

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA STUDENTS, FACULTY, AND STAFF UNITE TO OPPOSE POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION CUTS IN PROVINCIAL BUDGET

Joint Statement from University of Alberta Students' Union, University of Alberta Graduate Students' Association, Association of Academic Staff University of Alberta, and the University of Alberta Non-Academic Staff Association

Students, faculty, and staff at the University of Alberta are deeply concerned about the impact that the Government of Alberta's 2019-2020 budget will have on the quality, accessibility, and affordability of education at the University of Alberta. The University has been handed a mid-year cut of \$44 million to its operating grant and \$35 million in planned infrastructure maintenance funding has been revoked, while projections for future years foreshadow future cuts to come. At the same time, current and prospective students will be facing thousands of dollars of additional costs for their education between dramatic increases to tuition, student loan interest rate hikes, and eliminated tuition and education tax credits. We fear that the government intends to balance their budget on the backs of students, piling on extra costs while making cuts that will negatively impact the quality of instruction and support services that they will receive during their studies.

Alberta's post-secondary institutions, including the University of Alberta, already faced real challenges before this budget was tabled. The province's post-secondary participation rate has consistently been the lowest in Canada, student debt loads are amongst the highest in Canada, and a shrinking proportion of graduates agree that their degrees were worth the associated costs. As costs and debts have risen, increased incidences of student mental health concerns, food insecurity, and homelessness have been reported. All of these concerns have been felt even more prominently by groups who are already more vulnerable, including international students, first-generation students, LGBTQ2+ students, indigenous students, students with disabilities, and students who parent. Yet, in the face of these challenges and concerns, the government seems to have chosen to blindly cut funding for institutions and raise cost pressures for individuals instead of taking steps to build a more equitable and accessible post-secondary education system.

University of Alberta students, faculty, and staff will not sit silently while this budget takes effect, particularly on those most vulnerable members of our community. At every opportunity, we will stand up for our colleagues and peers in our advocacy both inside the University and to the government. We strongly encourage all of our fellow students, faculty, and staff to stay informed and involved over the coming months as we work to make our voices heard and continue the fight for an equitable, accessible, and affordable post-secondary education. As a first step, students, staff and faculty are welcome to join our rally on November 18th, at 11AM in front of the Administration Building, where will be marching to the Legislature at 11:30AM to hand-deliver hundreds of stories from students to the Government.

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