



*UTM STUDENTS' UNION DEMANDS FOR*

# EDUCATION FOR ALL



**UTMSU LOBBY WEEK**



# ***INTRODUCTION***

**Education is a right, not a privilege.**

Consequently, we have launched an updated lobby document advocating for students' demands post-pandemic. The Education for All Campaign is centered around embracing new strategies to guarantee that students obtain the highest quality of education possible. The campaign is focused on convincing the University of Toronto Mississauga administration and political leaders to make education accessible to all students, regardless of their background or financial situation. Further, it aims to remove the barriers that students face in obtaining education and to ensure that education is not a burden but an opportunity for all students to work towards a better future.

To help progress the campaign, UTMSU conducted an Education for All and Fairness for International Student Survey in 2022. Over 1,561 students across the Mississauga Campus have completed the survey, with 80.05% full-time students and 13.6% part-time students. Of these students, over 60% of them were domestic, whereas 32.7% were international. Throughout the lobby document, data from the survey will be utilized to support our demands. Each year, the university creates plans to attract both domestic and international students, but the resources and support provided do not match this effort. The university must address the needs of its students.

Considering these facts, the Education for All campaign aims to advocate for the needs and well-being of all students at the University of Toronto Mississauga Campus by calling for the following five actions from the university administration:

# **SUMMARY OF DEMANDS**

- 1** Immediate reduction and gradual elimination of tuition fees for all students
- 2** Conversion of student loans into grants
- 3** Creation of alternatives to mainstream education
- 4** Increase non-academic scholarships for students
- 5** Eliminate Out-Of-Province tuition hikes

**DEMAND 1**

# **IMMEDIATE REDUCTION AND GRADUAL ELIMINATION OF TUITION FEES**

Many assume that receiving an education from the best-ranked university in Canada is anything less than desirable due to the excellent research facilities, award-winning professors and diverse student body. However, the immense financial burden of tuition fees and their detrimental impact on students is often overlooked.

Students at the University of Toronto are heavily affected by the high tuition fees, leaving them in debt, taking countless years to pay off. This stress can cause financial instability for students who become worried about managing their student loans instead of focusing on their education or post-graduate life.

Research shows that 59.6% of students at UTM strongly believe that tuition fees impact their economic mobility. The above-mentioned statistic suggests that a significant portion of the student body cannot move up the economic ladder, pay off debt and invest their money due to the cost of their education. This makes sense, as students need to pay for their tuition and living costs such as rent, food and house bills. As such, expensive tuition fees make it difficult for students to afford necessities, resulting in potentially dangerous trade-offs. For instance, an international student facing financial difficulties because of extremely high tuition fees might feel forced to rent a shared room in an over-populated house. Students should not have to choose which necessities they can afford because of the cost of their education.

Furthermore, research shows that over 60% of students believe post-secondary education should be free. This means that many students view the current tuition costs as too high and thus too impactful on their lives. Thousands of students work during the academic year to save money to afford an education at the University of Toronto. Hence, as fees keep rising, students continue to worry about how to find different avenues to fund their education. But, education should not be a choice granted to those who can afford the rising tuition fees; it should be a right for everyone.

DEMAND **2**

# CONVERSION OF STUDENT LOANS TO GRANTS

Imagine graduating from the University of Toronto, ready to start your career. Instead of looking forward to a bright future, you are burdened with the crushing weight of student loan debt. This is the harsh reality that many U of T students face as the cost of higher education continues to rise. While these loans may seem like a necessary solution in the short term, they can become a significant burden for graduates in the long term, with many struggling to repay their debt. A possible solution to this issue is the conversion of student loans to grants. Student grants will alleviate the burden of student debt, increase access to higher education for low-income families and promote social mobility.

Converting student loans into grants will relieve the financial strain caused by student debt. The average student debtor owes at least \$26,075 at the end of their education (Pandurov, 2022). Many young graduates have delayed major life decisions, like buying a home, getting married or saving for retirement, due to an enormous amount of student debt. With grants, graduates would not have to worry about repaying the borrowed money and would be free to use their income as they see fit.

Grants instead of loans would enhance opportunities for low-income families to pursue higher education. Students would no longer have to worry about how they will finance their education and could attend university without added stress.

Finally, grants would promote social mobility by providing students from underprivileged backgrounds with the opportunity to attend university and improve their economic prospects.

DEMAND **3**

# ALTERNATIVES TO MAINSTREAM EDUCATION

The University of Toronto is known for its vital research programs, diverse student population, and ability to create tomorrow's leaders. Therefore, more co-op programs, online learning options, and improved accessibility services are needed to support students and their goals.

Firstly, there need to be more Co-op programs offered at UTM to accommodate the growing demand and popularity. The Professional Experience Year (PEY) Co-op Program at UTM is only open to Computer Science students enrolled in an Information Security, Bioinformatics Specialist or Computer Science Specialist/Major/Minor program. This limitation is significant as UTM offers over 90 areas of study and over 180 program options (University of Toronto Mississauga, 2020). Over 86% of UTM students said they would benefit from paid experiential learning opportunities. Nonetheless, the restriction placed on PEY Co-Op registration persists, leaving many students disadvantaged. Students recognize the value of the work-integrated learning programs, as they provide greater career clarity, offer new opportunities, and may result in securing paid positions after graduation.

Additionally, the University of Toronto students need an online alternative for undergraduate classes. Over 82% of students at UTM said they would benefit from both virtual and in-person learning, suggesting that a significant proportion of students prefer to have both learning formats available to them. The option for online learning provides students with increased flexibility, whether it is rewatching lectures they attended in person or attending class online from home due to personal and health reasons. The flexibility ensures that students can attend class from anywhere without falling behind. Evidently, after the COVID-19 pandemic, university staff can supply online alternatives. As such, hybrid learning should be available to ensure students have



consistent access to educational resources.

Moreover, there needs to be an improvement in the university's accessibility services, as current services are not enough to accommodate the total needs of students. Research shows that almost 60% of students at UTM are unsatisfied or neutral with the current standard of the University of Toronto's Accessibility Resources. Existing services, such as 'volunteer note-taking,' a program designed for students who need help taking notes, are insufficient due to the lack of volunteers and often inadequate notes. So, if no students volunteer, students who need the class notes are left without any. Similarly, if student volunteers upload illegible notes, the students requiring assistance are left with unsatisfactory notes that serve little use. In addition, volunteer note-takers are requested in classrooms only when at least one student enrolled in that class is registered with the accessibility center. As such, students who may need the notes due to specific physical or learning disabilities but are not registered with the accessibility center risk not being able to receive the messages that they need.

To combat these issues, volunteer note-taking positions should be paid to incentivize students who can take quality notes. This will ensure that notes are available for students who genuinely need them. Ultimately, students with physical or learning disabilities should not be disadvantaged because no student voluntarily uploads quality notes.





DEMAND **4**

# INCREASE NON-ACADEMIC SCHOLARSHIPS

The University of Toronto is ranked as one of the country's most expensive tertiary education institutions. Its prohibitive tuition is a primary obstacle to obtaining higher education for low-income families. Unfortunately, several financial aid options provided by UofT do not encompass more than just academics.

The University of Toronto is home to tens of thousands of students, yet the total number of non-academic scholarships offered is few. There were approximately 17,218 full-time undergraduate students in 2021-2022. However, U of T awarded over 5,700 admission scholarships for incoming undergraduate students (University of Toronto, 2022). There is a large discrepancy between the number of students at UofT and the number of non-academic scholarships provided.

In our recent survey, almost 70% of UTM students indicated that they would benefit from financial aid and scholarships offered to them by the university. This implies that most students in the sample need financial assistance to support their education. Given this statistic, the university should consider increasing its efforts to provide non-academic scholarships to help more students access higher education and overcome financial barriers. 65.6% of students at UTM have been granted financial aid but are still stressed, indicating that the non-academic scholarships need to be increased. This claim is further supported by the fact that 55.6% of students at UTM stated that tuition fees negatively impact their mental health and personal well-being.

Consequently, many students have to rely on student loans and a job to pay for their schooling. Many students struggle to maintain a balance between obtaining good grades and working, which results



in them not living up to their full potential, carrying a financial burden and, in the end, being ineligible to apply for academic scholarships. Many students, for this reason, graduate with mediocre grades and a large amount of student debt.

Despite the UTMSU providing need-based bursaries, they do not adequately meet the requirements of students. We recognize there is currently a global economic crisis, and that the university may be financially challenged. However, redirecting funds would enhance student support. Scholarships can alleviate the burden of working while studying, allowing students to concentrate on their academic pursuits, resulting in better grades, increased participation in extracurricular activities, and more remarkable societal contributions. Additionally, it can help students find employment in their chosen field.

DEMAND **5**

# ELIMINATE INCREASED OUT OF PROVINCE TUITION FEES FOR ALL STUDENTS

Thousands of non-Ontario students enroll in the University of Toronto to receive a world-class education but at what cost?

High tuition fees impact all students. However, students not residing in Ontario have been affected more significantly. In a meeting on March 31, 2022, U of T's Governing Council passed its tuition fee schedule for the 2022–2023 academic year (University of Toronto 2022). The plan offers a three percent increase in non-Ontario domestic students' fees. In 2021/22-year non-Ontario undergraduate student fees were \$14,180, the newly approved costs for 2022/23 amount to \$14,600, while the Ontario resident undergraduate fees stayed at \$14,180 (University of Toronto 2022). Out-of-Province tuition discrimination will harm regional diversity, reduce the number of indigenous students in UofT and damage the university's reputation.

Expensive tuition fees have put post-secondary education out of reach for many non-Ontario residents, especially amidst the post-COVID-19 crisis. While students struggle to keep up with their studies, they also have an extra weight of student debt. Thousands of students graduate with excitement and possibly more fear due to the mounting student loans they must pay back.

It is important to note that the out-of-province tuition hike has more effect on marginalized groups than others. Jamie Kearns, an Indigenous student, stated that the proposed two-tier domestic fee system would negatively affect Indigenous students. Kearns pointed out that Indigenous students at the University of Toronto come from various communities throughout the country, many of which have limited resources and funding (Jiang, 2022). Therefore, increased out-of-province fees will make UofT less accessible for indigenous students.

A lack of regional diversity at U of T will lead to limited perspectives, an absence of cultural understanding and a loss of diversity in research.

Additionally, out-of-province tuition hikes can negatively affect the University of Toronto's reputation because it would suggest that it favors students from Ontario over those from other provinces. This can lead to a decrease in non-Ontario students' enrollment and the student body's overall quality.

Students contribute billions of dollars to the province's economy by paying tuition fees and other expenses annually. Despite this, certain groups of students, such as non-Ontario residents, are facing increasing financial burdens due to rising tuition rates, making post-secondary education increasingly unaffordable. Education should not be a burden for students working towards a better future in another province.

## ***CONCLUSION***

The demands reveal the significant obstacles students face when it comes to accessing post-secondary education, accessibility, and funding. In light of this, we urge UTM administration to act on these demands, and to develop a plan of action. By doing so, the University will demonstrate its commitment to creating a post-secondary education system that prioritizes Education for All students.

## REFERENCES

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## **UTMSU LOBBY DOCUMENT**