

TUITION FREEZE NOW!

April 14, 2022

Dear Hon. Anne Kang, Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Training,

We are writing to you today to express our concern over the relentless tuition increases that we experience as post-secondary students, alumni, and community members. We are a coalition of students - domestic, international, undergraduate and graduate alike - and allies brought together by a shared anxiety about the effects of rising tuition on our post-secondary communities. Over the past 20 years, tuition has increased nearly 200%, making school today three times as expensive as at the turn of the millennium. Tuition comprises a larger component of most post-secondary budgets than provincial funding and in effect, our institutions have been privatized and are now exploiting students for profit.

Education is a crucial component of a just society and must be universally accessible. As part of your government's mandate, you have been mandated to "conduct a funding review of post-secondary education operating grants to make sure public post-secondary institutions have the resources they need to support economic recovery and student success." In a July 2021 report, the BCCDC recommended "Support measures (e.g., tuition freezes) to address students' financial challenges that have been exacerbated by the pandemic". In order to ensure economic recovery and student success, we would like to work with you to find concrete ways to implement a tuition freeze.

Tuition isn't just a number; when it increases, there are concrete impacts. As tuition increases, the campus community changes: the most marginalized students are excluded, and those who remain are increasingly divided. The large number of students who rely upon financial aid are put under increased pressure to perform, while those who are not part of financially independent households have less time to connect with their University community. As wages fail to increase at the rate of both tuition and housing costs, students have to work longer hours or take on additional jobs to continue their studies. Differential tuition fees mean the impact increases are dramatically larger for international students and those in specific programs such as Business, Engineering and Computing Science.

Fee increases not only divide the student body, they also decrease the quality of students' educations. Working long hours leads to divided attention in class, stress over performance, and deteriorating mental health. We have seen this affect our friends, classmates and colleagues. Those of us who are also teachers do what we can to provide students with the education they need; however, instructional solutions cannot circumvent the larger problem: less time to commit to studies leads to fewer opportunities for students to work towards their potential.

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Tuition fees are not simply a budget line; they dramatically alter the lives of students. This is a point consistently repeated by the student bodies as they express their keen support for a tuition freeze. Students are committed to their studies and simply request the ability to pursue them without facing the increased financial distress that this increase will generate.

To materially improve the lives of students, current and future, we request that as Minister you work to:

1. implement a freeze on tuition for all students at post-secondary institutions across the province;
2. provide increases to funding across the post-secondary sector to enable the freeze; and
3. commit to strike a commission to study the feasibility of providing free post-secondary education for all.

These are concrete goals that can be achieved. Across the world, many nations already ensure universally accessible post-secondary education. It is time for BC to take steps on that path, and a tuition freeze now is the best first step towards that better future for all.

Signed,

Teaching Support Staff Union at SFU (TSSU)
Graduate Student Society at SFU (GSS)
Simon Fraser Student Society (SFSS)
CUPE 2278 at UBC
CUPE 4163 at University of Victoria
BC General Employees' Union (BCGEU)
SFU 350
SFU Disability and Neurodiversity Alliance (DNA)
SFU SFU First Nations, Métis & Inuit Student Association (FNMISA)
SFU International Students Association (ISA)
SFU Students of Caribbean and African Ancestry (SOCA)
Simon Fraser Public Interest Research Group (SFPIRG)
Migrant Student United (MSU) at SFU