Background

To maintain excellence in the delivery of the engineering program, the Faculty of Engineering is seeking approval from the Provincial Government for, approximately, a $1,790 tuition increase, effective for domestic students admitted in Fall 2022 or later.

The tuition increase is necessary to ensure continued delivery of the highest quality engineering programming and to maintain the national and international standing of the Engineering at Alberta credential.

Engineering at Alberta is committed to remaining a leader in engineering education and training. Our goal remains to provide students with an excellent education and research experience, to prepare them for success in their professional career. Simply, achieving this goal is at risk without the required resources to maintain excellence in program and service delivery. And it is for this reason we are asking the government to allow for a tuition increase.

The Survey Results

On August 13, a survey was released to the undergraduate engineering student population to gather their input on potential enhancements to the engineering program and to gather their perspective on the effects of the tuition increase on future students.

By the survey closing date of August 27, 963 responses were received. Common themes emerge around uses for the revenue from a tuition increase including, improvements in course content and delivery (including more experiential opportunities), greater flexibility in the program, and additional student support services.

Areas for Improvement

Respondents ranked their top five choices for the areas of the program that could benefit from improvement/enhancements. Results are as follows:
1. Improving course delivery (e.g. increased instructor/TA to student ratios, online learning tools) was ranked as the number one choice for program improvement.

2. Ranked as the second priority was the modernization of course content.

3. Improving experiential learning and work integrated learning programs was the third highest ranking among respondents.

4. The option most frequently ranked as fourth and fifth was increased access to student services such as advising.

5. The final area identified for improvement was improvements to the first-year program.

Under “Others”, several students mentioned
Training of instructors for better quality of teaching  
Improved access to mental health resources

Additional thoughts included

- More hand-on training, e.g., shop time
- Creating a better technology program
- Flexibility in choosing disciplines
- More choices in elective courses and extracurriculars (e.g., seminars)
- Increased internships and placement opportunities
- Integration of online and in-person learning

Gaps in the Program

Respondents were asked about the key components currently missing from the Engineering at Alberta program. Responses focused on improvements in course content and delivery, increasing work-integrated learning, increased flexibility in the program as well as increased student support in areas such as advising, mentoring and mental health.

Most responses focused on the need for

- Better teaching, including more up-to-date course materials, interactive learning and modernized teaching methods (e.g., workshops outside of class), integration of in-person and online learning, and training of instructors — responses aligned with the priorities selected in the first question.
- More work-integrated learning (especially for students in the traditional streams), hand-on experiences (especially for the first two years), and opportunities to implement the knowledge in the engineering field.
- Flexibility in selecting courses (more offering of electives), transferring between programs, and extending length of the programs.
- Easier and faster access to advisor support (allowing appointments)
- More student/instructor and student/TA interactions
- Assessment of students’ workload, mental health support, more empathy and care towards students
- More guidance in selecting disciplines in the first year
- Mentorship for first year (transitioning into university) and last year (transitioning into workforce)
- Financial support
- Transparent communication with students
Respondents also identified gaps in the specific discipline programs (e.g., for MEC E, ECE, CH E, Civ E), including the types of courses they would like to see. Others suggested new programs including: aerospace, mechatronics, renewable energy.

**Valuable additions to the program**

Respondents were asked about the type of addition to the program that they believe would draw students from across the country. The responses to this question track those to questions one and two. A summary is given below:

- Low tuition/lower tuition
- Scholarship opportunities
- Expansion of co-op program: a wider selection of co-op employers and job opportunities, and/or higher number of spots in the program.
- Experiential learning opportunities, including research opportunities, hands-on learning opportunities, design classes, group projects, internships and work programs.
- Additional programs and/or courses: new programs and/or courses in Mechatronics, Aerospace Engineering, Automotive Engineering, Sustainability; expansion of the Biomedical Engineering program.
- Improved course instruction, course delivery, and course content
- Online course options

**Impacts of the tuition increase**

Although the respondents will not be subject to the tuition increase, we asked about perceived impacts to help identify the effects on incoming students.

Almost all responded that they would be impacted "negatively", and it would lead to more student loans, the need to secure a job during schooling, increased stress and the possibility of dropping out of the program or transferring to another university. Some commented that it might discourage good students from coming to U of A.

Some students commented that if there were a tuition increase, they would like to see it "go towards increasing student happiness and increasing employment rates post-grad". A few requested transparent communications about how the increased tuition would be used. A few commented that the increase would disproportionately affect lower income students.

**Summary of Town hall on August 18**

A town hall with engineering students was held via Zoom.

Students dropped in and out of the 1.5-hour meeting. At any time, there were about 20 students online. Questions were asked about the motivation behind the tuition increase proposal, comparison with other institutions in Canada, and the impact of the tuition on current/future and domestic/international students.
Questions were raised regarding whether the tuition increase can benefit specific areas including new equipment and staff for lab instruction, financial support for marginalized students, and designated space for student groups. Students wanted the final proposal shared with them.

**Summary of Town hall on August 24**

A second town hall with engineering students was held via Zoom.

There were fewer students in attendance than at the first town hall. At the peak time there were 11 students, dropping to three after the first half an hour.

Results of the student survey up to August 23 were shared with the attendees. Students appreciated the fact the survey responses were carefully read, analyzed, and shared. They suggested keeping similar channels of communication between students and the Faculty in the future.

Students expressed that they would like to see this proposal target issues identified in the survey and make a real difference in their learning experiences. Students shared their concerns regarding the lack of access to advisors (very long queue, booking system doesn’t really work). They suggest a FAQ page to help improve efficiency. They also pointed out that sometimes students need advice on their programs and careers and not just on scheduling. They don’t seem to be aware of advising services in each department/program.