



March 21st, 2022

Re: Proposed Tuition Increases for Domestic and International Students

Dear Governors,

This submission is being made on behalf of the Alma Mater Society (AMS) of UBC Vancouver in regards to the following proposed tuition increases for the 22/23 Fiscal Year: 2% for domestic students, 4% for new international students, and 2% for continuing international students. In addition to our strong opposition to these raises, particularly those for continuing students, we are extremely disappointed with the impetuous consultation process with students and the University's efforts to address student concerns on the cost of tuition.

On the Tuition Engagement Survey with the student body: the AMS was seriously concerned with the removal of the open response comment box at the conclusion of the survey (that is separate from the comment box that accompanies specific questions) which allowed students to share their thoughts on proposed tuition increases. In previous years, the free comment text box allowed students to share their personal stories and rationales as to why they did or did not support tuition increases, but were very often composed of financially-struggling students making their case against tuition hikes. 83% of students already believe that “the university does not share any concern for students’ rising cost of education” (Academic Experience Survey, 2021), and the removal of the free comment text box does little to mitigate those concerns. 87% of students do not believe that UBC has taken measures to lower barriers to education and an additional 77% of students do not believe UBC is transparent and communicative with students on how their student tuition is being spent. While the intention may not have been to operate in bad faith, the perceived outcome is that the university is trying to limit opportunities for students to voice their discontent. It is worth noting that the removal of the free comment text box only exacerbates the distrust students feel towards the University, especially on matters of tuition and finances, and the effects of the removal beyond student trust is that it leaves Governors less informed when making their decision.

Students at UBC already struggle with a slew of sources of financial hardship. Food insecurity is the most prominent financial concern for students on campus, with 42% of all students reporting concerns over exhausting all available funds for food (AES 2021). Top reasons for students to be concerned about food security consist of high housing and tuition costs coupled with inadequate financial assistance. Additionally, rising textbook costs also pose a financial barrier to students, with over 65% of students stating that they have gone without a textbook or course material in a course due to the cost. A 2% increase to the tuition of continuing domestic and international students may not appear to be a significant premium to some, but a quick glance at the existing financial concerns

of UBC students demonstrates that any increase to the tuition will have a drastic impact on general student wellness.

We would also like to take this opportunity to point out that the University has made no public efforts in engaging with the provincial and federal governments with regard to increasing in the operating grant, neither have there been robust efforts on advocacy to the province to lift the moratorium on external borrowing, nor have there been strong efforts to advocate for student housing to be turned into a government business enterprise that could borrow externally. These are just a few examples of the steps the University needed to have made strides in, or at least transparent efforts, in order to address the cost challenges the University faces in ways other than putting the financial burden on already-struggling students through tuition increases. It is supremely disappointing to see an utter lack of efforts on the external front while students are expected to bear increased costs that many were not aware of when making the decision to call UBC their home.

On January 17, 2019, the Ontario government announced a 10% cut to domestic tuition fees for that year (and a tuition freeze for the following year) (a reduction in about \$88 million CAD for 2019-2020 and \$113 million CAD for 2020-2021) ([UofT Budget Report 2021](#), 7). If the University of Toronto is able to positively respond to a shock to the budget as such, an equally leading institution like ours must have the calibre and care to make similar efforts.

Funding opportunities outside of personal savings and government loans are limited for domestic students and especially limited for international students. Currently, the vast majority of financial awards for international students are specifically targeted to those entering their first year to add to the University's recruitment efforts. There is little to no financial support in the domain of merit-based awards for continuing international students. Thus, an increase in tuition of 2% for continuing international students would place an even bigger burden on international students with financial need who have minimal need-based support offered by the University.

Students voice deep frustration on the issue of tuition increases every year. The Board and the Administration make commitments to addressing affordability concerns and the cost of education but lately, these commitments have rung hollow. We sincerely hope that members of the Board of Governors choose to act with compassion and generosity and vote no to tuition increases for FY2023.

Sincerely,



Eshana Bhangu

Vice President, Academic and University Affairs
Alma Mater Society



Cole Evans

President
Alma Mater Society