



ADVOCACY WEEK 2020



UCRU

Undergraduates of
Canadian Research-Intensive
Universities

The Undergraduates of Canadian Research-Intensive Universities (UCRU) is a national coalition of student unions from U15 post-secondary institutions across Canada that represents over 250,000 students. Together, they advocate the federal government on a wide range of student issues, with a focus on university research and affordability, to build a more accessible, affordable, and supportive education system for undergraduate students.

THEIR MEMBERS INCLUDE:

Alma Mater Society of UBC Vancouver
University of Manitoba Students' Union
University Students' Council of Western
Students' Society of McGill University
McMaster Students Union
University of Toronto Students' Union
University of Saskatchewan Students' Union
Waterloo Undergraduate Student Association
Alma Mater Society of Queen's University

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1

REALLOCATE THE TUITION TAX CREDIT TO STUDENT GRANTS

Eliminate the tuition tax credit and reallocate the estimated \$1.8 billion to upfront grants to be administered through the Canada Student Grant Program.

2

FAST-TRACKING INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS INTO THE CANADIAN WORKFORCE

The government should change the eligibility guidelines under the Canadian Experience Class (CEC) Express Entry program to allow international students to count full-time, work-integrated learning, and entrepreneurship experience as eligible work experience. There must also be investment into awareness and retention campaigns.

3

SUPPORT INDIGENOUS STUDENTS

Increase funding for the Post-Secondary Student Support Program, create a long-term strategy with Indigenous students and organizations on how the program should be administered, and increase funding for Indigenous language offerings and Indigenous Studies programs.

4

EXPAND CANADIAN UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH

Expand Undergraduate Student Research Awards (USRA) program funding to extend research opportunities to 3,800 students in social sciences, humanities, and health research under the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) and Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR). Funding for each award should also be increased to a living wage.

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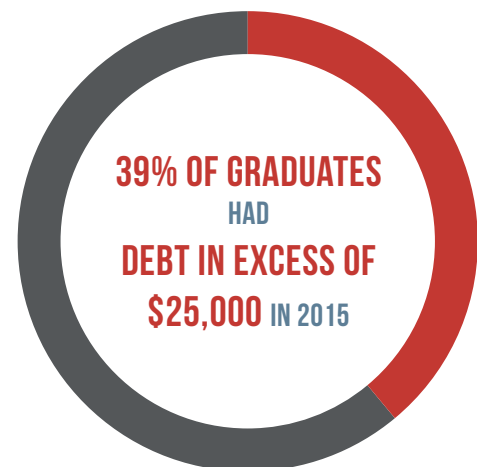
REALLOCATE THE TUITION TAX CREDIT TO STUDENT GRANTS.

RECOMMENDATION:

Eliminate the tuition tax credit and reallocate the estimated \$1.8 billion to upfront grants to be administered through the Canada Student Grant Program.

Students who benefit from student financial aid rely on support from upfront grants, whether it is to get their foot in the door or continue year to year to progress through their degree. In 2015, Statistics Canada reported that 39% of graduates had large debt in excess of \$25,000 to repay, and only 52% of students had paid off their debt within three years of graduation.^{1,2} Given this need and the debt that students face upon graduation, making these resources as accessible as possible should be a priority. However, there are two financial aid mechanics still in place that hinder tax benefits from equalizing access within Canada: the lack of tax benefits being available up-front, and the regressive effects of the tax benefit program.

Though tax credits are a traditional form of financial aid for students, they are a regressive form of support as they have been widely criticized by the Parliamentary Budget Officer for the following reasons: the number of tax credits claimed is steadily decreasing, resulting in inefficiencies in getting financial support to those who need it. Since the 1960s, federal post-secondary education tax credits have been a consistent expenditure for the government of Canada. In 2020, \$1.8 billion is budgeted to be spent on tuition tax credits.³ In 2013-2014 the unused stock of tax credits exceeded \$27 billion.⁴ When examining who actually takes advantage of this system, higher-income families are increasingly benefitting from tuition tax credits while low-income families continue to struggle, with 79% of top-quintile earners, and only 47% of bottom quintile earners accessing post-secondary as of 2014.⁵ The Parliamentary Budget Office indicates that higher-income families received the majority of the approximate \$1.5 billion spent on tuition tax credits in 2014.



\$27 BILLION
IN UNUSED TAX CREDITS
IN 2013-14

Since low-income students often make below the \$10,000 threshold in order to claim the tuition tax credit, these students are forced to carry forward the tax credit until after graduation. These students receive only one-third of tax credit expenditures. They cannot utilize them when they need it the most to help pay for their studies, which can lead to them choosing to drop out for financial reasons or impact the quality of their education.

In addition to the Liberal Government's election commitment to increasing the Canada Student Grants by \$1200, the Government of Canada should eliminate the tuition tax credits and relocate the estimated \$1.85 billion to upfront grants to be administered through the Canada Student Grant Program. This system already has the infrastructure to provide the support that students need while tax credits are no longer an effective tool to financially support low-income students who should get disbursed funding when they need it the most; at the beginning of the school year when costs are highest.

Upfront grants will reduce the sticker cost of education, thus lowering debt levels and better reallocate the government's current allocation of funding. It is additionally important that these grants address debt aversion, specifically related to first-generation students who often are unaware of major costs of post-secondary. The majority of these students are dissuaded from participating from post-secondary because of the high cost of debt that is taken on, especially at the start of their degree.⁶ Scholars find that since first-generation students rely more readily on student loans, they are more likely to believe that post-secondary education can only be attained through incurring debt. First-generation students benefit immensely from upfront grants, as barriers to access are lowered and their perceptions of debt are not a detriment to their participation in post-secondary.

The adoption of this recommendation would help to provide aid to students who need it most. By reallocating the tax credit system to upfront grants, emphasizing financial aid based on need and is implemented proportionately by maximum income thresholds, rather than income brackets. This proposed system will also allow students who do not currently have the income to qualify for tax credits to benefit directly from this new system.

¹ Statistics Canada, Table 37-10-0038-01 (National Graduate Survey)(2015). <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=3710003801>

² Statistics Canada, Estimated gross annual earnings and student debt of postsecondary graduates in Canada: Interactive tool (2019). <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/71-607-x/71-607-x2019025-eng.htm>

³ Department of Finance, Report on Federal Tax Expenditures - Concepts, Estimates and Evaluations 2019: part 2 (Line 105) (2019). <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-finance/services/publications/federal-tax-expenditures/2019/part-2.html>

⁴ Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer, Federal Spending on Postsecondary Education (pg. 16) (2016). http://www.pbo-dpb.gc.ca/web/default/files/Documents/Reports/2016/PSE/PSE_EN.pdf

⁵ Statistics Canada, Postsecondary Enrolment by Parental Income (2017). <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-626-x/11-626-x2017070-eng.htm>

⁶ Lee, Jason, and John A. Mueller. Student Loan Debt Literacy: A Comparison of First-Generation and Continuing-Generation College Students. 3 Nov. 2014, muse.jhu.edu/article/558257/pdf.

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FAST TRACKING INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS INTO THE CANADIAN WORKFORCE.

INTRODUCTION

Despite their intentions to stay in Canada, international student retention remains relatively low in areas across Canada, and there is significant untapped potential for helping international students to remain in Canada to help us address looming labor market shortages. However, international students face a variety of barriers upon applying for permanent residency. One of the most often cited reasons is that immigration pathways are confusing, or barriers are in place that limit what students can utilize to apply for immigration such as limitations on work-experience while a full-time student, or not counting entrepreneurship.

ELIGIBILITY OF WORK EXPERIENCE FOR EXPRESS ENTRY PROGRAM

RECOMMENDATION

The government should change the eligibility guidelines under the Canadian Experience Class (CEC) Express Entry program to allow international students to count full-time, work-integrated learning, and entrepreneurship experience as eligible work experience. There must also be investment into awareness and retention campaigns.

Canadian research-intensive universities disproportionately attract international students for a variety of different reasons, one of which includes Canadian institutions' prioritization of providing experiential and work-integrated learning opportunities.¹ In fact, more than half of today's undergraduate students have a form of work-integrated learning experience, which includes co-ops, internships, and research placements.² These are high quality work opportunities; 86% of students who participate in work-integrated learning opportunities throughout their programs reported that they feel better prepared for the workforce because of their industry-specific knowledge and experience.³ Similarly, over one third of employers



stated they create work-integrated learning opportunities to help recruit potential employees and build important skills.⁴ One example of this strategy includes PepsiCo, which recruits and trains students for work-integrated learning programs to help develop sales competencies that students may not learn in the classroom.⁵ Many work-integrated learning opportunities also are verified for quality by the post-secondary institution, or by an alternative accreditation process. For instance, Co-operative Education and Work Integrated Learning (CEWIL) offers an accreditation process for co-op opportunities.⁶

To help the government of Canada fulfil its immigration targets, specifically for economic class immigrants, the government should change the eligibility guidelines under the Canadian Experience Class Express Entry Program to allow international students to count full-time, work-integrated learning experience as eligible work experience. In a world where other countries are also recruiting international students and hoping to retain them through competitive work permits, it is important that Canada take steps to simplify the application process for international students. For instance, the UK recently decided to reinstate a 2 year post-study work permit following Australia's new program offering 2-4 year post-study work permits.⁷ The UK decision has already affected a portion of international students choosing to go to Australia.⁸ Students completing a co-op undergraduate program often accumulate up to 2 years of diverse work experience pre-graduation.⁹ By changing this eligibility guidelines, Canada could increase its ability to retain international students, help set students up for success with Canadian employers, and recognize work-integrated learning for what is - high quality and meaningful work.

Upon graduation, international students show a strong desire to stay and work in Canada. In fact, in 2018, 60% of international students planned to apply for permanent residency, but only 22,897 international students were granted permanent residency.¹⁰ That same year, Canada's international student population skyrocketed - a record of over 721,000 international students were studying in Canada.¹¹ However, employers sometimes avoid hiring highly skilled, post-secondary educated, international students because of unpredictability around their long-term immigration status, and the optics of hiring an international student or foreign worker over a Canadian grad/worker through the Labour Market Impact Assessment (LMIA).¹² Although the Canadian government announced it would award international students up to 30 additional points for a Canadian post-secondary degree or diploma, the changes do not significantly clear the path towards Permanent Residence (PR) for international students, as applicants require 600 points to be successful. These changes also did not alter the qualifications under the Canadian Experience Class (CEC) Express Entry program -- which international students use to apply for PR.¹³ Removing this as an eligibility criteria would improve international students' chance at gaining PR status and increase Canada's international student post-graduation retention rate -- which is at about 32 per cent for those with a Bachelor's degree.

EDUCATION AND AWARENESS OF PATHWAYS TO PERMANENT RESIDENCY

RECOMMENDATION:

The Federal government should invest in an awareness and retention program to help international students become competitive permanent residency applicants and help them transition to Canada.

There are many programs in different provinces across Canada that help international students stay and contribute to the local economies. However, many international students are not aware of the variety of different avenues through which they can gain permanent residency. One best practice that the Government of Canada can utilize to attract more international students to Canada is to expand the “Study and Stay” model present in Atlantic Canada. This helped Nova Scotia increase their international student retention from 5 percent in 2014 to 9.4 percent in 2018. The Study and Stay model includes support with cultural and social transition, career and labour market support, mentorship and access to immigration resources and support, and in Newfoundland, entrepreneurship support. Importantly, it outlines different pathways to permanent residency. This should be expanded across Canada and outline the variety of different pathways, such as the Atlantic Immigration Pilot, the Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot and the Start-Up Visa.

Entrepreneurial pathways are another important avenue for international students, and exist at both the provincial and federal levels. Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Manitoba are all in various stages of implementing entrepreneurship-focused programs and pathways. Meanwhile, the federal Start-Up Visa encourages potential immigrants to start up new businesses to achieve permanent residency. Although the program is not specifically designed for international students, there is a significant focus on youth entrepreneurship. International students – 572,415 of whom studied in Canada in 2018, contributing some \$21.6 billion to Canada’s GDP – arguably represent an underutilized source of entrepreneurial potential at present, especially given how the federal program helps link entrepreneurs with private sector organizations that have experience in building new businesses.

Such programs harness the ambitions and business ideas of international students to help spur the creation of local, Canadian-grown businesses that have the potential to compete at a global level. Indeed, according to an analysis by the Brookfield Institute for Innovation and Entrepreneurship, based out of Ryerson University, entrepreneurship may become the dominant career path for individuals in a future economy that is no longer based on holding a single job or two over the course of several decades.¹⁴ The same analysis notes that an increase in talent immigration could be key to creating new Canadian-made innovations, products, services and employment opportunities. Newcomers, according to some measures, are relatively successful in terms of starting a new business or being self-employed compared to Canadian-born entrepreneurs, and frequently do so by creating companies that engage in international trade with newcomers’ countries and/or regions of origin.¹⁵ Newcomer-owned businesses have also been shown to create more jobs than Canadian-owned businesses.¹⁶ In order for Canada to maximize the benefit from this job creation and labour pool, we need to make sure that international students are aware of these opportunities and are supported in pursuing them as their route to permanent residency.

The Canadian government could utilize funding from the Targeted Digital Marketing Strategy to expand this model to both recruit students from new countries and to incorporate tools and channels to help them stay in Canada. This can help students make informed decisions about how the variety of permanent residency pathways fit their needs. This can also help to incentivize more international students to select universities or programs that may fit the needs of rural and Northern regions in Canada, for example, in order to expand their opportunities to apply for permanent residency after graduating.

As of 2019, a time when advances in health care and living standards mean people are living longer than ever, seniors – those aged 65+ years-old – account for 17% of the population, while children – those 14 years-old and under – make up 16% of the population.¹⁷ By 2030 seniors will comprise nearly a quarter of the population (23%) and 17.9 million baby boomers will be eligible for retirement. Between now and 2040, the rate of replacement within the labour force – the number of people graduating school and entering the workforce in contrast to those retiring – will fall short by 1.4 million workers.¹⁸ Encouraging international students to remain in Canada after graduation will remain a key priority in Canada for years to come in order to counter an aging population and promote innovation and job creation within our rapidly changing economy. It will be critical to ensure that the significant population of international students in Canada are aware of the myriad of opportunities that exist, and have the support they need through those pathways to ensure their success in becoming permanent residents.

¹ Canadian Bureau of Education, “Canada’s performance and potential in international education,” (2016) <https://cbie.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/A-World-of-Learning-HI-RES-2016.pdf>.

² Universities Canada, “Study on experiential learning and pathways to employment for Canadian youth supporting university students to succeed,” (2018) <https://www.univcan.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/study-on-experiential-learning-pathways-to-employment-for-cdn-youth-submission-march-2018.pdf>.

³ Abacus Data, “Work Integrated Learning and Post-Secondary Education: What Students Think,” (2016) <http://bher.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/What-students-think.pdf>.

⁴ Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO), “Work-Integrated Learning and Postsecondary Graduates: The Perspective of Ontario Employers,” (2012) <http://www.heqco.ca/en-ca/Research/ResPub/Pages/Work-Integrated-Learning-and-Postsecondary-Graduates-The-Perspective-of-Ontario-Employers.aspx>.

⁵ RBC, “Humans Wanted: How Canadian youth can thrive in the age of disruption,” (2018) https://www.rbc.com/dms/enterprise/futurelaunch/_assets-custom/pdf/RBC-Future-Skills-Report-FINAL-Singles.pdf, and HEQCO, 2012.

⁶ Cooperative Education and Work Integrated Learning (CEWIL), “Accreditation Application,” (2017) <https://www.cewilcanada.ca/accreditation-application.html>.

⁷ The PIE News, “Two year work rights for international students in UK reinstated for 2020/21,” (2019) <https://thepienews.com/news/two-year-work-rights-for-international-students-in-uk-reinstated-for-202021/>.

⁸ The PIE News, “UK PSW takes interest from Australia,” (2019) https://thepienews.com/news/uk-psw-takes-indias-interest-australia-idp-connect/?mc_cid=54841dea50&mc_eid=aa96e46919.

⁹ University of Waterloo, “Engineering: Co-op,” (2019) <https://uwaterloo.ca/engineering/future-undergraduate-students/co-op-experience>.

¹⁰ Canadian Bureau of International Education (CBIE), “International Students in Canada,” (2018) <https://cbie.ca/infographic/>.

¹¹ Government of Canada, “Building on Success: International Education Strategy,” (2019) <https://www.international.gc.ca/education/assets/pdfs/ies-sei/Building-on-Success-International-Education-Strategy-2019-2024.pdf>.

¹² Government of Canada, “Hire International Students,” (2017) <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/work-canada/hire-foreign-worker/international-students.html>.

¹³ Government of Canada, “Eligibility to apply for the Canadian Experience Class (Express Entry),” (2019) <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/immigrate-canada/express-entry/eligibility/canadian-experience-class.html>.

¹⁴ Brookfield Institute, “Turn and Face the Strange: Changes impacting the future of employment in Canada,” (2019) <https://bit.ly/30gyKIH>.

¹⁵ Statistics Canada, “The Impact of Immigrant Business Ownership on International Trade,” (2019) <https://bit.ly/2FMJAq6>.

¹⁶ Statistics Canada, “Immigrant Entrepreneurs as Job Creators: The Case of Canadian Private Incorporated Companies,” (2019) <https://bit.ly/2QNhDEX>.

¹⁷ Statistics Canada, “Canada’s population estimates: Age and sex, July 1, 2019,” (2019) <https://bit.ly/35SnrRs>.

¹⁸ Conference Board of Canada, “Can’t go it alone: Immigration is key to Canada’s growth strategy,” (2019) <https://bit.ly/36QmxXI>.

SUPPORT INDIGENOUS STUDENTS.

INTRODUCTION

In Budget 2019, the Government made a laudable attempt at addressing the post-secondary attainment gap affecting Indigenous students with a \$327.5 Million increase in funding for the Post-Secondary Student Support Program (PSSSP), in addition to separate funding allotted for Metis students at \$362 million over ten years plus \$40 million per year ongoing, and for Inuit students at \$125.5 million over ten years plus \$21.8 million per year ongoing.¹ While UCRU recognizes this as a positive step, it is clear this will not be adequate to fully close the attainment gap at this time. It is also clear that the barriers to education for Indigenous students extend beyond financial matters. The Government must engage in active consultation with Indigenous communities and students and work towards the adoption of all calls to action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) which pertain to education, including Indigenous language offerings and improved resources for Indigenous studies programs.

FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR INDIGENOUS STUDENTS

RECOMMENDATION:

Increase funding for the Post-Secondary Student Support Program, create a long-term strategy with Indigenous students and organizations on how the program should be administered, and increase funding for Indigenous language offerings and Indigenous Studies programs.

Despite movement toward assessing the attainment gap in Canadian post-secondary education, Indigenous students persistently remain disproportionately disadvantaged in regards to the University sector. Only 9.8% of the Indigenous population held a university degree in contrast with 26.5% of the non-Indigenous population.² Indigenous peoples are one of the fastest-



7 IN 10 FIRST NATIONS YOUTH
ASPIRE TO COMPLETE A POST-SECONDARY DEGREE

growing and youngest demographic groups in Canada, with a population growth of 20% between 2006 and 2011. Furthermore, with approximately 7 in 10 First Nations youth aspiring to complete a post-secondary degree, funding levels must increase beyond what has been slated to match the increase in demand that is forecasted.³

As of 2015, another 78,000 First Nations post-secondary graduates were required in order to close this gap and align attainment with the non-Indigenous population.⁴ The AFN estimated in 2019 that a total of \$1.7 billion would be necessary to make up this gap in educational attainment between Indigenous people and non-Indigenous people.⁵ The forecasted funding amount required grew by approximately \$90 million per year from the \$724 million last estimated in 2008.⁶ The pledged increase of \$65.5 million over each of the next five years is thus unlikely to even maintain the current attainment gap, and is not nearly enough to close it.

78,000
OF STUDENTS NEEDED TO
CLOSE THE ATTAINMENT GAP

That being said, it is crucial that the Government invest in more ways than funding with regards to the PSSSP program, as cost is far from the only barrier contributing to the attainment gap. Indigenous students must be consulted to discern what changes can be made to the PSSSP model to determine what works best. These students are the end beneficiaries of this program, and in order to administer these funds effectively and equitably, qualitative and quantitative data should be gathered in order to maximize the impact of this funding. As the First-Nations Post-Secondary Policy Proposal was approved by the Federal cabinet in mid-2019, it confirmed support for the First Nations-led Treaty-based process in order to develop models that support First Nations post-secondary education.

Indigenous students require bold initiative from all stakeholders to determine policy-based solutions that are a result of meaningful consultation with Indigenous students at the centre. Despite a clear intent to improve, Canada is still failing to utilize education as a tool for reconciliation, further hindering individual attainment and falling well short of educational equity. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s findings on education “call upon the federal government to provide adequate funding to end the backlog of First Nations students seeking a post-secondary education”.⁷

RECOMMENDATION:

Ensure funding is equally accessible to students both on and off reserve and publish an annual report on progress in this area. (In accordance with Calls to Action eight and nine of the TRC)

The factors contributing to the attainment gap of post-secondary education for Indigenous students are multiple and go far beyond direct financial support upon entry to post-secondary programs. Calls to Action eight and nine of the TRC state that the federal government has a responsibility to eliminate the federal funding gap between Indigenous students on and off reserve and publish annual reports to this affect including reporting of attainment gaps in employment and education between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

As of the auditor general's report in 2016, high school completion rates on reserves in Canada were at just 24%,⁸ compared with a rate of 79% in Canada as a whole.⁹ It is unlikely that the post-secondary attainment gap will close even with adequate funding unless the systemic elements of the problem are also addressed. To this end, the Government has committed \$2.6 billion over the next five years to match provincial base funding for education, as well as modifying its funding approach in April of 2019 that includes targeted per-student funding available for language and culture programs.¹⁰

These are positive steps in the right direction. However, the last report regarding on reserve education funding and outcomes was in the 2016-17 academic year, pre-dating many of these progressive reforms.¹¹ In accordance with call to action nine of the TRC, we ask that the government prepare a report on the current state of funding for on reserve education as it relates to off reserve funding, and measure how these reforms have affected attainment outcomes, including completion rates for secondary education and application and attainment rates for post-secondary education. As well, any reports on this subject must involve active consultation with affected Indigenous communities and include a consideration of how accessible and equitable the distributed funds are to members of these communities from their perspective.

INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES AND WAYS OF KNOWING

RECOMMENDATION:

Commit to fostering programs that include Indigenous Language revitalization projects; call for more Indigenous language offerings in post-secondary institutions (In accordance with Call to Action sixteen of the TRC)

With the introduction of Bill C-91, 'An Act Respecting Indigenous Languages,' the Government has shown an intent to enact TRC call to action 14, which demands an Aboriginal Language Act. Additionally, TRC call to action 16 calls on Canadian post-secondary institutions to "create university and college degree and diploma programs in Aboriginal Languages".¹²

The Government of Canada should be promoting Indigenous language learning by establishing grants and funding structures to Indigenous language keepers who may not necessarily have the ability to go and share their knowledge. Currently, Indigenous language courses are offered at the University of Victoria, University of British Columbia, University of Saskatoon, University of Manitoba, University of Toronto, and many others. The reality is that there are 70 Indigenous languages as part of 12 different language groups spoken across Canada.¹³

Additionally, many Indigenous language keepers do not have postsecondary education requirements to lecture at universities and colleges. The Government of Canada should work towards removing barriers to Indigenous knowledge keepers to participate in post-secondary

learning and teaching. This is essential in providing a decolonized academy for students to participate in, as well as providing more accessible pathway for students and scholars to participate in these programs.

Call to Action 65 of the TRC calls on the Government of Canada “to establish a national research program with multi-year funding to advance understanding of reconciliation” through the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC).¹⁴ Currently, only three grants are available with regard to Indigenous Peoples.¹⁵

Beyond funding concerns, Indigenous scholars have cited that the orientation of government-backed research opportunities is disconnected from the needs of Indigenous academics. Stated University of Saskatchewan professor Karla Williamson, “Processes in academia have repeatedly shown themselves to be well-oriented towards colonization and can easily bulldoze the unique contributions and knowledge brought by Indigenous scholars.”¹⁶ We call on the government to work with SSHRC to increase the availability of these grants and commit to outreach at institutions and within Indigenous communities to advertise these opportunities to prospective applicants. As well, we call on the Government and its associated research councils to engage in active consultation with Indigenous scholars to better incorporate Indigenous ways of knowing into research opportunities available to them.

RECOMMENDATION:

Focus on developing more opportunities for Indigenous knowledge practices to make their way into classrooms by providing funding and resources to postsecondary institutions to establish and improve Indigenous Studies Departments (In accordance with Call to Action sixty-five of the TRC)

While some schools such as the University of Toronto, Trent University, and University of Manitoba have well-established Indigenous Studies departments, there is certainly a gap in the amount of sophistication in some programs. Take the Maritime provinces for example, where Dalhousie University - the largest in the region - offers only an Indigenous Studies minor program, whereas the University of New Brunswick operates the Mi'kmaq Wolastoqey Centre, offering the Wabanaki Bachelor of Education that focuses on offering Wabanaki worldviews as part of elementary education.

Programs like this one are vital, and the obligation to fund them cannot be placed only upon institutions. As is stated in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), “States shall, in conjunction with Indigenous peoples, take effective measures, in order for Indigenous individuals to have access, when possible, to an education in their own culture and provided in their own language.”¹⁷ In addition, Call to Action 65(ii) of the TRC calls on the Government of Canada to “provide the necessary funding to post-secondary institutions to educate teachers on how to integrate Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods into classrooms.”¹⁸

To ensure that the government meets its obligations under the TRC and UNDRIP, federal funding should be made available to institutions to establish and improve Indigenous studies departments. This funding will go towards the hiring of more Indigenous professors and instructors, providing adequate resources for students to succeed, and the financial support required to continue with and promote course offerings in Indigenous studies and Indigenous languages where it can be difficult to fill institutionally-required seat count minimums within the first year.¹⁹

In conclusion, we call on the Government to reaffirm its commitment to Call to Action 65 and develop a funding model for post secondary institutions that will allow for further development of Indigenous presence within universities and colleges.

¹ Canada, "Post Secondary Education." Indigenous Services Canada. 2019. <https://www.sac-isc.gc.ca/eng/1100100033679/1531406248822>

² Canada. "National Household Survey." Statistics Canada. 2011. <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/nhs-enm/2011/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E>

³ Assembly of First Nations. "Fact Sheet." Assembly of First Nations. 2011. https://www.afn.ca/uploads/files/education/22._2011_afn_pse_fact_sheet.pdf

⁴ Thompson, Tim. "First Nations Post-Secondary Education Review." Assembly of First Nations. 2018. https://www.afn.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/PSE_Interim_Report_ENG.pdf page 23

⁵ Cameron, Bobby. "Update on First Nations Post-Secondary Education." Assembly of First Nations. 2019. <https://www.afn.ca/2019/07/11/afn-update-on-first-nations-post-secondary-education-july-2019-afn-bulletin/>

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⁷ Truth and Reconciliation Commission. "Calls to Action." Truth and Reconciliation Commission. 2015. http://trc.ca/assets/pdf/Calls_to_Action_English2.pdf

⁸ Office of the Auditor General. "Socio-economic Gaps on First Nations Reserves—Indigenous Services Canada." Office of the Auditor General. 2016. https://www.oag-bvg.gc.ca/internet/English/att__e_43053.html

⁹ Canada. "On-time high-school graduation rate; 2015-16." Statistics Canada. 2018. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/181211/cg-a003-eng.htm>

¹⁰ Canada. "Learn how the Government of Canada is responding to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action 6 to 12." Government of Canada. 2019. <https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1524495412051/1557511602225>

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Truth and Reconciliation Commission. "Calls to Action." Truth and Reconciliation Commission. 2015. http://trc.ca/assets/pdf/Calls_to_Action_English2.pdf

¹³ McIvor, Onawa. "Indigenous Languages in Canada." Unesco. <https://en.ccunesco.ca/-/media/Files/Unesco/Resources/2018/09/IndigenousLanguagesCCUNESCO.pdf>

¹⁴ Truth and Reconciliation Commission. "Calls to Action." Truth and Reconciliation Commission. 2015. http://trc.ca/assets/pdf/Calls_to_Action_English2.pdf

¹⁵ Government of Canada. "Funding". Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council. 2020. <https://www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/funding-financement/index-eng.aspx>

¹⁶ McDonald, Moira. "Six Indigenous scholars share their views of Canada at 150." University Affairs. 2017. <https://www.universityaffairs.ca/features/feature-article/six-indigenous-scholars-share-views-canada-150/>

¹⁷ United Nations. "United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples." United Nations. 2017. https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2018/11/UNDRIP_E_web.pdf

¹⁸ Truth and Reconciliation Commission. "Calls to Action." Truth and Reconciliation Commission. 2015. http://trc.ca/assets/pdf/Calls_to_Action_English2.pdf

¹⁹ McDonald, Moira. "Six Indigenous scholars share their views of Canada at 150." University Affairs. 2017. <https://www.universityaffairs.ca/features/feature-article/six-indigenous-scholars-share-views-canada-150/>



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Undergraduates of
Canadian Research-Intensive
Universities

EXPAND CANADIAN UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH.

RECOMMENDATION:

Expand Undergraduate Student Research Awards (USRA) program funding to extend research opportunities to 3,800 students in social sciences, humanities, and health research under the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) and Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR). Funding for each award should also be increased to a living wage.

The USRA program, currently operated by the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council (NSERC), encourages undergraduate students from select disciplines to participate in four-month research opportunities under the guidance of senior researchers. The program, using federal funds, covers 80% of the cost of the research opportunity with the balance covered by the participating university or private sector partner. The USRA program is rooted in the value of government investment in research and development, which is indispensable in bolstering economies at the local, provincial and national levels.

As noted by the Council of Canadian Academies (CCA)- a non-partisan body that convenes multidisciplinary panels of experts to advise on complex decision-making in Canada- in the 21st century national prosperity, competitiveness and well-being will be inextricably linked to the cultivation of research talent that drives development and innovation.¹

However, in its assessment of the current state of research and development in Canada, the CCA also warns that the current trend of declining levels of public and private research in Canada threatens to undermine Canada's international standing as a top performer in research output, which itself is a legacy of past investment.

Increasing USRA funding would signal commitment to maintaining Canada's research reputation, while also underpinning innovation and private sector growth - as shown through the creation of research superclusters.² For its part, Industry Canada has shown their commitment to this through plans to increase private sector research and development funding to \$30 billion by 2025.³ At the same time, an enhanced USRA program would act as a catalyst to maximize the return on Industry Canada's investment through cultivating research talent and ideas beginning at the undergraduate level, which can then be channeled into use in the private sector through partnerships with industry.

From a labour market perspective, educated workers with critical thinking and problem-solving skills are among those most sought after in both the public and private sectors.⁴ Undergraduate research provides students with the opportunity to develop these capacities, as well as hone their time management and decision-making skills. The Royal Bank of Canada has noted that the latter two abilities will be key in filling 90% of job openings in the next three years.⁵

Furthermore, by increasing investment in the USRAs - while broadening the program's scope to include social sciences, humanities and health research - the federal government will be enabling a new generation of researchers to examine ways in which to address the social and economic challenges that come from both Canada's increasingly ageing population and the acceleration of urban-rural disparities, as well as the changing nature of work in the upcoming era of automation.

Currently, the USRA program is only made available to students through NSERC grants.⁶ Projects focusing on health sciences, social sciences or the humanities are not eligible, excluding a large proportion of students.

With a future that requires an increased focus on workers having transferable skills and governments needing insight into the challenges the public faces due to an aging population and technological disruption, it is important that students from these key disciplines have access to opportunities to enrich their skills and contribute to Canada's future prosperity and wellbeing.

RECOMMENDATION:

Increase federal USRA recipient funding to \$6,720 per person, which - when matched by proportionate funding by participating universities or private sector partners - would be the equivalent of a \$15 per hour livable wage.

An NSERC report on the USRA program in 2012 highlighted that the federal contribution of \$4,500 per participant, combined with the mandatory 25% university support, led to compensation equivalent to \$9.38 dollars per hour for a 35-hour work week over the duration of a 16-week research experience.

The 2012 program review recommended that the \$4,500 amount be increased, but this has not happened in the last eight years.⁷

However, our recommendation would see the federal government commit to funding levels of \$6,720 per participant. With a proportional increase in the 20% funding component that comes from the participating university or private sector partner, this would reflect a wage of \$15.00 per hour - equivalent to the minimum wage of Alberta, and what many experts cite as the threshold for a livable income - and would result in more students accepting the awards.⁸

Costing: \$35.3 million per year to increase the USRA funding to increase participant's level of compensation to \$15 per hour, and create 3,800 new spots under SSHRC and CIHR.

Cost breakdown: Increasing federal funding of current USRA recipients to \$6,700.

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS	INCREASE PER PARTICIPANT	TOTAL INCREASE
3,800	\$4,500 + \$2,220 = \$6,720	\$8.5 million

Cost breakdown: Creating 3,800 new USRA spots for students within the social sciences, humanities and health research.

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS	INCREASE PER PARTICIPANT	TOTAL INCREASE
3,800	\$6,720	\$25.5 million
Administration - *estimate based on replicating 5% overhead cost of current USRA program	—	\$1.3 million

¹ Council of Canadian Academies, Competing in a Global Innovation Economy: The Current State of R&D in Canada (2018), <http://new-report.scienceadvice.ca/>

² Industry, Science and Economic Development Canada, Canada's New Superclusters (2018), <https://bit.ly/3b236x1>

³ Industry, Science and Economic Development Canada, Tracking progress and results: The Innovation and Skills Plan (2018), <https://bit.ly/2thKf0b>

⁴ Conference Board of Canada, The Cost of Ontario's Skills Gap (2013), 26, <https://bit.ly/2RlccYn>

⁵ RBC, Humans Wanted Future Skills Report Technical Annex and Methodology, <https://bit.ly/3aTWktr>

⁶ NSERC-CRSNG, Evaluation of the USRA Program (2012), 9, <https://bit.ly/38Xh3e1>

⁷ NSERC-CRSNG, Evaluation of the USRA Program (2012), <https://bit.ly/36E5pTO>

⁸ Government of Canada, Current And Forthcoming Minimum Hourly Wage Rates For Experienced Adult Workers in Canada (2017), <https://bit.ly/2GJyl2i>