



Select Standing Committee
on Finances & Government
Services

A large, dark grey circular graphic with a white dotted border, resembling a planet or a moon, is centered on the page. Inside the circle, the text "2022 Budget Submission" is written in a bold, white, sans-serif font. The background of the page is a collage of overlapping teal and grey geometric shapes, some with white dotted lines connecting their vertices.

2022 Budget Submission

**Thompson Rivers University
Students' Union**

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**STUDENT
VOICES FROM
OUR MEMBERS
2021**



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Introduction

As we are all keenly aware, the past two years have been an unusually challenging time for British Columbians. The Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) has disrupted vast sectors of the economy, in addition to the unprecedented health and social effects. Looking forward to the next few years as the economic fallout from COVID-19 continues to be felt there will be significant challenges that we need to face together as a province.

As an organization representing post-secondary students, we know that students and young people are struggling to make ends meet. Students have had their studies disrupted, lost jobs and/or job prospects, and face new hurdles to afford to complete their studies in a timely fashion.

Our recommendations for the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services for the 2022 Budget are

in response to the challenges being faced by students and the post-secondary sector more broadly. Our first recommendation is to enhance financial supports for students in the short term in response to COVID-19 through expanding the new BC Access Grant. Our second recommendation is to launch a provincial jobs program for post-secondary students to help students gain experience and find employment. Our third recommendation is to launch a provincial international student strategy. This is more important than ever as international students face a host of new challenges to continue their studies in B.C. and institutions face significant uncertainty in the sector. Our fourth and final recommendation is for the B.C. government to restore apprenticeship offices in conjunction with the rollout of compulsory trades.

**Select Standing
Committee on
Finances and
Governance
Services**

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Recommendation 1:

Expand the B.C. Access Grant in response to COVID-19

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Recommendation 2:

Establish a Provincial Jobs Program for Post-Secondary Students

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Recommendation 3:

Create a Provincial Strategy For International Students

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Recommendation 4:

Restore Apprenticeship Offices to Support Post-Secondary Trades Training

**Membership
YOU can be
proud of.**

The Thompson Rivers University

Students' Union is a membership-based organization representing approximately 10,000 students in Kamloops, British Columbia.

Recommendation 1: Expand the B.C. Access Grant

Students across the province have consistently advocated for need-based grants because they are targeted to students with financial need, provided at the time of when the largest costs of education are due, and transparent, therein allowing students to be sure of their financial position before incurring the costs of education. Compared to other forms of student finance aid, these characteristics uniquely position need-based grants to increase participation in post-secondary education, completion of studies, and transition into employment.

Their viability as the most impactful financial aid option is supported by significant research across North America on the impact of student aid on participation, completion, and workforce transition. A 2010 Stanford University study found need-based grants to be more effective at improving students' likelihood to enroll in university, stay in university, and earn a bachelor's degree.^[1] A 2012 Harvard University study concluded that by reducing the cost of attending a post-secondary institution, financial aid in the form of up-front need-based grants lowers the real or perceived cost of at-

tendance to the point where many students on the margin of enrolling decide to register.^[2]

In September 2020 the BC Government launched the new BC Access Grant, a new need-based grants program for post-secondary students. This program is designed to complement the federal Canada Student Grants program to ensure that BC students can receive up to \$4000 in combined provincial/federal non-repayable assistance regardless of their program length. Specifically, this program provides up to \$1000 per year to students in programs longer than two years and up to \$4000 per year to students in programs under two years in length.

On behalf of our 10,000 members at Thompson Rivers University in Kamloops BC, we thank the B.C. Government for moving forward this program forward to increase the accessibility of post-secondary education. We also thank the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services for their recommendations supporting this program over the past decade.

In these unprecedented times, ensuring that

post-secondary education is accessible to all is of increasing importance. Students and young people have continued to face higher unemployment rates than other demographics, which will impact their ability to afford post-secondary education. There will also likely be new prospective students who are looking to post-secondary education for retraining due to the economic downturn that need increased levels of support.

In response to these concerns the Federal government has already announced that they are doubling the Canada Student Grants program for 3 years starting in the 2020/21 academic year.^[3] This will increase the maximum grant for low income students from \$3000 per academic year to \$6000 until July 2023 in federal funding for programs longer than two years in length. There is also a role for an increased response

from the provincial government. As the increase in federal grants money returns to normal levels in the years ahead there will be students across B.C. still struggling financially due to ongoing COVID impacts and therefore a slow recovery from some industries. This is an opportunity for the B.C. Government to help the economy recover now and in the future through increasing accessibility to post-secondary education.

Our recommendation is therefore that the B.C. Government increase the value of the B.C. Access Grant in the 2022 Budget. This will complement the Canada Student Grants program to ensure that BC Students have increased levels of support for the years following the COVID-19 pandemic to encourage participation and completion in post-secondary education.

We asked students at TRU to reflect on their experiences during the year of 2020. This is what some students shared with us regarding their finances.



“Without a doubt, finances are what mainly preoccupy my thoughts while I pursue my studies. Having lost three jobs at once due to the pandemic, I do worry about being able to continue to meet my financial obligations while I resume my studies.”

“Increased grant money allowed me to upgrade my technology which has been a huge help.”

“I received extra grant money as part of COVID-19. It does help as I know I will have large debts to pay once I graduate.”

Recommendation 2: Establish a Provincial Jobs Program for Students

Our second recommendation is for the provincial government to establish a jobs program for post-secondary students across BC. There is a longstanding federal jobs program that supports students, but some other provinces such as Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Ontario have created their own provincial components as well. As we prepare to restart our economy during and after the COVID-19 pandemic we believe it is important for the BC Government to have a student jobs program as well.

We believe this recommendation is important because the COVID-19 pandemic is proving particularly challenging for young people and new graduates. As of January, 15-24 year-olds have accounted for 45% of net employment losses since the onset of the pandemic. And young people still face much higher unemployment rates than pre-pandemic – 10.4% in January 2020 compared to 19.7% in January 2021.^[4]

The federal student jobs program provides some assistance to students and graduates, but there is more that could be done. The Canada Sum-

mer Jobs program aims to “provide flexible and holistic services to support all young Canadians develop the skills and gain paid work experience to successfully transition in the labour market.” It is open to employers from not-for-profit organizations, the public sector, and private sector employers with under 50 employees. During most years the program will fund up to 100% of minimum wage for not-for-profits and up to 50% for public and private sectors employers.^[5]

While this program is valuable and helps thousands of BC students find employment every summer, it is also no longer targeted to only students. Other provinces have layered a provincial program targeted to their province’s students. For example, in April 2020 Manitoba announced a new \$120 million program that will fund up to \$7 per hour and up to \$5000 per student. This program was put forward not only as a way to help students struggling to find meaningful employment in this new environment, but also as a way to help not-for-profits and businesses adapt their workplaces to social distancing while offsetting staffing costs.^[6]

Now is the time for British Columbia to also launch a student jobs program. The provincial government already provides a wide range of student jobs across different sectors, centralizing these opportunities under a single program could provide the framework for a comprehensive program while also providing simplicity and clarity to students looking for opportunities related to their studies. With additional targeted funds the provincial government could also be helping not-for-profits and small businesses recover from the pandemic while providing valuable work experience to students just starting their careers.

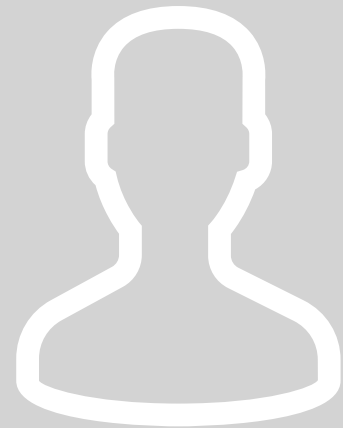
We asked students at TRU to reflect on their experiences during the year of 2020.

This is what some students shared with us regarding their job experiences.

“I was laid off from my job for half the year. I always work part time throughout the school year so not having work has been a huge stressor for me financially.”

“Without a doubt, finances are what mainly preoccupy my thoughts while I pursue my studies. Having lost three jobs at once due to the pandemic, I do worry about being able to continue to meet my financial obligations (rent, utilities, credit card debt, etc) while I resume my studies.”

“I lost my job beginning of March and it has truly been hard living without work for so long.”



Recommendation 3: Create a Provincial Strategy for International Students

At Thompson Rivers University the number of international student enrollments has rapidly increased, growing from 1749 in 2014/15 to 3345 in 2018/19, representing a 91% increase.

^[7] Over the last two years alone, growing international enrolment has led to an increase in projected revenue from international undergraduate and graduate tuition by more than 40% from \$40.6 million in 2017/18 to \$57.1 million 2019/20. As a result, tuition and fee revenue from international students at TRU now accounts for 59% of tuition revenue.^[8]

TRU is not unique in the province in this regard either. British Columbia currently hosts over 150,000 international students, representing approximately 25% of international students across the country. Over 58,000 of these students are enrolled in the public post-secondary sector, having almost tripled since 2007/08.^[9]

This increase in international enrollment brings significant value to post-secondary institutions and communities across the province. The direct and indirect economic impact of international education in BC in 2016 was over \$4.2 billion. As a result, international stu-

dents contributed \$2.8 billion to the provincial GDP in 2016 and helped to support vital services for residents across the province. ^[10]

The future of international student enrolment is increasingly uncertain though in the context of COVID-19. Post-secondary institutions across BC are nervously looking ahead to the fall semester and beyond with uncertainty about how travel restrictions and an unstable global economic situation may impact enrolment – and perhaps even more importantly, how it may impact revenue.

There are no easy answers for how to move forward for post-secondary institutions and for international students themselves. Some international students have expressed concern with being able to afford to continue to study as they have lost jobs that they relied on while studying here or in some cases family back home are facing new financial challenges. On the other hand, institutions face increased costs of supplying online education this fall with uncertain enrolment and so in many cases cannot afford to reduce fee costs for students.^[11] Despite the significant role international education plays in our provincial economy, the

entire sector has largely grown without any broad strategic plan. Each post-secondary institution across BC tends to recruit as many international students as they believe they can accommodate and charges fees at a level they believe students will pay. Now each institution in turn will be making decisions on their campus about how to move forward after the COVID-19 pandemic without the benefit of a provincial plan or coordination. This is problematic because it leaves our province economically vulnerable to a few individual decision makers at post-secondary institutions who oversee international enrollment, without the benefit of any broader formalized provincial context.

The previous provincial strategy for international students released in 2012 focused mostly on maximizing the economic benefits of international students and strategies to attract more students. Today, nine years later, B.C. needs a new strategy for international students that ensures that international education continues to benefit post-secondary institutions, communities, and the province as a whole at a time when the entire sector is particularly vulnerable. We

believe that the provincial government needs to have a stronger role in this important part of our economy in order to ensure that BC can continue to maximize benefits from international education while also ensuring that international students are supported.

We asked students at TRU to reflect on their experiences during the year of 2020. This is what some international students shared with us regarding their experiences.



“The biggest challenge I faced was studying online in virtual classes. I got my visa last year in March and was super excited to join TRU in September. Unfortunately, due to the lock-down, I had to cancel all my plans of moving to Canada, since I live in India, I had to come to the realization that my dreams of moving to Canada will have to wait for some time more.”

“Covid 19 definitely brought financial problems and with the fees not decreasing and jobs vanishing it become extremely difficult for an international student to survive.”

Recommendation 4: Restore Apprenticeship Offices to Support Trades Training

On June 11, 2021, the B.C. Government announced that they would be bringing back mandatory trades certifications for trades workers in the province. This rollout will start with ten trades and potentially be expanded from there.^[12] As an organization representing post-secondary students, particularly where a large number of our members are engaged in trades training, we applaud the BC Government for this move. Compulsory trades training will help to ensure that workplaces have a high level of safety, all workers are appropriately trained, and that our members are paid fairly.

In the long term this program will help provide clear pathways to trades through post-secondary education. But in the shorter term there will be an increased number of students seeking certification in order to continue to work in their chosen field. With this increasing demand on post-secondary campuses across BC there will be a greater corresponding number of students looking for financial support, employment support, and career counselling.

In order to meet this need for greater support for trades students we are recommending that the BC

Government restore apprenticeship offices at post-secondary institutions across the province. Some of the services that were provided by apprenticeship offices in BC up until 2003 are currently provided by the Industry Training Authority (ITA), but in many ways this model has fallen short in adequately supporting students. Institution specific apprenticeship offices would be much better placed to help meet the unique needs of trades students across the province. These offices would be able to take a much stronger role in connecting students to employers throughout the apprenticeship process. They would also be more intimately connected to institutions and local students, therefore being better able to identify students struggling financially. In other words, rather than using a centralized approach to supporting students through the ITA, apprenticeship offices at each institution could tailor their approach and services to what their students need.



Endnotes

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^[4] Statistics Canada. COVID-19 in Canada: A One-year Update on Social and Economic Impacts. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-631-x/11-631-x2021001-eng.htm#a4>

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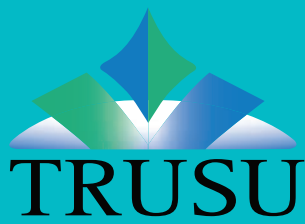
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^[10] Global Affairs Canada. 2017. Economic impact of international education in Canada – 2017 update. Retrieved from the Global Affairs Canada website: <http://www.international.gc.ca/education/report-rapport/impact-2017/sec-3.aspx?lang=eng>

^[11] Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC). May 7, 2020. As international students struggle to make ends meet, universities face crippling drop in enrolment <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/international-students-bc-covid-19-1.5557286>

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