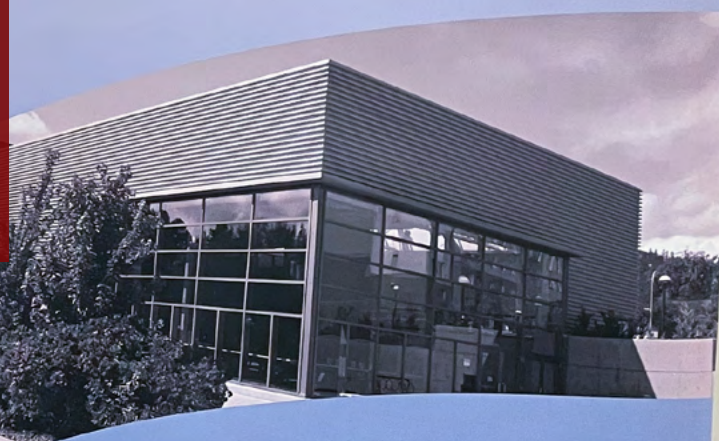


# 2024 PROVINCIAL BUDGET SUBMISSION

Recommendations from the TRU Students' Union to the BC Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services in advance of the 2024 Provincial Budget.



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## Introduction

The last few years have posed numerous challenges for all British Columbians, and the students at Thompson Rivers University in the Interior of BC are no exception to that. In the wake of disruptions to their education, an ever-evolving employment landscape, and the upheaval of significant milestones in their young adulthood due to the ongoing impact of COVID-19, these students now face mounting obstacles, particularly in terms of affordability. Their circumstances often leave them vulnerable due to issues such as limited savings, the need for frequent relocation to pursue opportunities, and various other barriers. As a result, students continue to look to their provincial government for support in key areas.

On behalf of the approximately 10,000 students at Thompson Rivers University we make this submission for your consideration, focusing on three key policy areas. First, we strongly recommend an expansion of the BC Access grant's value to ensure it remains in line with the escalating affordability challenges faced by lower-income students. Second, we ask the government to complete the post-secondary funding review process that was started in 2022. There are numerous stakeholders in our community who have been asking for this review for many years, and those who have further contributed to the review process itself that are eagerly awaiting the outcome. Finally, we recommend that the provincial government put in place a provincial strategy for international students. These students now make up a very large percentage of the student body both at TRU and across the province, and we believe it is time for the government to ensure a more consistent educational experience for international students.

By addressing these critical areas, we can establish a path towards a brighter future for students in British Columbia, promoting accessibility, equity, and the well-being of our educational community. Together, let us work towards a province that supports its students in navigating the challenges they face, while fostering a thriving and inclusive post-secondary education system.

## Recommendation 1: Expand the BC 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.<sup>1</sup> 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 attendance to the point where many students on the margin of enrolling decide to register.<sup>2</sup>

In September 2020 the BC Government launched the BC Access Grant, a need-based grants program for post-secondary students. This program provides up to \$1000 per year to students in programs longer than 2 years, and up to \$4000 to students in programs shorter than this.

On behalf of our 10,000 members at Thompson Rivers University in Kamloops BC, we thank the BC 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.

Financial aid sources are not necessarily transparent to students though as they may seamlessly receive aid from both provincial and federal levels of government. Over the past three years the federal government had doubled the value of the Canada Student Grant to be up to \$6000 per year for lower-income students. Starting in September 2023 this will be reduced to a maximum of \$4000 per year.

As a result, we believe that there is also a role for an increased response from the provincial government. This is an opportunity for the BC Government to help the economy recover now and in the future through increasing accessibility to post-secondary education.

Our recommendation is therefor that the BC Government increase the value of the BC Access Grant in the 2024 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.

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<sup>1</sup> Bettinger, Eric. 2010. *Need-Based Aid and Student Outcomes: The Effects of the Ohio College Opportunity Grant*.  
<sup>2</sup> Long, Bridget. 2012. Looking Beyond Enrolment: The Causal Effect of Need-Based Grants on College Access, Persistence, and Graduation.







## Recommendation 2: Complete the Post-Secondary Funding Review

In a significant development for the post-secondary education sector in BC, the provincial government announced in the spring of 2022 that they would be undertaking a full review of the BC post-secondary funding system. This was the first review process of the system in modern history. Many people and organizations across the interior of BC have long supported this review and were very excited to see this announcement with the hope of it addressing some of the long-standing challenges in the system.

However, since summer 2022 the review process appears to be stalled.<sup>3</sup> There have been no further updates following the initial phase of the review, which was focused on engaging various stakeholders across the post-secondary sector. This lack of progress has left many members of our community disappointed, as there was anticipation for future updates and potential meaningful reforms.

Here at TRU, a group of engaged students, faculty, and staff came together to provide community informed feedback, with the intention of contributing to the comprehensive review process. This process resulted in the TRU Students' Union's submission with recommendations to this review.

The principles of community consultation best practices dictate that it is crucial to close the loop and provide individuals and communities with feedback on how their input has been utilized. Unfortunately, this vital step has been overlooked so far, leaving the TRU community and others who participated in the review process in a state of uncertainty. The lack of communication and transparency in this regard has left many feeling disconnected and questioning the significance of their contributions. By neglecting to provide feedback on the utilization of community-informed feedback, the review process risks eroding trust and undermining the very purpose of community consultation on issues such as this.

Moving forward, we ask that the BC Government complete this review process and demonstrates for our community a genuine commitment to engaging with the concerns in the sector. We hope this leads us towards an inclusive, accessible, and high quality post-secondary education system for all British Columbians.

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<sup>3</sup> BC Government website: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/education-training/post-secondary-education/post-secondary-funding-formula-review>

## 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 over 4100 in the Winter 2023 semester, representing a more than doubling of numbers. International students now represent almost half of TRU's on-campus student population.

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.<sup>4</sup>

The presence of these students has brought numerous benefits to both our institution and the local community, contributing not only economically but also culturally. However, challenges have arisen that need to be addressed. International students have expressed concerns about their own experiences, and there have been broader community concerns, particularly regarding housing capacity.

Despite the crucial role of international education in the local community and the provincial economy, there is currently no comprehensive strategic plan in place for the sector. The previous provincial strategy for international students, released in 2012, focused primarily on maximizing economic benefits and attracting more students. It is now essential to develop a new strategy that goes beyond mere enrollment numbers and ensures that international education benefits the students coming here to study, institutions, communities, and the province as a whole.

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.



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4 Student Transitions Project. 2018. International Students in BC's Education Systems. Retrieved from the BC Government website: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/post-secondary-education/data-research/stp/stp-international-research-results.pdf>

