content were eligible to apply for additional funding if their project engaged students in the co-design and co-production process. Over 25

projects in the second round of the VLS are lever-aging this opportunity. An example of a VLS project in round one that engaged learners as co-creators is Ontario Extend: Liberated Learners[147], a program designed to prepare "a well-rounded and ready-for-almost-anything post-secondary learner" in the digital realm.

An Open Invitation

As we continue exploring future possibilities and co-creating desirable visions for better futures through inclusion, intersectionality, and learner agency, we leave an open invitation to Ontario learners, learner associations, and educators to reach out and engage with us in the exploration of those future possibilities. Collaboration will continue to be increasingly important to envision shared futures, and to guide present-day action to strengthen the conditions that allow every learner to thrive. Contact the Research and Foresight unit at eCampusOntario at research@ecampusontario.ca if you would like to learn more about our work or to get involved.

Rocío Chávez Tellería
eCampusOntario Research and
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advocacy priorities
2022 – 2023

Affordability

As students attempt to financially recover from the COVID-19 pandemic alongside the increased cost of living, OUSA has prioritized advocacy to modify components of OSAP so that students have a more accessible, transparent, and effective financial aid system.

Sector Sustainability

The long-term sustainability of the post-secondary sector, particularly through sources of funding, continues to be a concern for students. As such, OUSA is committed to advocating for increased provincial operating grants and international tuition regulation to ensure the viability of the sector for years to come.

Rural and Northern Students

Various areas of post-secondary remain inaccessible for rural and northern students, negatively affecting the quality of their experience. OUSA has made addressing these concerns a priority, especially as it relates to expanding transit and healthcare options for more flexible and well-rounded services.

Gender-Based Violence Prevention and Response

Sexual and gender-based violence has been a crisis on post-secondary campuses that students have called attention to for many years. OUSA is dedicated to advancing advocacy on this issue through proactive means such as comprehensive and consistent data collection, as well as enhanced K-12 sexual health curricula.

publications & milestones

Financing Fees: The Inequitable Burden of University Costs (August 2018)

Shared Perspectives: A Joint Publication on Preparing Students for the Workplace (April 2019)

Habitats: Students in their Municipalities (June 2019)

Pride, Policies, and Post-Secondary Spaces (July 2019)

2017 Ontario Post-Secondary Student Survey Results: Accessibility (August 2019)

2017 Ontario Post-Secondary Student Survey Results: Affordability (August 2019)

Sexual and Gender Diversity in Post-Secondary Education: LGBTQ+ Students Interview Series Report (August 2019)

2017 Ontario Post-Secondary Student Survey Results: Quality (December 2019)

In It Together: Foundations for Promoting Mental Wellness in Campus Communities (February 2020)

Habitats: Students in Their Municipalities 2020 (June 2020)

Post-Pandemic Pedagogies: What COVID-19 Can Teach Us About Blended, Distance, and Emergency Online Learning in Tomorrow's World (September 2020)

Habitats: Students in their Municipalities (May 2021)

Educated Solutions: Enhancing Equity in Education (September 2021)

Our Collective Lookbook/Magazine (September 2021)

Invisible Intersections: Bringing the Experiences of Young Adult Caregivers to Public Discourse (September 2021)

2020 Ontario Undergraduate Student Survey: Affordability (January 2022)

2020 Ontario Undergraduate Student Survey: Accessibility (March 2022)

2020 Ontario Undergraduate Student Survey: Quality (April 2022)

Shared Perspectives: A Joint Publication on the Changing Landscape of Student Financial Aid (April 2022)

Habitats: Students in Their Municipalities 2022 (May 2022)

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2016

$365 million of tax credits repurposed into grants for low-income students (The New OSAP)

Links created on OUAC and eInfo websites leading to each university's accessibility service for students with disabilities

2017

$190 million for experiential learni

$9 million for more frontline menta workers on campus & $73 million f chotherapy

$10,000 increase in OSAP repaym

$1 million invested in Ontario's Op Library

Reduction in the parental and spou expectations for applicants to the (

2018

Release of the International Student Strategy

Commitments from all political parties on the need for mental health investments (saw commitments from all political parties on the need for mental health investments, with $1.9 billion allocated towards mental health)

First-ever provincial-wide survey on campus sexual violence conducted by the provincial government

2021

Amendments to Ontario Regulation 131/16 to make post-secondary sexual violence policies more trauma-informed, survivor-centric, and evidence-based.

Additional $7M for post-secondary mental health, allocated from gov't funding pool for broader provincial mental health, $2.39M of which put toward expanding mental health services and increasing access for Black, Indigenous and Francophone students

2020

COVID-19 student support package, which included, the implementation of the Canada Emergency Student Benefit (CESB); Expansion of the Canada Student Grants and Loan Program; and a $75 million increase in distinctions-based support for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis post-secondary students.

Six-month interest-free moratorium on Canada Student Loans in response to COVID-19

$19.25M for PSE mental health supports for 2020-2021 year, with funding to support campus service providers, develop partnerships, and increase access

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...usal contribution ...OSAP program

2019

Fees funding student transit passes declared mandatory for implementation of Student Choice Initiative

Doubled funding for the Women's Campus Safety Grant to support gender-based violence prevention and response on campuses