



Analysis Report: UTSU Student Aid Program

For circulation to the Student Aid
Committee and Board of Directors

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Background

The University of Toronto Students' Union offers a Bursaries and Grants Program to its membership of 38,000. This program includes the following forms of aid:

- Book and Academic Supplies Bursary (capped at \$100 per applicant per semester)
- Exam Deferral Bursary (capped at \$70 per applicant per semester)
- Academic Pursuits Grant (capped at \$100 per applicant per semester)
- Health and Wellness Bursary (capped at \$100 per applicant per semester)
- Accessibility Bursary (capped at \$100 per applicant per semester)
- Transit Bursary (capped at \$50 per applicant per semester)
- Emergency Bursary (capped at \$250 per applicant per semester)

Since the reforms to the Student Aid Program took place in late September 2019, numerous applicants have applied and received funding from the program. The Student Aid Committee has met to deliberate these applicants on four (4) separate occasions:

- 4 October 2019 at 1:30PM
- 17 October 2019 at 4:00PM
- 31 October 2019 at 2:00PM
- 6 November 2019 at 11:00AM

The purpose of this report is to provide the Committee and Board with insight into how the reformed program is running, and to make recommendations for its continued improvement and longevity.

Application and Disbursement Data Analysis

In the years spanning from 2017-2019, the UTSU received 140 applications to its Student Aid Program. Of those applications, 105 were approved and 35 were rejected.

With the new revamped program, the UTSU has received nearly the same amount of applications in a two-month span as it did in a two-year span.¹

In addition, in that same two-year span, the UTSU disbursed \$10,899 in aid. To this date in the 2019-2020 year, the UTSU has disbursed \$7,324.26, which is a 67.2% capacity of what it was in the last two years.

Bursary Name	Number of Applicants	Number Approved	Funds Disbursed
Book and Academic Supplies	40	34	\$2,993.26
Exam Deferral	6	6	\$420.00
Academic Pursuits	5	1	\$100.00
Health and Wellness	9	4	\$220.00
Transit	56	50	\$2,241.00
Accessibility	2	1	\$100.00
Emergency	7	5	\$1,250.00
TOTALS	125	101	\$7,324.26

As shown in the table above, thus far the Student Aid Committee has approved 101 applications. It is worth noting that of these applications, eight (8) applicants received disbursements for two or more bursaries. Applicants have the opportunity to apply for all bursaries, however the Student Aid Committee has taken the time to ensure that if a student applies for one bursary that will give them more funding than another, that application is considered more so than the other to maximize 1) the amount of help the student is receiving, and 2) reducing the amount coming out of any one line item from the program.

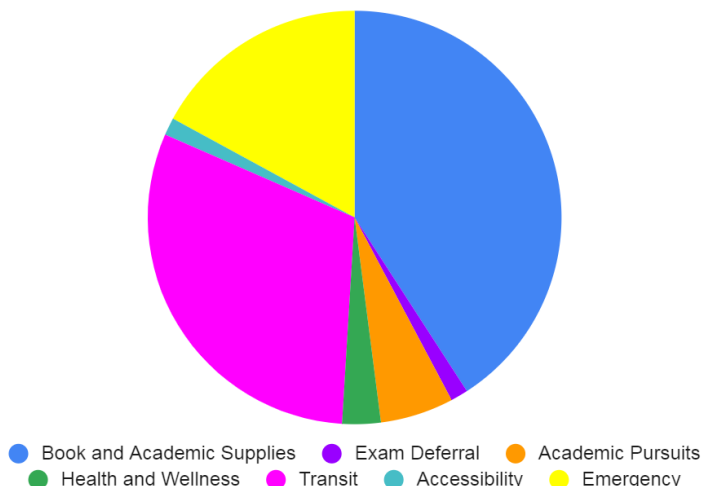
¹ This report encompasses data as of Tuesday, November 19, 2019.

The Transit Bursary is our most popular, having seen 56 applications and 50 approvals. It is still not our most expensive line item given that disbursements are capped at \$50 per applicant per semester.

The Book and Academic Supplies Bursary is our most expensive, as we have disbursed nearly \$3000 thus far. The idea with the Book and Academic Supplies Bursary when it was

expanded from the Book Bursary was that students could claim for expenses beyond books, such as laptops, lab coats, writing materials, and more. We have received numerous applications from students wishing to replace their laptops, which is a positive outcome of the revamped program.

Disbursement Distribution as of 2019.11.19



Emergency Bursary Applications

Emergency Bursaries are inherently sensitive. They are for students who are finding themselves in very sudden financial distress, and they are coming to us for help. As a disclosure, the original intent was that the Emergency Bursary would be disbursed at a maximum of \$1000 per applicant. During the second meeting of the Student Aid Committee, I as Screening Clerk recommended that we lower the maximum disbursement to \$250. This was a painful decision, and one that myself and the Committee did not take lightly. It is the reality that in the landscape of the Student Choice Initiative, where 15.8% of our members opted out of a \$0.16 fee, that we do not have the capacity to be giving so much money to so many individuals.

I have undertaken the responsibility of liaising with all applicants regarding disbursements, including those who have applied for the Emergency Bursary. Due to the limited nature of the application itself, it is important that the Committee receive supporting documentation, whether that be rental

agreements or further clarification on situations in which applicants find themselves. This is meant to be as minimally invasive as possible, and only serves to ensure that the Committee has all the information it can when deliberating applications.

Overall, the Emergency Bursary has been a good addition to our Student Aid apparatus, however we simply need more funding. We are getting by this year after putting a little less than \$20,000 into the program, but next year will be a different story.

Disbursement Method

This year, we have offered students the ability to grant us their Direct Deposit information such that we can disburse their funds directly into their bank accounts. This is a method that we tried in the 2018-2019 year after a recommendation from previous UTSU Executives who said that there were often many cheques left unclaimed at the office in April. Of the 101 successful applicants, 53% opted to receive funds through Direct Deposit. In addition, instead of making students come to the office at 12 Hart House Circle for their cheque, we mailed them to the address they provided to ensure they got their funds.

The entire Executive and Staff team has been diligent in ensuring constant communication throughout the application, approval, and disbursement process. The Student Aid Program has made us look at more efficient and substantive ways of helping students in the long run.

Recommendations

In my capacity as the UTSU's Chief Operations Assistant and Screening Clerk for the Student Aid Program, there is one overall solution that I see mitigating any future issues with the program: a referendum.

Since the UTSU's society fee has been broken down due to the Student Choice Initiative, each individual fee is its own and subject to its own referenda rules. As mentioned previously, the Scholarships and Bursaries fee is \$0.16. If a referendum were run to increase the fee to \$0.50, or even \$1.00, we would have more money for the program without having to rely on contingency next year.

This program has helped 92 students receive aid thus far, and that number is only going to go up. It is imperative that we take action to ensure its long term health.