



# WRITTEN SUBMISSION

FOR THE 2021 PRE-BUDGET  
CONSULTATIONS

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## **Recommendation 1**

Make sections of the COVID-19 student support package permanent to ensure students transition smoothly into the workforce.

- i. Invest \$1.8 billion dollars per year to implement a 2-year grace period on all federal student loans for new graduates.
- ii. Increase the 2019 Canada Student Grants by \$1200 per student for the 2021 federal budget.

## **Recommendation 2**

Make \$20 million available to support Student Work Placement Program opportunities for both international and domestic students.

## **Recommendation 3**

Invest \$15 million per year to expand the Undergraduate Student Research Awards Program to 3,400 students annually in health, humanities, and social science research, with priority given to projects that fulfill a 'future global challenge' as identified by the SSHRC.

## **Recommendation 4**

Invest an additional \$100 million in funding to support Indigenous reconciliation initiatives, especially on university campuses through the Indigenous Languages and Cultures Program.

## **Recommendation 5**

Ensure high-speed internet is accessible for all Canadians by 2030 and reduce the costs associated with cell and wireless services by 25 percent.

# UNDERGRADUATES OF CANADIAN RESEARCH-INTENSIVE UNIVERSITIES

Undergraduates of Canadian Research-Intensive Universities (UCRU) is a coalition of student associations whose mandate is to advocate for an affordable, inclusive and high-calibre undergraduate university education with opportunities for increased access to undergraduate research. Our coalition began in 2015 to advocate on issues that disproportionately and uniquely affect undergraduates from Canada's U15 universities – which is what sets our strategic advocacy priorities apart from other student advocacy organizations at the federal level.



UCRU acknowledges that our members live, work and study across Canada on the traditional and unceded territory of many Indigenous peoples including the Cree, Dené, Métis, Sioux, Huron-Wendat, Attawandaran, Anishinaabeg, Haudenosaunee, Leni-Lunaape and the many distinct Coast Salish peoples.

UCRU is committed to advocating for the needs of Indigenous students and furthering Indigenization, decolonization, and reconciliation in our communities and beyond.



# EXTENSION OF STUDENT SUPPORT PACKAGE

MAKE SECTIONS OF THE COVID-19 STUDENT SUPPORT PACKAGE PERMANENT TO ENSURE STUDENTS TRANSITION SMOOTHLY INTO THE WORKFORCE.



**i. Invest \$1.8 billion dollars per year to implement a 2 year grace period on all federal student loans for new graduates.<sup>1</sup>**

The long-term implications of COVID-19 will have an enormous impact on students as they enter the workforce. These impacts have already begun, as the employment rate of students aged 20 to 24 was 29.8% in April, down is from 52.5% in February.<sup>2</sup> Students are also feeling continued strain from the pandemic. A survey completed by Abacus Data found 75% of students say COVID-19 will have a lasting impact on their financial situation beyond this year.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, graduating in a recession can be detrimental for many students' careers, as this leads to initial earning losses of 30-40% after graduation.<sup>4</sup> Implementing a two-year grace period on student loans for all new graduates relieves some financial burden, enabling students to reach a better financial position.

1. Government of Canada. Revenues.

2. Statistics Canada, "Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Postsecondary Students," Government of Canada, May 12, 2020.

3. Canadian Alliance of Student Associations (Abacus Data), "Students are Still Worried: COVID-19 and Post Secondary Education," Canadian Alliance of Student Associations, June 15, 2020.

4. National Bureau of Economic Research, 1050 Massachusetts Ave., Cambridge, MA 02138; 617-868-3900.

According to Statistics Canada, the average student takes on \$28,000 in debt while pursuing an undergraduate degree.<sup>5</sup> By extending the National Student Loan Grace Period for new graduates, the government will assist students searching for good jobs while taking on less debt, supporting Canadians and stimulating the Canadian economy in response to COVID-19. With less pressure on repaying their student loans, students will be able to reconceptualize their life plans, moving towards home ownership and entering the middle class sooner than was possible before.

**THE AVERAGE STUDENT TAKES ON \$28, 000 IN DEBT WHILE PURSUING AN UNDERGRADUATE DEGREE.**



5. Statistics Canada, “National Graduates Survey (NGS), student debt from all sources, by province of study and level of study,” Government of Canada, July 14, 2020.



**ii. Increase the 2019 Canada Student Grants by \$1200 per student for the 2021 federal budget.**

In response to COVID-19, the government increased the amount of grants available to students. These measures were necessary and assisted many students, with 29% of all post-secondary students losing all summer income.<sup>6</sup> This has impacted many students' ability to pay for school, making this increase in grants invaluable.

Affordable access to education is critical for middle-class Canadians to achieve their career goals, earn a comfortable living wage and further Canada's economic development. To ensure the long-term success of students in Canada, the government should increase the 2019 Canada Student Grants levels by \$1200 for the 2021 federal budget. This is an investment that would cost roughly \$1 billion Canadian and that was promised in the Liberal Party's 2019 election platform and would support students through this prolonged economic crisis.<sup>7</sup>

6. Canadian Alliance of Student Associations (Abacus Data), "Students are Still Worried: COVID-19 and Post Secondary Education," Canadian Alliance of Student Associations, June 15, 2020.

7. Liberal Party of Canada, "Forward: A Real Plan for the Middle Class," p.9.

# WORK INTEGRATED LEARNING FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

MAKE \$20 MILLION AVAILABLE TO SUPPORT  
STUDENT WORK PLACEMENT PROGRAM  
OPPORTUNITIES FOR BOTH INTERNATIONAL AND  
DOMESTIC STUDENTS



International students are a vital part of the Canadian economy, contributing \$22 billion annually.<sup>8</sup> In order to address Canada's skilled labour shortage, we must work to retain our students after they graduate. Canadian work experience helps international students prepare to apply for a post-graduation work permit, on top of developing valuable skills for their future. This investment would fund positions for up to 7,000 international students to help achieve this goal.

The government's support for co-ops and internships through the Student Work Placement Program is invaluable to facilitating these opportunities for students. However, employers cannot access these programs when hiring international students. This can cause an unfair hiring bias towards domestic students which denies international students the same valuable experiences.

UCRU recommends that the government match funding currently available to domestic students by allocating or reallocating \$20 million in the Student Work Placement Program to be available for both international and domestic students.



8. Kareem El-Assalm, "642,000 international students: Canada now ranks 3rd globally in foreign student attraction," CIC News, February 20, 2020





# EXPANDING RESEARCH

# OPPORTUNITIES FOR UNDERGRADS

INVEST \$15 MILLION PER YEAR TO EXPAND THE UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH AWARDS (USRA) PROGRAM TO 3,400 STUDENTS ANNUALLY IN HEALTH, HUMANITIES, AND SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH, WITH PRIORITY GIVEN TO STUDENTS WORKING ON PROJECTS THAT FULFILL A 'FUTURE GLOBAL CHALLENGE' AS IDENTIFIED BY THE SSHRC.




The Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council (NSERC) strives to support students in their studies while fostering innovation in the natural sciences and engineering.<sup>9</sup> The Council achieves these goals, in part, through the provision of research scholarships available at every stage of study.<sup>10</sup> Working in parallel with NSERC, the SSHRC “supports postsecondary-based research and training in the social sciences and humanities,” while the CIHR seeks to train and support health researchers.


Despite the similar goals of the tri-council agencies, NSERC is the only member to holistically fulfill its mandate through the delivery of undergraduate programming, namely the provision of Undergraduate Student Research Awards (USRAs).

9. Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, “NSERC,” n.d.

10. NSERC “Students and Fellows,” 2020.



USRAs help fund projects that facilitate valuable research and positively impact student development. An investment in the USRA program presents the opportunity to guide social science and humanities undergraduates toward research projects that address a ‘future global challenge,’ thereby cultivating early interest among issues identified by the government as crucial to our nation’s future.<sup>11</sup>



Defined by their skills in critical thinking, complex decision-making, and creative exploration, leaders across industries hold degrees in the social sciences and humanities more often than any other course of study.<sup>12</sup> In the age of COVID-19, an investment in undergraduate research that bolsters the social sciences and humanities ensures the development of transferable skills while also aiding in the immediate employability of new graduates.

Utilizing the existing USRA infrastructure in use by NSERC, UCRU recommends the government commit \$15 million to extend opportunities to 3,400 undergraduate students in the humanities, social sciences, and health fields. This is a crucial step not only toward building a vibrant research culture centered on global challenges, but also toward economic recovery post COVID-19.

11. Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, “Future Challenge Areas: 2018-21,” 2020.

12. British Council, “The Educational Pathways Of Leaders: An International Comparison,” 2015.



# SUPPORT FOR TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION

INVEST AN ADDITIONAL \$100 MILLION IN FUNDING TO SUPPORT INDIGENOUS RECONCILIATION INITIATIVES, ESPECIALLY ON UNIVERSITY CAMPUSES THROUGH THE INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES AND CULTURES PROGRAM.



The government has made a commitment to the preservation and revitalization of Indigenous languages and cultures through their \$334 million investment in Indigenous language programs. However, these funds are unavailable to most post-secondary institutions where our youth are being educated. Furthering the process of reconciliation requires all Canadians to internalize principles of Indigenization and decolonization; this process begins with our education system.

In accordance with TRC recommendation 14,<sup>13</sup> UCRU recommends that the government expand eligible projects of the Indigenous Languages and Cultures Program to include development of accredited Indigenous Studies programs by non-Indigenous led post-secondary institutions. Across the country, there are a limited number of Indigenous-led institutions. The preservation, revitalization, and strengthening of Indigenous languages should be Indigenous-led. However, Indigenous-led programs can thrive within other post-secondary institutions and further these goals.<sup>14</sup>

13. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, “Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada,” 2015.


14. Lakehead University, “About our Indigenous Education Programs,” 2020.

Similarly, in alignment with TRC recommendation 61, the government should develop an Indigenous Cultures Component of the program. There are a number of valuable activities, including those that focus on Indigenous art or spirituality, which are not covered under the languages component. UCRU recognizes that reconciliation and Indigenization initiatives must extend beyond our campuses. We believe post-secondary institutions can play a key role in these activities to complement the work of Indigenous-led groups. UCRU recommends the government invest an additional \$100 million in funding to support Indigenous reconciliation initiatives, matching the 2017 grant funding allocation.



# CONNECTIVITY FOR CANADIANS

ENSURE HIGH-SPEED INTERNET IS ACCESSIBLE FOR ALL CANADIANS BY 2030 AND REDUCE THE COSTS ASSOCIATED WITH CELL AND WIRELESS SERVICES BY 25 PERCENT.



The Internet is becoming an integral part of the lives of Canadians. With many Canadians working from home to do their part socially distancing during the pandemic, internet services are becoming even more integral. Post-secondary students are also learning from home during the 2020-2021 school year, as most universities are suggesting a hybrid learning model – mostly online with some possibility for in-person activities.<sup>15</sup> Many schools require that students access Internet resources for homework projects and post-secondary institutions, often providing learning and course materials online.<sup>16</sup>

Despite the importance of high-speed Internet, almost half of Canadian households with an annual income of \$30,000 or less do not have access to high-speed internet.<sup>17</sup> Affordability is a major obstacle to online learning, as having the funds to afford a personal computer and internet access is a luxury.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, Canadians living in rural areas often have unreliable connection to the Internet, making online learning almost impossible.<sup>19</sup> Canadians need access to fast, reliable and affordable Internet to learn, work, socialize and access government services. UCRU recommends the government of Canada ensures high speed internet is accessible for all Canadians by 2030 and reduce the costs associated with cell and wireless services by 25 per cent.

15. University Affairs, “COVID-19: Updates on Canada’s Universities,” University Affairs, July 14, 2020

16. Government of Canada, “Connecting Families,” Government of Canada, November 22, 2019

17. Ibid.

18. Joshua Bleiberg and Darrell M. West, “Barriers to Universal Internet Access,” Brookings, December 14, 2020

19. Andrew Lupton, “In the time of COVID-19, slow Internet is more than an annoyance,”

CBC News, Mar 27, 2020.



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