

Fairness for International Students

Student demands for the support of international students



UTM Students' Union (UTMSU)

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Introduction

International Students need a more accessible and sustainable future for post-secondary education in the University of Toronto.

To say that the University of Toronto is not an international University at its core would be an injustice. In 2019, the international student enrolment increased to 23,019 students which was 24.7% of the incoming student population.¹ The UofT's Mission Statement states that the University of Toronto is dedicated to fostering an academic community in which the learning and scholarship of every member may flourish, with vigilant production for individual rights of a resolute commitment to the principle of equal opportunity, equity, and justice.² As the UTMSU, we aim to safeguard the individual rights of all our students, foster intellectual growth and advocate to ensure that higher education is accessible for all.³

High tuition fees have discriminatory and detrimental impacts on students. In Ontario, students are faced with the highest tuition fees in the country and the financial burden for international students studying in the province is even greater. Post-secondary education demands an enormous financial investment; many times, students are pressured to choose educational fields according to what they can

afford, rather than what they want to study. Education has a price tag that many students can no longer afford.

In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, international students are yet again left out of the economic care that the government is providing through the Canada Emergency Student Benefit (CESB).⁴ In a period where the communities are facing an economic depression, international students are overlooked. International students are often stuck in the middle where they receive minimal support from their home country and are often left stranded by their host country. While the UTMSU as well as the UofT Administration has offered financial relief, these are band-aid solutions and there is a lot more that should be done. Understanding that many international students have lost their present employment as well as their prospective job offers this can add additional stress for students who are expected to financially support themselves.

Whether we discuss the treatment of international students in the current pandemic or otherwise, international students are often treated like cash cows and are offered little to no support. One article ranks the University of Toronto as the most expensive university in Canada if you're living away from home.⁵ Recently we have heard from the administration



that tuition fees for the 2020-2021 Academic Year are bound to increase; this news deeply saddens both the UTMSU and the members we represent.

In analyzing what the University of Toronto has in mind for its three campuses for the next ten years we have realized that the plan is to increase student enrolment at the University of Toronto Mississauga Campus from 16,014 students up to 24,000 students by 2030. Currently, international students consists of 22.5% of the undergraduate population and 16.8% of the graduate population, averaging the international student enrolment at 19.65% It is projected that international students enrolment in undergraduate programs will reach 24% by 2022-2023, however in Fall 2019-2020, undergraduate international enrolment reached 26.1%, which surpasses their projected growth.

This Lobby Document aims to support the international students at the University of Toronto Mississauga Campus by demanding three of the following from the University of Toronto Administration:

- 1 Immediate reduction of tuition fees for all students**
- 2 Ontario Health Insurance Plan (OHIP) for international students**
- 3 Increase funding and scholarships for international students**

Whether we discuss the treatment of international students in the current pandemic or otherwise, international students are often treated like cash cows and are offered little to no support.



1. [http://www.planningandbudget.utoronto.ca/Assets/Academic+Operations+Digital+Assets/Planning+\\$!26+Budget/enrolment1718.pdf](http://www.planningandbudget.utoronto.ca/Assets/Academic+Operations+Digital+Assets/Planning+$!26+Budget/enrolment1718.pdf)
2. From the Statement of Institutional Purpose, adopted by the Governing Council, October 15, 1992.
3. <https://utmsu.ca/about-us/what-we-do/mission/>
4. <https://www.canada.ca/en/revenue-agency/services/benefits/emergency-student-benefit/cesb-who-apply.html>
5. <https://www.narcity.com/amp/top-18-most-expensive-universities-in-canada-if-youre-living-away-from-home>

First Demand:

**Immediate
Reduction of
Tuition Fees
for all Students**

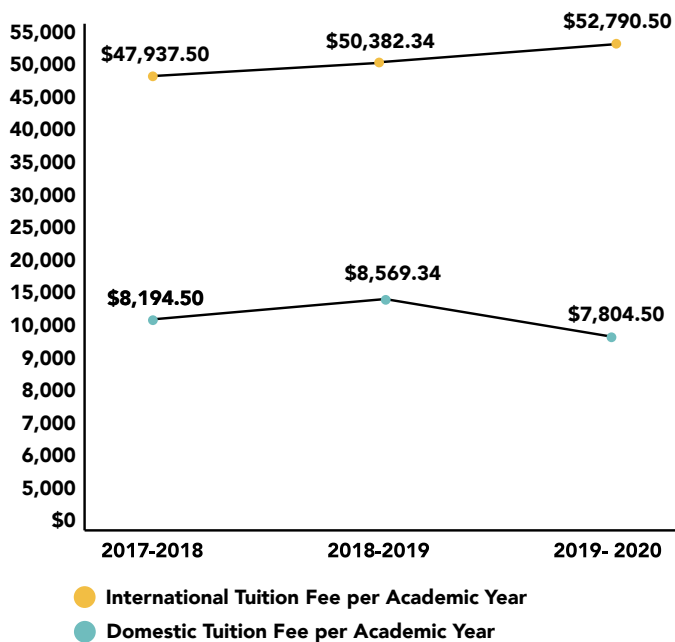
In Ontario, tuition fees for undergraduate international students are triple that of domestic students and graduate international students are double that of domestic students; resulting in undergraduate and graduate international students paying \$29,761 and \$20,673, compared to domestic students, respectively paying \$8,114 and \$9,416 (in Arts and Science programs).¹ International students play a significant role in the Canadian economy, contributing \$9.3 billion GDP in 2014, which amounts to 11% of Canada's total exports and 2.2% of Canada's total merchandise exports, therefore, creating over 122,680 jobs.² Ontario

contributed the highest to the GDP of \$4.4 billion (47.3%), with international students spending \$5.4 billion while creating 54,286 jobs.³ In 2018, an estimated \$21.6 billion contributed to the GDP, a federal increase of 132.3% within four years.⁴

International students have a significantly large economic impact; annually, they contribute billions to the province's economy through paying tuition fees, living expenses, taxes and general spending. However, despite these contributions, tuition fees rise at an exponential rate for them.



Figure One, Domestic and International Tuition Fee per Academic Year



In figures one to three*, it is illustrated that international students are privy to unfair differential fees; wherein over three academic years an international student's full-time course load has increased by \$5,000, and continues to do so. High tuition fees have put post-secondary education out of reach for many international students.

Differential tuition fees endanger the intellectual, cultural, and social benefits that international students contribute to campuses. As tuition fees increase with every passing year, this suggests that the province and institutions are interested in the wealthiest students, rather than the brightest students.⁵ We believe education should be accessible to students, not a burden for students who are working towards a better future for themselves.

Figure Two, International Fee Per Course

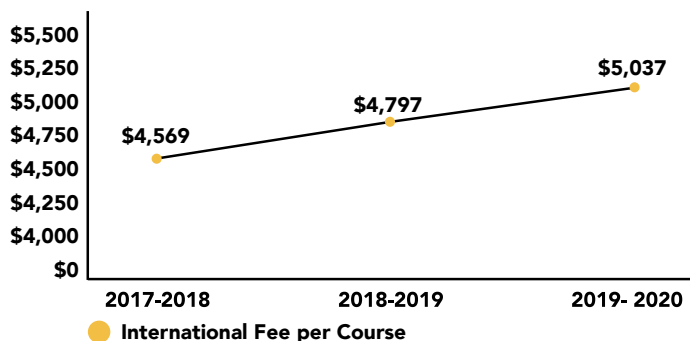
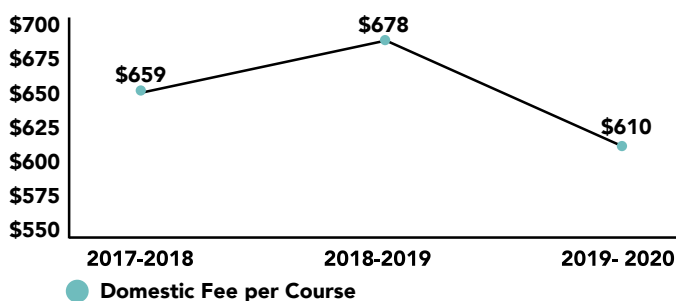


Figure Three, Domestic Fee Per Course



***The UTMSU
advocates for access
to education for all
students including
International Students
regardless of their
financial standing.***



*Note: All prices are taken from ACORN and are in accordance with a full 5.0 course load. Figure One is generalized accross programs.

1. Statistics Canada. Canadian and international tuition fees by level of study (Table 477-0077); Figures do not include tuition fees for Dentistry, Medicine, Pharmacy & Masters of Business Administration programs (2016).
2. <https://www.international.gc.ca/education/report-rapport/impact-2016/index.aspx><https://www.international.gc.ca/education/report-rapport/impact-2016/index.aspx?lang=eng>
3. <https://www.international.gc.ca/education/report-rapport/impact-2016/index.aspx><https://www.international.gc.ca/education/report-rapport/impact-2016/index.aspx?lang=eng>
4. <https://www.international.gc.ca/education/strategy-2019-2024-strategie.aspx>
5. <https://cfsontario.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Factsheet-InternationalStudents.pdf>

Second Demand:

Ontario Health Insurance Program (OHIP) for International Students

International students were previously covered under the Ontario Health Insurance Program (OHIP) until 1994 where international students were transitioned to the University Health Insurance Plan (UHIP) or College Health Insurance Plan (C-HIP).¹ In 2019, the UTMSU released a mental health report on its campus discussing student experiences and needs. In respect to international students and the Mental Health Services available to them, here are a couple of things we would like to highlight from that report.

International students have reduced access to affordable mental health services, although there is external mental health support and healthcare available, international students cannot access these services due to their lack of coverage through the UHIP program.² These restrictions often lead to international students being left to avail of the services provided by the University and external health care providers which oftentimes put them on lengthy waitlists, therefore, discouraging students from seeking help under the idea that it would take too long for a response. Additionally, international students are likely to be under stress caused by their financial status; considering that international student tuition fees are almost five times more expensive than their domestic counterparts.³



Ontario currently houses 180,000 international students studying in post secondary institutions.



For the inclusion of international students in OHIP, it is important to understand what international students contribute to this country. In 2016 international students in Ontario contributed \$4.4 Billion to the Ontario economy, created over 54,000 jobs and raised just over \$1 billion in government revenue.⁴ Ontario currently houses 180,000 international students studying in post secondary institutions. Additionally, the majority of international students who graduate with post secondary degrees decide to extend their stay in the country. For UTM graduates, a large population usually decides to reside in the region of Peel, which begs the question of why the government fails to include them under the provincial health insurance.

1. <https://www.narcity.com/amp/top-18-most-expensive-universities-in-canada-if-youre-living-away-from-home>

2. Ibid.

3. <https://utmsu.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Mental-Health-Report-2.pdf>

4. <https://cfsontario.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Factsheet-OHIP.pdf>

Third Demand:

**Increase Grants
and Scholarships
for International
Students**

International students are often excluded from provincial grants and funding; but still require financial assistance considering they have equal amounts of finances if not more than their domestic counterparts. High tuition fees have put education out of reach for many international students who want to study in Ontario; the current lack in scholarships and bursaries for international students contribute to this.

For instance, an international student can receive an (maximum) entrance scholarship of 12,000\$ split between their four years. This exclusive scholarship barely relieves financial stressors and adds additional pressure for students to uphold academic performance to maintain their scholarship.

Although the UTMSU has been distributing needs based bursaries, these barely fulfil the needs of our international students who might be facing financial difficulties. While we understand that even the University is facing financial strain during these unprecedented times, reallocating certain funds would improve support from the University to its students.

Increasing grants and scholarships would greatly assist international students in financial distress as well as allow the University of Toronto Mississauga to set precedent in these times of distress.



Conclusion

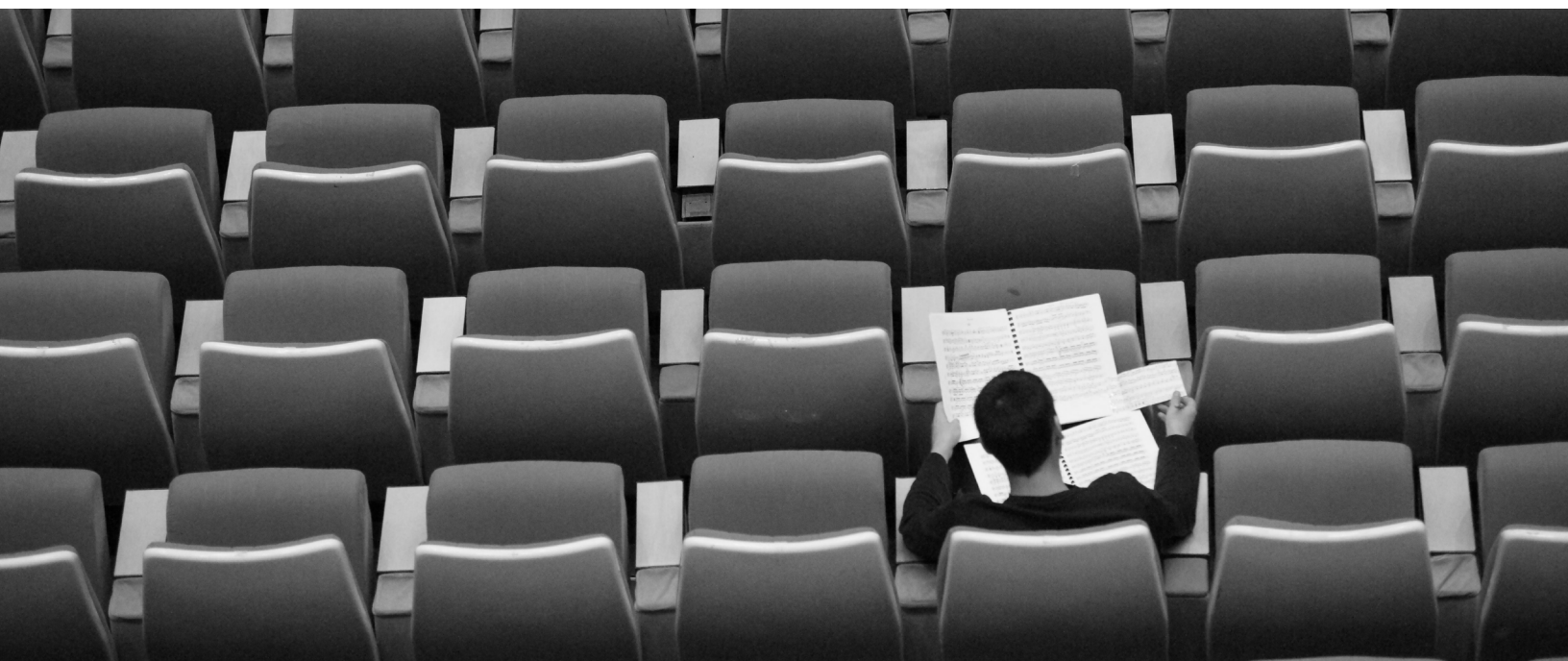
Year after year, the University is interested in recruiting and retaining international students, however, services and supports do not replicate this. The University needs to represent and tend to all students, not solely domestic students. These demands and recommendations illuminate the fact that international students are faced with significant challenges when it comes to accessing post-secondary education, health care, and finances.

That being said, we call upon the UTM administration to act on these demands and to create a plan of action regarding this document by Monday, January 18, 2021.

International students contribute to the economy and livelihood of this country.

Showcasing the University's support for international students will not only illustrate that international students are being listened to and represented but will also display that the University of Toronto is truly a global leading university.

As an educational institution, it is our duty to provide proper access to resources and services that benefit all students and not just a few. These demands are integral to creating a post-secondary education system that prioritizes and is fair for international students. It is high time for the University of Toronto to stop treating international students as cash cows and finally start prioritizing the needs of international students too.



Testimonials



"I came to Canada in 2017 to pursue my undergraduate degree at the University of Toronto. I was so excited to come to such a well known and established university. I knew the tuition fee was a burden on my parents, but they pushed me to apply as they hoped this degree would open many doors for me. Upon studying here for 3 years, I am disappointed to know that every year our fee goes up (even during a global pandemic), and we are constantly left out of student grants, loans and bursaries.

Despite paying so much, it is disheartening to see that I do not have access to even the same mental health facilities that my domestic counterparts do. I hope with this lobby document, there will be more fairness towards international students and their needs." - **Fourth Year Student, Management Specialist**

"Hi! I'm an international student from India. I'm grateful for being given the opportunity to study at UofT and learn among great minds. I would like to share some thoughts from an international student's perspective. Many international students have no friends and family when they arrive and they try to find a home within the university community. However, this becomes difficult when there's so much discrimination against international students.

The extremely high fees make it difficult for parents to pay for all four years of university. In addition, being in a deregulated program means spending almost 7 times more than domestic students. We are not even allowed to apply for a lot of grants and scholarships because of our international status. Moreover, there are times when we are made to feel that we are taking away opportunities and imposing on domestic students. I implore you to reduce the fees as well as make more opportunities for availing funds available to international students. I hope this testimonial is able to aid your decision in making university life fair for international and domestic students alike." - **Fourth Year Student, Management Specialist**



Testimonials



"I'm an international student from Japan, currently studying Accounting and Economics at UTM. Due to the noble COVID-19 pandemic, all our normal became abnormal and now we are re-establishing "new normal" everywhere. I believe this applies to the University of Toronto as well. I think the University of Toronto is making so many great changes but to maintain/improve on the quality of education under the current circumstances. However, there is a place, where UofT has not considered enough to deliver great quality of education to everyone EQUALLY. As UofT acknowledges, there are so many international students who attend UofT to seek for great education from all over the world. This means that

many UofT students do not reside in Canada. Especially during the current situation with COVID-19, many international students decided to return to their home country to stay with their family after the university closure in March 2020.

Recently, we have received an invoice for tuition from UofT for the upcoming academic year. I am very disappointed about the fact that the tuition has increased a lot compared previous academic year. Specifically, all the fees that can only be expensed in Canada do not have an option for us to opt-out. For example, health insurance, fee of the gym, Mississauga U-pass and more. Those fees would not be expensed by international students simply due to the fact they will not be in Canada. Not giving an option to opt-out for those fees is unfair. I strongly believe that UofT should reconsider its fee to truly deliver the best quality of education to everyone. Please do not ignore the voice of students. Thank you." - **Fourth Year Student, Commerce**

"It was extremely disheartening to discover that UofT has not considered the impact of COVID-19 on the financial status of any of its students, let alone the international ones.

As an international student, I feel exploited and helpless in a situation like this. There are significant financial constraints for many students due to the economic downturn. Especially with the scarcity of grants and scholarships for international students, these constraints are felt even more." - **Third Year Student**



Testimonials



"Having lived and schooled in Canada for a considerable amount of time, I have been able to see the many discrepancies between the quality of service provided to domestic and international students. Other than the obvious difference in fees, international students now have to face an unexplained increase in tuition during a global pandemic while domestic fees either reduce or stay the same. This is an issue that I feel should at least be addressed by the University of Toronto. It would be helpful to keep communication about such issues open and honest especially during a time like this. It is important to note that it is not only domestic students that are experiencing the repercussions and financial difficulties caused by COVID-19.

International students require help and assistance as well and should not be used as safety nets to cover the costs of reductions in domestic fees. At this point in time, I am aware of many international students at different institutions who are struggling due to the fact that they or their parents have faced job losses at this time. So it is quite unreasonable and unrealistic to expect such a student to be able to pay increased fees which have not even been explained. As students, we came to Canada expecting a high-quality education with inclusive services for all students no matter their background or country of residence.

Additionally, with the fees international students pay, it would be ideal to be able to have student insurance that covers more procedures than UHIP does at this moment. Several services that students need are usually out of pocket costs that are not covered by UHIP meaning that many students still have to pay for their medical services on top of their tuition fees." - **Fourth Year Student, Management Specialist & Psychology Minor**

"Over the years I have grown accustomed to life at UTM. I believe it has been a great introductory experience to Canadian life and culture. I enjoy being an active member of the UTM community. However, being an international student, it is disheartening to know that our needs/considerations are neglected within the community.

As equal members of the society at UTM, we should be treated fairly regardless of tuition paid or contributions made. With the lobby document, I hope that there is increased accessibility to resources for international students and more equitable treatment." - **Fourth Year Student, Psychology Specialist**



Testimonials



"Being an international student has been very difficult because sometimes we lack the support that domestic students are able to receive. For one, tuition is extremely high but we do not receive the necessary support we need. From my experience, the office of the registrar has been one of the services that have made it difficult for me to have a great experience in the school. I am always stressed, even after I go to seek certain advice or answers to questions about my academic year. All through my three years at UTM, I have had to figure out trying to complete in four years, especially changing programs about 2-3 times. It added more stress to the school-stress I already had, trying to study and making a good grade.

If we as international students are paying so much money, we at least deserve to get the support from the office of the registrar to give us the proper guidance when we need it. However, it has not been the case. To me, it makes me feel like the school only cares about the amount of money international students can give, rather than the kind of education we can receive. I have gone to the office of the registrar to ask for guidance as to how I can ensure that I can definitely complete in four years, and the answer I always received was 'you can always do it next academic year.' It seems like they do not understand that some of us are able to afford to add an extra year to our academic studies. It's been a difficult 3 years." - **Fourth Year Student, Economics and Sociology**

"As an international student, it's really disheartening to know that a school that claims to care about your mental health constantly takes actions that negatively affect international students.

During a worldwide pandemic where countries are struggling with the exchange rates, and other countries are falling into one of the most serious recessions, the school decides to raise tuition fees. To what? Compensate their losses? Furthermore, several families do not have a source of income right now and are using their savings which puts more pressure on them to pay these fees. The school is clearly only considering themselves when making decisions as such. Even though fees are higher they do not result in equal services being provided to us- domestic students still benefit more. In my opinion, this is extremely unfair and should be reconsidered." - **Fourth Year Student, Commerce**



Testimonials



"The university has not taken into consideration the problems that international students face due to this pandemic, international students have also suffered financial setbacks like many others and find it difficult to pay such an inflated tuition. Many international students cannot return to Canada this fall and have opted to choose online courses yet are being charged a higher tuition which is not optimal especially because online education is inferior to the in-person experience and because of the sacrifices international students will be made looking at the time zone differences. We have been charged with in-person fees for the athletics services, and more for the fall semester in which we will not be in Canada

so I feel that we have been treated unfairly especially with an increase in tuition for online courses." - **Fourth Year Student, DEM**

"As an international student myself, my tuition has increased by a massive percentage within the last few years. While I am extremely lucky and privileged to still be able to afford the fees, I know this has impacted many students on the campus. The increase in tuition fees prevents many from receiving opportunities and an education that they deserve. Increases like this discriminate against those who are not able to afford a wildly expensive tuition fees and a reduction in the fees would benefit and provide opportunities for many students." - **Fourth Year Student, Biology Specialist**



"I chose to study in Canada knowing this country is full of opportunities and welcoming. As I study at the University of Toronto I saw that my education gets more and more expensive to pay therefore giving me and my family a hard time. After the pandemic we all have been going through, online education is the only option I could choose. I am currently in my home country Turkey. Travelling back is not the safest option I have for the upcoming year. Knowing that I won't be able to use any campus amenities nor I might not have the same learning experience through a screen it disappointed me very much to learn that I have to pay the same amount I was paying for an on-campus education. I am writing

this testimonial hoping there will be an action taken helping us, international students more." - **Third Year Student, Political Science and CCIT**

