



ASEC

Alberta Students' Executive Council

2024-2025 Policy and Budget Recommendations



Alberta Students deserve

Accessible, Affordable & High-Quality Education

ASEC believes that having a post-secondary system that offers high-quality education, accessible to all who wish to pursue it at an affordable cost is an essential part of the Alberta Advantage. **When we succeed at offering world-class education, we succeed in building a leading economy for generations to come. Students must be partners in shaping the future of which they will be leaders.**

A large part of creating learning that is accessible is ensuring that there are pathways to post-secondary for people with different lived experiences and starting points. The cuts to foundational learning have had a tremendous impact on learners across schools where pathways to higher learning have been cut or scale backs have rendered students abruptly ineligible for assistance funds. While we recognize these cuts are as a result of federal decision-making, ASEC is keen to find ways to re-empower these students with an accessible pathway to learning.

Many factors impact cost of living and affordability for students. Domestic students have access student aid to increase affordability during their years as students. Aside from delays in the past two years, students are also finding it harder to qualify for important funds that are often the deciding factor of being able to attend post-secondary at all. Students with complicated parental relationships are often unable to get salary data or the figure may disqualify a student for being too high despite their parents not supporting them financially; either way, students in both boats are left stranded. This year's changes to student aid policies have had punitive effects to students who have struggled in the past, adding a barrier to their current efforts to overcome past challenges. Furthermore, certain funds for disability students are contingent on being a student aid recipient, meaning students disqualified for other reasons are then also ineligible for specialized funds.

A high-quality post-secondary education system drives research and innovation, gainfully employs top talent, and attracts the brightest of minds. When we envision the future of our province as a leader on global and national stages, post-secondary is an essential ingredient. We must fund research at all levels of education, be a leader in advancing knowledge through methods like open educational resources (OER's), and our institutions must be sustainably funded to retain the best minds. Funding for post-secondaries has become precarious with international student restrictions in a system that relies heavily on their unregulated tuition and planned cuts to government funding. Many students are already being told that scarce services and increased fees are early compensations for uncertain and declining revenue. The risk of continuing without a stable, predictable funding model that demonstrates a value in post-secondary is far too high. The future of our province depends on investing in Advanced Education.



Alberta Students deserve Mental Health Supports

Invest in prevention and early intervention

With the affordability crisis exacerbating stressors already experienced by students, the need for more mental health support is acutely felt on campuses making it a top priority for ASEC members. Data informing the 2016 Advisory panel on mental health revealed nearly two thirds of students experiencing overwhelming anxiety²; every survey during and since the pandemic points to mental health only worsening since then.

Students are experiencing cost of living pressures, major life transitions, evolving social supports, and academic pressures. When half of post-secondary students are under the age of 25³ and According to the Centre for Innovation in Campus Mental Health (CICMH), 75% of mental health-related problems are first diagnosed between the ages of 16 and 24 the need to have enough of the right supports on campus is clear.

While the existing grant supports important on-campus service delivery, there has been no increase in the amount since its inception despite increasing need, enrollment, and inflationary costs. Campuses across the province have and are suggesting Mandatory Non-Instructional Fees (MNIF's) dedicated to mental health and counselling to attempt to meet demands unmet by existing grant dollars. However these are yet another set of fees placed on students, adding to the cost pressures contributing to a sense of overwhelm, which was already a staggering 90% in 2016².

To be a sustainable financial model, we propose that there be an annual CPI and enrollment adjustment accounted for so the increased quality of care is something students can count on year over year. It is our hope that investing in preventative and early intervention care on campuses will result in less students reaching critical life threatening stages of mental illness.

¹ ACHA-National College Health Assessment (NCHA) 2019 Data (Canadian Reference Group)

² Alberta Advanced Education, Advisory Panel on Post-Secondary Mental Health.

³ Statistics Canada, Postsecondary enrolments, status of student in Canada

Results from the 2019 National College Health Assessment Canadian Reference Group indicated that over

16%

of students had seriously thought of suicide, and

2.8%

had attempted to take their own lives.¹

ASEC Recommends
Increase post-secondary mental health grant by 50% with planned increases indexed for enrollment growth and cost of living each year thereafter.

Alberta Students deserve Food Security

Human rights are student rights.

Having food to eat, just like a shelter over one's head is a basic human need and right. While not a problem exclusive to students, we know that students are particularly vulnerable to food insecurity, and when that basic need isn't being met they aren't able to thrive in their studies.

When it comes to food insecurity, Alberta was ranked as the third most impacted province per 2022 Statistics Canada data indicating 22%, or more than 1 in 5 Albertans experiencing food insecurity¹. Data from the same report shows us demographic groups with increased vulnerability to experiencing food insecurity such as being Indigenous, racialized, immigrants, renters, younger (stats reflect lower rates by each age cohort), and unemployed.

These statistics haven't been surprising for ASEC members as many are seeing record usage of their on-campus food banks. NAITSA had 214 students apply for a hamper in the 2021 calendar year with that number more than quadrupled to 911 in 2023.

The Food Security Grant issued in 2023 has been greatly appreciated by recipients within the campus food bank community. With no end to food insecurity in sight, students are hopeful to have the investment renewed. Many organizations have limited capacity and are trying to maximize the grant's impact. Extending the grant term to two years would allow food banks to better plan their operations, reduce administrative burdens, and direct more resources to providing meals, thereby ensuring greater efficiency and impact, resulting in higher value for taxpayer dollars.

¹Government of Canada, Statistics Canada. (2023, November 14). Food insecurity among Canadian families.

²Food Banks Alberta. (2022). ANNUAL REPORT 2022.

Alberta's food banks saw a

73%

increase in use from
2019 to 2022²



ASEC Recommends

The Ministry of Seniors, Community and Social Services renew the Food Security Grant, extending the grant term to two years.

Consult and include students in matters relating to food security, housing, and accessing other basic needs.



Alberta Students deserve Operational Grant Funding

That safeguards the reputation of Alberta's post-secondary institutions and economy

Alberta's post-secondary institutions are facing challenges due to a steady decline in percent government funding. Currently only accounting for approximately 46% of institutional budgets, this decline (with a target of 42% by 2026-2027) has left both institutions and students shouldering a disproportionate burden, leading to increased fees and reduced services. As government funding declines, essential student services are being scaled back, placing student well-being and success at risk.

Post-secondary is not only a place where students learn and train to contribute to the labour force, but also a hub for research and innovation, moving society forward and gainfully employing tens of thousands of Albertans.

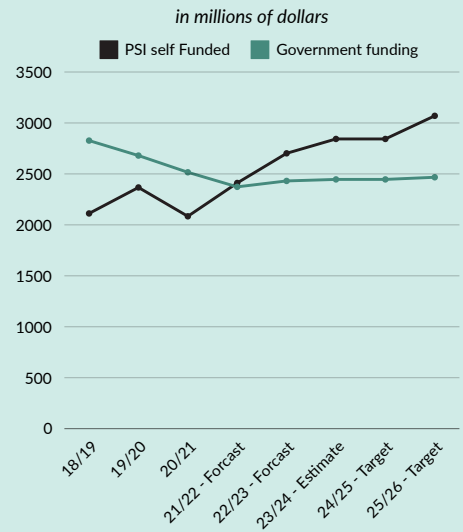
The current plan to reduce funding doesn't only impact students financially—it threatens the overall quality of education in Alberta. With fewer resources available and the evolving federal international student policies, institutions may be forced to cut programs, reduce staffing, limit access to key educational resources, and defer research and innovation. These measures to respond to unstable funding risks the quality of education, the ability of our post-secondaries to train our future workforce, and stunts innovation, all of which are crucial for Alberta's economic growth.

In recent weeks, ASEC has learned of the panel to re-evaluate post-secondary funding. We are optimistic that this will illuminate the risks of a continued decline. ASEC is adamant that student voices be meaningfully included in the panel's review.

¹Fiscal Plan Securing Alberta's Future 2023 - 26

²Data from Alberta Fiscal Plans 2020-23 through 2023-26

Alberta post secondary grant funding¹



ASEC Recommends

Inclusion and meaningful consultation of students in the funding review panel.

Increase the investment in Operational Grant Funding for publicly funded post-secondary institutions, targeting 50% government funding by Budget 2027.

Integrity and support for **International Students**

Essential members of our campuses

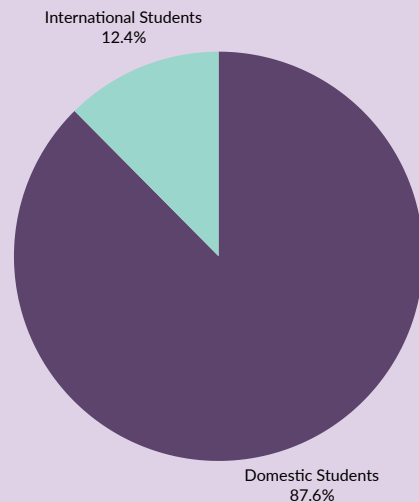
Canada is promoted as a place of multi-culturalism with opportunities to learn and grow, and a desire to welcome newcomers. However, many international students arrive only to feel alone and valued only for their steep tuition payments.

International students typically pay 3-4 times the tuition of domestic students and as of this year, their ability and that of their spouses is restricted. Adding more hardship are social stigmas that make everything from finding familiar food to affordable housing even more challenging. Many international students cite feeling like they are not equipped financially, supported socially, or privy to pathways to address either once they've arrived.

On average, students in Canada take 1.5 or 2 times the typical program duration to complete their programs¹. Extending student visas and Alberta's tuition guarantee to 1.5 times the program's expected duration better aligns with how long we now expect students to take to graduate and helps to minimize additional stressors and financial burden on international students.

While visas, post-graduate work permits, and work hour caps are federally mandated, ASEC is hopeful that the provincial government can put pressure on federal counterparts to reconsider these policies targeted at bad actors elsewhere in the country. As many institutions do not have the extra funds to invest in unique supports for international students, it is also our recommendation that students be included in ethno-cultural events and initiatives in the greater community.

We believe that international students add invaluable culture and unique skills and life views to campus communities in and out of the classrooms. We ought to treat them like it.



In 2020 International Students made up 12% of Post-secondary students in Alberta²

ASEC Recommends

Remove the off-campus working hours limitation for International Students.

Extend the duration of student visas (federal) and the tuition guarantee (provincial) to equal 1.5 times the expected program duration.

¹ Statistics Canada, Persistence and graduation indicators of postsecondary students, 2011/2012 to 2021/2022

² Statistics Canada, Postsecondary enrolments, status of student in Canada

Alberta Students deserve Fee regulations & transparency

To plan for their financial futures

In the pursuit of affordability, predictability, and transparency in post-secondary education, ASEC is seeking regulation and enforcement of existing policies related to mandatory non-instructional fees (MNIF's).

In examining recent fee increases in post-secondary, MNIF's have increased by as much as 33% at Keyano College, 50% at Portage College, and 65% at Red Deer Polytechnic over three years and impacts students attending most ASEC institutions¹.

This trend places additional financial strain on students who are already grappling with tuition and textbook costs and other living expenses. While MNIF's are intended to be cost recovery, they have grown considerably, far outpacing inflation. Students are left wondering what fees actually cover when their access to services is flat or declining despite increasing fees.

With government funds to post-secondaries declining and international student restrictions bound to decrease tuition revenue, students are on high-alert as MNIF's remain one of the few levers institutions have to increase revenue without regulation. The Tuition and Fees Regulation has many intended parameters for MNIF's but students in multiple institutions have identified non-compliance. This is why ASEC is seeking support and enforcement of existing regulations in addition to framework similar to that of exceptional tuition increases to ensure MNIF's don't become flow throughs for expenses not intended to be covered at the initial point of student approval.

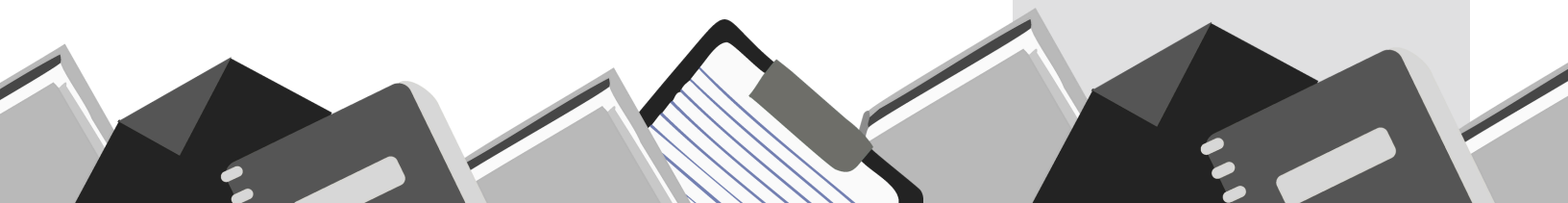
¹In an environmental scan of MNIF's for ASEC members from 2020-2023 based on full-time enrolment

ASEC Recommends

Amendment to the Tuition and Fees Regulation to require a Students' Association's written approval for any MNIF increases by 10% or more in a single year.

Enforce regulations prohibiting omnibus fees including increased scrutiny of any omnibus fees permitted through legacy agreements.

Collaboration with Students' Associations to ensure enforcement of Section 8 (Consultation), within the Tuition and Fees Regulation



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Contact

Anika Zepp

Executive Director
ed@albertastudents.ca

Lily Schaerer

Chair
chair@albertastudents.ca

Anna Dau

Vice Chair
vicechair@albertastudents.ca

AlbertaStudents.ca | @Albertastudents

#210, 11520 100Avenue NW

Edmonton, AB T5K 0J7

Treaty 6 Territory and Metis Region IV