



PUBLIC INTEREST ALBERTA

PRIORITIES FOR CHANGE

POST-SECONDARY
EDUCATION

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Priorities for Change: Post-Secondary Education

Introduction



Alberta has a wide variety of universities, colleges, and technical institutes providing high-quality education to Albertans, as well as Canadians from other provinces, and people from all over the world. However, over the past three decades, successive governments have treated post-secondary education as, at best, a low priority. This provincial election is a chance to reverse course.

Under Peter Lougheed's government in the 1970s, Alberta had the lowest tuition rates in the country. Twenty years later, tuition rates skyrocketed under Ralph Klein, as his government's massive cuts degraded public services overall and downloaded more and more costs onto individual Albertans and their families. While there was a brief respite while Premier Stelmach was in power, in 2013 the PC government once again made deep cuts that resulted in many staff layoffs, the reduction or elimination of programs, and increased class sizes.

The NDP government elected in 2015 reversed the planned cuts and froze tuition levels. The measures relieved some pressures in the short-term. But these new priorities were short lived because of the election of the current UCP government, which has redoubled austerity in the sector while working to transform the relationship between our institutions and the economy and labour market. Since 2019, the UCP has cut PSE operating grants from \$2.68 billion in 2019-20 to \$2.36 billion in 2021-22: this is a 12% cut in just three short years. The UCP government projects another 4% cut over the next two years.

Students, workers, and community members can come together to oppose these cuts and advance a positive vision of our universities and colleges futures. Public Interest Alberta's PSE Taskforce is convening these voices and welcome everyone's ideas, strategies, and participation to achieve the post-secondary system all Albertans want and deserve. As part of civil society, the PIA's PSE Taskforce will advocate and lobby for these changes to improve Alberta's PSE landscape, during the provincial election and beyond.

Priorities for Advancing the Public Interest

The Vision: Embrace more enlightened policies and sustained investment in building a more accessible, affordable, and high quality post-secondary education (PSE) system.

The Government of Alberta must take the following steps to improve post-secondary education in the province:

1. Decolonize and Indigenize our post-secondary institutions

- Make Indigenous education a priority
- Ensure collegial governance structures recognize and respect Indigenous peoples and knowledges
- Establish Indigenous-centric services
- Actively build relationships with and be accountable to Indigenous communities to promote reconciliation and access to PSE on campuses



2. Reverse past policies that have transferred more of the costs of post-secondary education onto students and staff

- Large-scale and long-term reinvestment in post-secondary institutions: both increasing operating funding & student bursary/grant funding
- Strictly regulate increases to tuition & mandatory non-instructional fees
- End the systemic practice of precarious employment for faculty, librarians, academic staff, and support staff at post-secondary institutions to improve conditions for students in their research and education
- Restore the support staff levels to pre-UCP levels in order to increase student services, research capabilities, and teaching capacities at our institutions
- Increase provincial research funding, including creating a provincial research funding body for graduate students to increase Albertan labs/project and commercial and non-commercial research capacity while setting up our graduate students for success
- To end the government's use of unscientific, performance-based metrics for setting institutional funding levels



3. Improve the accessibility of post-secondary education

- Collaborate with partners to explore a tuition-free model of post-secondary education, in order to help Alberta adapt to a fast-changing global economy and address accessibility challenges (especially for underrepresented groups)
- Increase the program spaces in our universities and colleges to accommodate the increased population of high school students that will be entering our system in a few years
- Provide subsidized, high-speed internet to all regions of the province so students can participate in distance learning and regular programming

4. Reform the governance of post-secondary institutions to focus on the public interest

- Limit the use of partisan appointments to stack the public members of post-secondary institutions' Boards of Governors
- Ensure strong representation on institutions' Boards of Governors from undergraduate and graduate students, faculty, and support staff
- Strengthen the decision-making autonomy of General Faculties Councils so that senior administrators cannot push through their plans without consent of student, academic staff, support staff, and faculty. Where General Faculties Councils do not exist, ensure the academic staff, support staff and student have a strong voice in shaping the future of their institution
- Recognize the value of the different mandates given to institutions, as all Albertans need educational diverse pathways to better prepare for their futures

5. Address the mental health needs of students and staff

- Immediately fund the implementation of the recommendation from Valuing Mental Health: Report of the Alberta Mental Health Review Committee 2015 that reads: "Create healthy and supportive post-secondary campus environments through health promotion, addiction and mental health campus services, and community partnerships."