

Formal Submission: 2021 Pre-Budget Consultations

Waterloo Undergraduate Student Association

The Waterloo Undergraduate Student Association represents over 35,000 students at the University of Waterloo. As a member of the Undergraduates of Canadian Research-Intensive Universities (UCRU), we are pleased to present UCRU's recommendations for the federal 2021 budget.

Summary of Recommendations:

Student Financial Support

- Invest \$230 million dollars per year to implement a 2-year interest-free grace period on all federal student loans for new graduates.
- Increase the 2019 Canada Student Grant levels by \$1200 dollars per student for the 2021 federal budget.

Supporting International Students

- Make \$20 million dollars available to support Student Work Placement Program opportunities for both international and domestic students.
- Include international students in the Youth Employment and Skills Strategy and Canada Summer Jobs Program.
- Continue to prioritize international students in Canada's Immigration Levels Plan by including work conducted non-continuously and during students' undergraduate programs for express entry pathways.

Undergraduate Research Opportunities

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

Access for Indigenous Students

- Further expand funding for the Post-Secondary Student Support Program
- Invest in the Métis Nation and Inuit Post-Secondary Education Strategy to eliminate barriers preventing students from accessing support
- Create additional funding opportunities for all Indigenous students interested in pursuing high-social-impact fields such as healthcare and education

UCRU fully appreciates the federal government's numerous investments in post-secondary education throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Students studying and graduating today face a host of challenges. Now, as we look forward to vaccine distribution and long-term economic recovery, it is clear that post-secondary education and post-secondary students will play a key role as Canada recovers from the pandemic. We seek the government's investment in students to help us contribute to Canada's economic growth and to support our entry into the middle class. Our recommendations focus on the provision of student financial aid and the creation of work-integrated learning opportunities for students.

Post-secondary graduates will go on to undertake high-skill jobs that are critical to Canada's economic recovery. Universities Canada identifies that 80% of top jobs require a university degree.¹ However, this prosperity is at risk for students graduating through the ongoing effects of COVID-19. Graduates will provide highly skilled labour to companies while suffering initial earning losses of 30-40% as a result of graduating during economic uncertainty.² Furthermore, students' economic contributions are not limited to after graduation; even while at university, students contribute substantially to Canada's GDP through participation in work placements throughout their degree.

In the wake of COVID-19, student financial aid in the form of grants and debt relief will be critical in ensuring that students are not overcome with debt after graduation. Support for marginalized students is particularly important to ensure that populations like our Indigenous students are able to thrive. Student debt serves as a significant impediment to students' ability to achieve key milestones after graduation such as buying a house, starting a family or even renting a home close to their job.³ Such challenges could affect our generation's economic contributions and financial wellbeing for years to come.

In addition to investments in student financial aid, we are also seeking expansion to several funding sources for work-integrated learning opportunities. The myriad of challenges posed by "virtual learning" means that students are struggling to receive an education that adequately prepares them for their career.⁴ Work-integrated learning opportunities such as work placements, summer jobs, and research contracts allow students to get hands-on experience and training needed to prepare them for the future.

While the long-term impacts of COVID-19 are still being discovered, we can be certain that young people will be disproportionately impacted.⁵ Therefore, we urge the government to take our recommendations into consideration, invest in post-secondary students, and support young people as they weather the adverse effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

¹ Universities Canada. [Facts and Stats](#).

² National Bureau of Economic Research. [The Career Effects Of Graduating In A Recession](#). Issue 11. 2006.

³ Bertolo, Stephanie, Matthew Gerrits, Connor Plante, and Tasneem Warwani. [Policy Paper: Student Financial Aid](#). Toronto: Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance, 2019.

⁴ Mellon, Matt. [Students are being misled about the quality of their education](#). Queen's Journal. January 22, 2021.

⁵ Frenette, Marc, Derek Messacar and Tomasz Handler. [Potential Earnings Losses among High School and Postsecondary Graduates Due to the COVID-19 Economic Downturn](#). Statistics Canada. July 28, 2020.



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About UCRU

Undergraduates of Canadian Research-Intensive Universities 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.