



**Tuesday, April 6, 2021.**

**Statement RE: Proposed 2021-2022 University of Toronto Budget & Tuition Fee Schedules**

To the Governing Council and administration of the University of Toronto,

Over the course of the 2020-2021 academic year at the University of Toronto, students have faced a number of unprecedented challenges as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Students have shown great resilience throughout this crisis, but in many cases, have turned to their student governments and the University itself for greater support. To this end, the UTSU has worked with many elected student leaders from across campus to express to the university administration the necessary actions it must take to ensure students are supported in their education this year. One of the top concerns that has been raised by students and that has gone unaddressed by the administration is tuition fees. With the Governing Council of the University of Toronto meeting later today to consider the approval of the 2021-2022 tuition fee schedules and operating budget, we felt it necessary to clearly state our concerns and recommendations for this budget, and U of T's budgeting process overall.

After the initial shift to online classes at the University of Toronto, the UTSU issued a statement on April 22, 2020 calling on the university to, among other things, "reduce both domestic and international course fees due to online delivery." As more questions arose around the 2020-2021 academic year, this demand was reinforced by UTSU statements in May and July 2020, alongside calls to cancel the planned increase to international tuition fees, which averaged 5.3%. The administration dismissed these demands, stating that investments were needed in digital infrastructure and that academic programs continued to be delivered through alternative means. The UTSU's Report on Online Learning & Remote Classes concluded that the quality of education at the University of Toronto had suffered as a result of the shift to online learning, and endorsed tuition relief, as did the Joint Statement on the University of Toronto's COVID-19 Response, signed onto by the UTSU and eight other major student groups at the U of T St. George campus and released in October 2020. Despite this advocacy work, the university continued to dismiss discussions around tuition relief. Students have been encouraged to access financial aid, and while financial aid has proved to greatly help many students, there are still many who fall through the cracks of federal, provincial, and university financial aid programs. Universal tuition relief would alleviate some of this financial burden for all students, ensuring no one is left behind.

The UTSU has continued to advocate on the issue of tuition fees since then, including joining the Same Degree, Same Fee campaign with the Computer Science Students' Union, Bioinformatics & Computational Biology Students' Union, and Arts & Science Students' Union to advocate for reduced tuition fees for formerly-deregulated programs with differential tuition. However, we have not seen much willingness from the University of Toronto administration to work with us to find tangible solutions that would solve the financial difficulties many students are facing. We understand that provincial operating funding has steadily declined in recent years, and that this has increased the university's reliance on tuition fees, particularly international tuition. The UTSU is actively advocating to the provincial government for a tuition freeze and increases to operating grants for universities, and we'd



welcome opportunities to collaborate with the university on this advocacy. But the status quo is not working for students, and the proposed 2021-2022 University of Toronto Budget does little to address our concerns.

**With this in mind, the University of Toronto Students' Union calls on the Governing Council to direct the administration to implement the following recommendations for the proposed 2021-2022 University of Toronto Budget:**

- **Freeze international and domestic tuition fees for the 2021-2022 academic year.**  
We appreciate the planned freeze to domestic tuition fees, but we understand that this is only being done in the absence of a tuition fee framework from the provincial government. Alarming, this budget proposes an increase to international tuition fees averaging 2.3%. Many international students have lost part-time job opportunities, and have faced the negative economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on their home countries, including on familial income. To raise international tuition fees during a pandemic is unacceptable, and we firmly oppose this proposed increase.
- **Revise the proposed 2021-2022 tuition fee schedules to reduce tuition fees for classes operating remotely in Summer 2021 and onwards as necessary.**  
Students know that the quality of online learning does not justify paying full tuition fees, particularly at a time when many students and their families are facing financial difficulties. We are not getting what we're paying for. As students and student groups have been calling for the past year, tuition fees should be reduced for classes operating remotely.
- **Reduce domestic and international tuition fees for the Computer Science, Bioinformatics & Computational Biology, and Data Science programs so that they are equal to tuition fees for other regulated programs in the Faculty of Arts & Science.**  
Students in the CS, BCB, and DS programs pay higher fees than other students pursuing a Bachelor of Science, despite these programs being regulated. Not only is this differential tuition structure unfair, it creates a barrier for low-income students to access these fields, and creates additional financial burdens on students who are already in academically rigorous programs. We are asking for students pursuing the same degree to pay the same fees.
- **More permanent funding for campus mental health resources, such as Health & Wellness, so they can reduce reliance on student ancillary fees.**  
Students are facing a mental health crisis on our campus, and after much advocacy, the university is beginning to address it. We appreciate the efforts that have been made to invest funding in mental health resources and counselling services at U of T, but much more work needs to be done. Currently, Student Life, the university division that oversees the Health & Wellness Centre, is primarily funded by student ancillary fees. While the Council of Student Services recently voted in favour of the 2021-2022 Student



Life Budget and fee increases, the UTSU made it clear that the university must provide more funding to reduce reliance on ancillary fees. We appreciate the Provost's increased investment from the University Fund this year, but we hope that this increase to central funding for mental health services will be expanded upon and made permanent.

We must make clear that this is not the first time we have put forward these recommendations to the administration. Despite being flatly dismissed with seemingly no interest in finding possible solutions, student leaders have been calling for reduced tuition for online classes since the beginning of the pandemic, and have met with the administration multiple times on the issue. Further, in lobbying for our Same Degree, Same Fee campaign, the UTSU, CSSU, ASSU and student governors met with administrators in mid-December to discuss differential tuition in formerly deregulated programs, where the university's budget process was explained to us. We learned that there is no formal mechanism through which students are consulted during the budget process, despite students' tuition accounting for roughly two-thirds of the university's revenue. We requested follow-up meetings after this meeting in December, however we were told it was too late, and the suggestion was made that student leaders could comment on the budget at governance bodies.

This suggestion ignores the reality of student voice at U of T; speaking at the university's governance bodies does not result in change, because students have no power in these bodies. Only eight students are elected each year to a Governing Council of 50 members, and student union representatives can only speak for a few minutes, and are not allowed follow-ups to administrative responses. Even if students were empowered at this stage, changes are rarely made to items presented to the Governing Council; the budget undergoes a year-long planning process, and it's been made clear that if students want to impact the university budget, they must participate in the planning process.

**With this in mind, the University of Toronto Students' Union calls on the University of Toronto administration to enact the following recommendations for future budget cycles of the University of Toronto:**

- **Each academic division should create a budget consultation process with students, similar to the Faculty of Arts & Science.**

After our discussion with administrators in December 2020 regarding our Same Degree, Same Fee campaign, the Dean of the Faculty of Arts & Science began to work with the Arts & Science Students' Union to create budget consultation sessions with students, as a part of the Faculty's budget planning process. This is a welcome change, and we would like to see all university divisions create a similar process. There was a commitment made at the March 17 Business Board meeting by the Provost to consult with deans on such a proposal, and we hope to hear updates on these discussions and a plan to implement these consultations.



- **Allow the UTSU, APUS, UTGSU, UTMSU, and SCSU to make budget submissions to the Provost with recommendations for distributing funds from the University Fund.**

We appreciate that the U of T budget planning process is designed to be 'bottom-up' and starts at the academic divisions, and that divisional student societies should be involved in these processes. However, leaving the five representative student committees out of the planning process entirely weakens our ability to represent the interests of all U of T students to the university administration. The University Fund, a pool of centrally-distributed funding overseen by the Provost, provides an opportunity for the university to consult with student unions on funding priorities. This would not be unique to U of T; the University of Manitoba Students' Union and the Western University Students' Council are two examples of student unions that make budget submissions to their respective administrations with recommended funding priorities. We encourage the Provost to create a process for this to occur at U of T, and we would welcome the opportunity to discuss this further.

- **Hold a town hall on the operating budget, open to all U of T students, at the end of the fall semester before the budget is finalized.**

Students are hardly aware of the budget planning process that is undertaken each year, despite contributing the most revenue towards the university. We're asking that a town hall be scheduled in the fall semester each year prior to the operating budget being finalized. This would be an opportunity for students to understand the finances of the university and ask questions to administrators, and for administrators to understand the needs of students and how best to reflect that in the university's budget. Given the decentralized nature of the budget process, administrators from academic divisions could also be in attendance to speak to their division's budget plans.

- **Make it easier to access detailed divisional and departmental budget information.**

In the course of our Same Degree, Same Fee campaign, student leaders requested to see departmental budget information, as we had been told that if tuition fees were lowered, that would necessitate cuts to student services. We were refused that request, on the grounds that detailed departmental budget information is not public. The UTSU had also been refused access to the U of T Campus Police budget for the same reason. Unable to corroborate claims of potential cuts to student services, the UTSU filed two requests under the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* to obtain budget information for these departments. We were successful in obtaining most of the information we requested, and are currently reviewing this information, but filing FIPPA requests is not the most accessible way for students to determine how their tuition fees are being spent. The University of Toronto must make detailed divisional and departmental budget information more easily accessible to students. If tuition fees can't be lowered, the onus is on the administration to show us the numbers that justify that conclusion.



Students need to be supported by the university during this crisis, but thus far, that support has fallen short. The Governing Council and administration of the University of Toronto has the opportunity today to better support U of T students as we prepare to return to campus in the fall and begin to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. As we wrap up the 2020-2021 academic year, the UTSU will continue to strive to support students and advocate for their needs during and after this crisis. We hope that those in the administration will listen.

Yours,

**The University of Toronto Students' Union Executive Committee**

**Muntaka Ahmed**

President

**Neeharika Hemrajani**

Vice-President, Student Life

**Dermot O'Halloran**

Vice-President, Operations

**Alex McLean**

Vice-President, Equity

**Tyler Riches**

Vice-President, Public & University Affairs

**Paul Kaita**

Vice-President, Professional Faculties

**Please direct all questions to:**

Muntaka Ahmed (*she/her*)

President

[president@utsu.ca](mailto:president@utsu.ca)

Tyler Riches (*he/they*)

Vice-President, Public & University Affairs

[vppua@utsu.ca](mailto:vppua@utsu.ca)