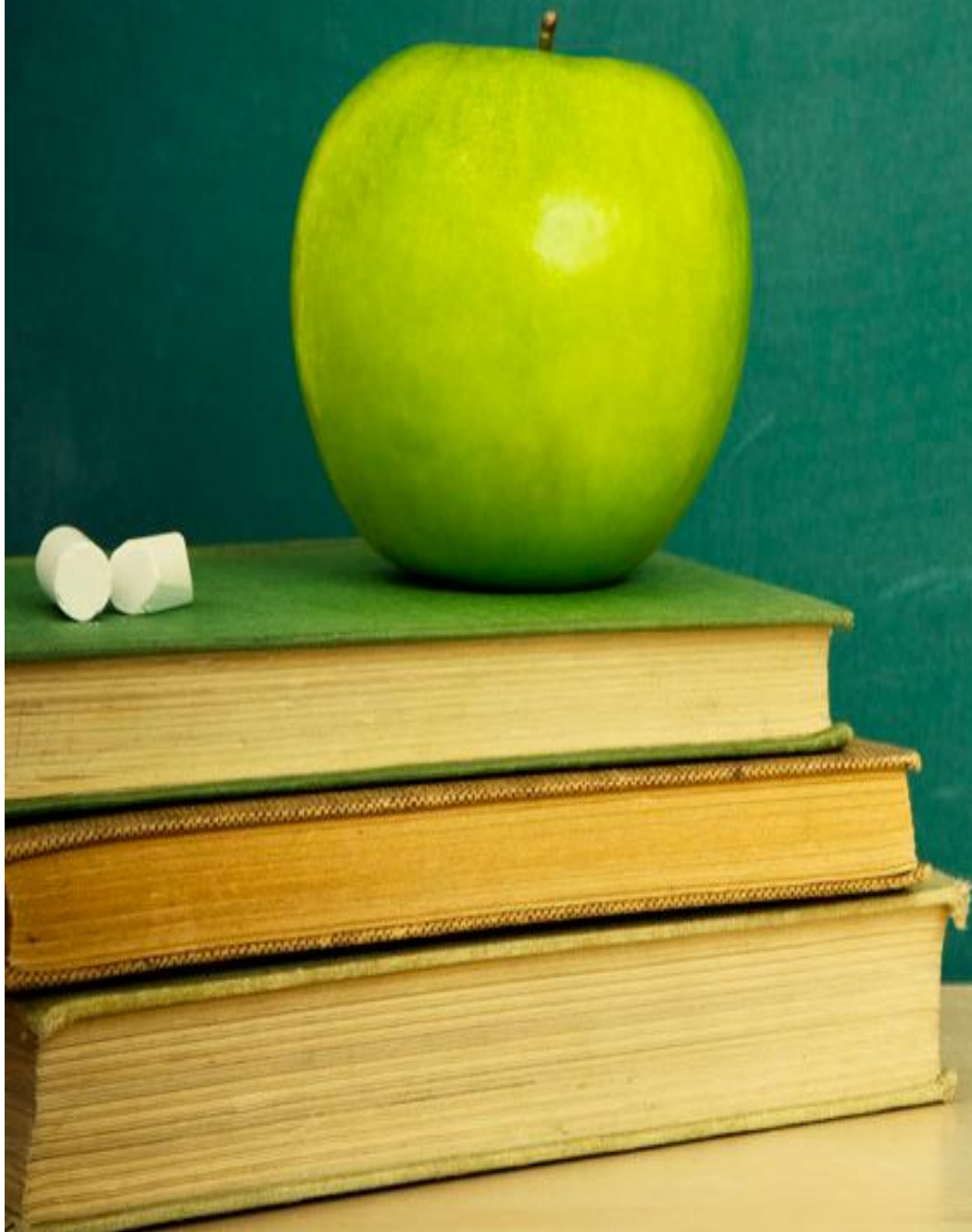


Shaping Post-Secondary Education in Canada: A College Perspective



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2011 Federal Election Platform Submission

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About Our Organization

The College Student Alliance (CSA) is a member-driven advocacy and student leadership organization which proudly serves Ontario's college and college-university students. The CSA currently represents students from 17 colleges and 24 student associations with over 135,000 full-time student members throughout the province.

Our Pan-Canadian Student Partnership

Our provincial and national student organizations are working together to place post-secondary education issues at the forefront of political discourse and discussion. The partnership consists of the CSA, Canadian Alliance of Student Associations (CASA), Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance (OUSA), Alliance of Nova Scotia Student Associations (ANSSA), Alberta Students Executive Council (ASEC), Council of Alberta University Students (CAUS), and New Brunswick Student Alliance (NBSA). This partnership has unified advocacy efforts across Canada to ensure that federal parties are acutely aware of student needs, issues and priorities.

The CSA Postsecondary Education Principles

- All Canadians should be able to enter a post-secondary education program if they meet the eligibility requirements set out by the institution
- All Canadian citizens must have access to the financial resources necessary to start, continue and complete studies
- All Canadian college and college-university graduates should not carry an excessive debt loan

Canada has fared well in the recent global economic downturn, due to its prudent financial and monetary policies. Our country also celebrates a history of balanced budgets even as spending increases; recently, the national economy has been successful even though gross domestic product and employment have been somewhat adversely affected.

By 2015, Statistics Canada estimates that 41% of the workforce will be between the ages of 45 to 64, compared to 29% in 1991. While the removal of mandatory retirement will allow baby boomers to continue working, they will eventually retire. To remain amongst the leaders of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries in post-secondary education and globally competitive, Canada must devise a strategy to overcome this upcoming skills shortage.

Moving forward, the Canadian government will have to accentuate the link between renewed economic growth and education. In an effort for Canada to continue social spending, our economy will require a greater emphasis on innovation, more business investments, and higher paying jobs. The College Student Alliance believes that if these three components are adequately addressed with sound and rational policies, then a skilled labour deficit can be avoided. This will produce workers who have the appropriate market-required skills to support business development.

Accessibility

Access to education is vital for social, economic and civic progress.

Culturally speaking, many Canadians embrace the value of education. We traditionally appreciate knowledge for and within itself and embrace wisdom. An educated citizenry helps establish a more stable and wealthy government, and brings benefits such as a healthier population, lower crime rate, and a more engaged civic population. We must significantly increase PSE participation rates by making education more accessible while also increasing the numbers of international students attending Canadian institutions.

Skilled Labour Deficit

In order to avoid a skilled labour shortage, we must ensure that the Canadian population has access to education to obtain skills.

Dr. Rick Miner produced a paper in 2009 entitled “People without Jobs, Jobs without People”. In this research paper, Dr. Miner used data compiled by the federal government to assess and explain upcoming challenges to economic prosperity. Among them, there are two significant obstacles that face us.

Firstly, Canada faces a skilled worker crisis. Dr. Miner forecasts that the skilled labour deficits will reach 1.5 million workers by 2021 and 2.7 million workers by 2031.¹ Secondly, employment opportunities are increasingly demanding post-secondary education. Dr. Miner suggests that by next year, at least 70% of the entire workforce will require a PSE. Currently in Ontario, about 67% of youth aged 18–24 years are in the process of completing, or have already completed, PSE. However, Ontario’s workforce as a whole currently has a PSE completion rate of 56%.²

For Canada to remain competitive, we must satisfy two very important needs. Firstly, we must ensure that underrepresented groups are accessing PSE at much higher rates. Secondly, we must remain globally competitive.

Addressing Needs of the Underrepresented

Canada must continue to support early outreach initiatives to include underrepresented groups in PSE.

Ensuring that underrepresented groups access PSE is contingent on early outreach initiatives (EOIs). Early outreach is required because students make the decision to attend post-secondary schooling at the approximate age of 13.

Likewise, students are streamed into differing pathways at the beginning of high school that affect their life choices. Students will select which courses to take, with either an academic or applied stream—the first being guided into university and the other to college. Take Ontario, for example; once in Grade 11, the academic and applied stream is renamed to “university” and “college”, respectively, to correspond to their future educational goals. It is important to note that socio-economic status tends to play a significant role in post-secondary education choices. EOIs, such as Pathways to Education, seek to address the academic, personal, and social barriers to valuing and completing education. As well as promoting literacy, math skills, and an appreciation for education, these programs work to enhance the confidence and self-appreciation of the participants.

EOIs ought to be community-based in order to further develop ties between these programs and members of their communities. These EOIs should operate with flexibility, in the sense that programs should be created to address the unique needs of the specific communities. Outreach programs like Pathways to Education must be supported by the federal government. The program first started in Regent Park, and has now reduced dropout rates from 56% to 12%. In neighbourhoods such as Regent Park, PSE participation rates have gone from 20% to 80%. These results have been similarly replicated in communities such as Toronto’s Lawrence

¹ Dr. Rick Miner, *People Without Jobs, Jobs Without People*, pg. 2

² *Ibid*

Heights, Scarborough, and Rexdale, and in cities such as Ottawa, Kitchener, Montreal, Hamilton, and Winnipeg.

International Students

Canada must continue to recruit and retain international students.

Canada is a leader in internationalization, and as a result we have the opportunity to recruit and retain the world's best and brightest students. Canada has identified international students as a key policy priority, as colleges have enrolled over 14,500 international students. The added value that international students bring has become evident in the diverse perspectives and experiences shared in the classrooms, the broader cultural diversity on campus, and the economic benefit gained by the province as a whole.

However, to contrast with this benefit, international students are paying nearly three times the amount of domestic students' tuition. An international student will pay, on average, \$14,000 a year, in addition to roughly \$2,000 per month for living expenses. If the Canadian government continues to provide insufficient financial support to international students, the degree of educational quality that these students seek will not be met.

As the global supply of international students increases, we can also expect additional demands for recruiting this talent into various education markets. In order to entice students to choose Ontario, we must provide a system with the same incentives and supports that persuade domestic students to choose Canada.

Expanding Federal Grant Eligibility

Federal grants should be made available to all students.

In 2006–07, the Canadian Millennium Scholarship Foundation determined that 20% of students were unable to meet their financial need. Currently, the Canada Student Loans Program (CSLP) and Canada Student Grants Program provide assistance to students in need by providing bursaries and need-based grants.

It is crucial that all college students, both full-time and part-time, be offered grants and bursaries regardless of whether they hold a loan. CSA understands that the current system is designed to ensure that those in the most financial need receive these further forms of assistance, by ensuring that only those who required loans will receive grants and bursaries.

The expansion of non-repayable assistance would be intended to expand accessibility. The current system does not take into consideration underrepresented groups, such as first generation, mature and Aboriginal students, as they are more likely to be averse to debt. For example, many

Aboriginal students worry about not obtaining well-paying jobs after graduation, and many mature students have acquired mortgages and other private loans before entry into college. Therefore, they worry about the debt load, and as a result those who need financial assistance may not access it. Expanding eligibility for grants would seek to address this.

Lowering Interest Rates on Loans

Lowering interest rates on the Canada Student Loan Program will enable more students to access PSE.

Lowering interest rates would prove to be a strong motivator to access PSE for those persons who are extremely debt-averse. An Ontario college student graduates with an average of \$8,400 of debt, but 44% have borrowed over \$10,000, and 29% have borrowed over \$15,000. The number of students graduating with debt over \$15,000 continues to grow in Ontario.

We must reduce the interest rates on these loans to prime. At present, with the prime rate currently set at 3.0%, Ontario students are paying 4.0% interest on the Ontario portion of their loans, although this is sure to increase. The CSA supports the phasing out of high-interest CSLP and Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP) payments in order to better assist the federal and provincial governments in the transition. However, the phasing out of high-interest payments ought to take no more than 5 years.

Conclusion

In summary, the CSA believes that all Canadians should be able to enter a PSE program if they meet the eligibility requirements set out by the institution, and that they must have access to the financial resources necessary to start, continue, and complete their studies without incurring an excessive debt load. The CSA believes that these principles and goals can be met by expanding access to education, as PSE is vital for social, economic, and civic progress. To do this, Canada must continue to support EOIs to include underrepresented groups in post-secondary schools. Initiatives like these will in turn help Canada circumvent a skilled labour shortage. To remain globally competitive, Canada must continue to recruit and retain international students. Finally, education must be made affordable, and to assure this affordability, federal grant should be made available to all students. Also, the lowering of interest rates on loans disbursed through the Canada Student Loan Program will enable more students to access PSE. Our partnering organizations are working together to place PSE issues at the forefront of political discourse and discussion. To ensure a successful PSE system, the above issues must be taken into consideration.