



# **GOING GLOBAL**

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Supporting Ontario's International Students

March 2011

# **OUSAA**

Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance



## **GOING GLOBAL: Supporting Ontario's International Students**

March 2011

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### **About OUSA**

OUSA represents the interests of nearly 6,000 international and over 140,000 professional and undergraduate, full-time and part-time university students at seven institutions across Ontario. Our vision is for an accessible, affordable, accountable and high quality post-secondary education in Ontario. To achieve this vision we've come together to develop solutions to challenges facing higher education, build broad consensus for our policy options, and lobby government to implement them.

### **Acknowledgements**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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The Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance (OUSA) recognizes the importance of attracting more international students to study in Ontario, as articulated by the Ontario government in its *Open Ontario Plan*. In a competitive global environment, international students enable the province to train and retain highly skilled individuals, provide access to a greater pool of talent, diversity and ideas, and contribute to the economy. This paper provides an overview of six areas of significant importance to undergraduate domestic and international students alike, all of which are in need of greater attention by institutions and the provincial government.

### INTERNATIONAL UNDERGRADUATE TUITION

International undergraduate students should pay the equivalent of the revenue derived from their domestic peers plus additional costs associated with recruiting and supporting international students. However, Ontario universities are charging fees above and beyond this rate, and international tuition fees should not be used to compensate for institutional funding shortages. Moreover, international student tuition should be regulated by the government to ensure that any year-to-year increases are at a predictable and reasonable rate.

### FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Ontario should seek to attract the best and brightest students, regardless of socioeconomic circumstances. Currently, a lack of need-based financial assistance and exorbitantly high fees deters lower-income international students from studying in Ontario. The provincial government should provide both merit- and need-based assistance to international undergraduate students, and a portion of international student fees should be set-aside and dedicated to fund institutional need-based bursary programs.

### INTERNATIONAL STUDENT HEALTH COVERAGE

International students should have access to affordable health care that is comparable in coverage to that available to all Ontario residents. The current University Health Insurance Plan (UHIP) does not meet this standard. Like many other provinces and countries, the Ontario government should include international students in the publicly funded Ontario Health Insurance Plan (OHIP). Until this can be achieved, international students should at a minimum be allowed to enrol in OHIP in exchange for paying reduced premiums to the government.

### EMPLOYMENT FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

To attract international students and retain them post-graduation, these students must have access to meaningful part-time work experience while studying in Ontario and assistance in obtaining permanent residency status and full-time employment after graduation. The provincial government should take steps to reduce barriers to employment for international students, educate employers about hiring international students, and make substantial improvements to Opportunities Ontario.

### INTERNATIONAL STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

International students face pressures associated with living and learning far from home, often in a new culture. Institutions must strengthen student support programs to ensure that all international students can be successful in Ontario's post-secondary institutions. The provincial government must recognize and embrace its role in ensuring the availability and quality of these services.

### BRANCH AND AFFILIATE CAMPUSES

The Ontario government should help establish a comprehensive quality assurance strategy for international branch campuses to ensure students attending these campuses receive the same quality of instruction and student supports as those studying at domestic campuses. In addition, the government should regulate affiliated international colleges to ensure that fair recruitment practices and a consistent set of entrance standards are applied to all students.

## SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

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### TUITION FEES

International student tuition should be regulated within the Ontario tuition framework to ensure fairness for students, such that international tuition is equal to the government and tuition revenue generated for a comparable domestic student plus additional reasonable costs associated with educating an international student.

The provincial government should regulate increases in international student tuition such that increases beyond the first year would be capped at a predictable rate not to exceed the rate of comparable domestic tuition increases.

### FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

The provincial government should implement a program that provides need-based assistance to international students, including undergraduates, to truly support international students in coming to Ontario.

The provincial government should mandate that institutions adopt a set-aside of international tuition to provide funding for need-based financial aid for international students.

### HEALTH COVERAGE

To further attract top talent and restore the fair treatment of international students, the provincial government should allow international students to enrol in the Ontario Health Insurance Plan.

In the short-term, the provincial government should allow international students to pay insurance premiums directly to OHIP in return for the same coverage given to domestic students.

### EMPLOYMENT

The provincial government should take a more active role in ensuring employers have accurate information regarding the hiring of international students.

The provincial government should extend eligibility for Opportunities Ontario to undergraduate students without pre-existing job offers.

The provincial government should eliminate the application fee for Opportunities Ontario.

The provincial government should increase efforts to raise awareness of Opportunities Ontario.

The provincial government should work with the federal government to expand the number of eligible candidates in the Opportunities Ontario program.

### STUDENT SUPPORTS

The provincial government should create a task force on international student services to identify and promote best-practices.

The provincial government should ensure, through incentive or mandate, that international student offices provide a robust suite of quality international student support services.

### BRANCH AND AFFILIATE CAMPUSES

The Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities should promote the creation of an international branch campus quality assurance strategy through the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada.

The provincial government should work to ensure that universities do not partner with private, for-profit international colleges that allow international students to bypass academic standards.



OUSA supports the government's plan to increase international student enrolment.



## INTRODUCTION

In the last Speech from the Throne, the Ontario government announced a plan to increase international enrolment in post-secondary institutions by 50 per cent over five years.<sup>1</sup> Last year, Ontario universities enrolled nearly 25,000 full-time international students, as outlined in Table 1.<sup>2</sup> When the government's international enrolment target is met, this number will increase to over 36,000. With the expectation of enough international students to fill a large university, there is a pressing need to address the significant issues associated with this increased internationalization.

International students enrich the learning environment at Ontario universities by adding to the diversity of perspectives and experiences in the classroom and enhancing the broader cultural diversity on campus. In a recent survey by the Higher Education Strategy Associates, 71 per cent of Canadian undergraduate students agreed that international students enhance their educational experience. As such, OUSA supports the government's plan to increase international student enrolment, but stresses that more must be done to ensure these students are receiving a high quality education with adequate supports at a fair cost.

**Table 1: Full-Time International Students at Ontario Universities in Fall 2009<sup>3</sup>**

University	International Undergraduate Students	% International of All Undergraduates	International Masters Students	International Doctoral Students	Total International Students
Brock	566	4.2%	323	15	904
Carleton	1,566	9.1%	307	107	1,980
Guelph	304	1.8%	106	136	546
Lakehead	80	1.3%	41	8	129
Laurentian	241	4.0%	39	13	293
Laurier	166	1.3%	30	15	211
McMaster	994	4.9%	269	227	1,490
Nipissing	20	0.5%	0	0	20
OCAD	141	5.0%	28	0	169
UOIT	232	4.0%	48	7	287
Ottawa	825	3.2%	309	180	1,314
Queen's	449	3.1%	332	235	1,016
Ryerson	516	2.9%	127	50	693
Toronto	5,375	10.5%	668	916	6,959
Trent	414	6.9%	28	16	458
Waterloo	1,843	7.6%	443	516	2,802
Western	626	3.0%	411	423	1,460
Windsor	846	7.5%	321	93	1,260
York	2,108	5.4%	242	151	2,501
<b>ONTARIO</b>	<b>17,312</b>	<b>5.39%</b>	<b>4,072</b>	<b>3,108</b>	<b>24,492</b>

The provincial government derives \$102 million annually in direct revenue from all 66,000 international students studying in Ontario, and these students collectively spend over \$2.1 billion dollars in Ontario.<sup>4</sup> The contribution of international students to Ontario's economy will continue to grow if Ontario meets its goal of increasing international student enrolment by 50 per cent. In recognition of the important role that international students play in post-secondary institutions, the Ontario government provided \$3.5 million to universities in 2009-10 for international marketing.<sup>5</sup> Even with this support, there is concern that other provinces and countries are outpacing Ontario with regard to attracting international students.



Ontario's decision to increase international enrolment corresponds with a growing international market for these students. By 2025, global demand for international education is predicted to grow from 1.9 million to 7.2 million students.<sup>6</sup> The most popular study abroad locations in the world are currently the United States, United Kingdom, France, Germany and Australia. However, as demand for international education has increased, competition between countries for these students has risen as well. Both Australia and the United States have recently seen a reduction in the growth of international students attending their institutions, in part as a result of increased competition from other countries.

To increase Canada's competitiveness as a whole, the Council of the Federation announced at its August 2010 meeting that the Premiers will direct their Ministers of Education to work with provincial and territorial Ministers of Immigration to further develop an international education marketing action plan by March 2011 which identifies areas for investment and opportunities for federal-provincial collaboration on marketing.<sup>7</sup> In order to create a post-secondary education system that is competitive in attracting students from around the world, it is essential that the provincial government establish an action plan to provide international learners with a high-quality education and adequate supports at a fair and predictable cost.

There are six major areas of concern that require greater attention from the Ontario government if the province wishes to be successful in attracting and retaining international students. These concerns are addressed in detail in this paper and are grouped under the following categories: tuition fees, financial assistance, health coverage, employment, student support, and branch and affiliate campuses.

Attracting the best and brightest from around the world to study in Ontario should be a focus of government. A greater number of international students will improve the learning environment, make Ontario a hub of world-class education and contribute to the growing prestige of Ontario's post-secondary institutions. Increased internationalization can also provide economic benefits in the form of both students who purchase domestic products and services, and future prosperity through an influx of skilled labour. To remain competitive, however, Ontario must distinguish itself from the growing number of players in the internationalization sphere, not only by providing a high-quality educational experience, but also by building a reputation as the most supportive environment for international students in the world.



It is essential that the provincial government establish an action plan to provide international learners with a high-quality education and adequate supports at a fair and predictable cost.





It is unfair to expect undergraduate international students to contribute more to their institutions than the revenue derived from their domestic peers.



## TUITION FEES

One of the greatest areas of concern for international undergraduate students is the cost of tuition. In Ontario, these fees are not only exorbitant but are also deregulated and increasing quickly. On average, Ontario international undergraduate students in first-year arts and science paid \$18,189 in tuition fees in 2010-11, 3.5 times more than their domestic peers. These tuition fees are summarized in Table 2.

Over the past four years, undergraduate international tuition has increased at a rate considerably higher than domestic tuition.<sup>8</sup> Considering that international tuition fees are already much higher than domestic tuition fees, it is alarming that the financial contribution of international students is also growing at a faster rate each year.

**Table 2: First Year Undergraduate Arts and Science International Student Tuition at Ontario Universities<sup>9</sup>**

University	2010-11 Domestic Tuition	2010-11 International Tuition	Percent Intl. vs. Domestic	2009-10 International Tuition	2008-09 International Tuition	2007-08 International Tuition	2006-07 International Tuition
Brock	\$5,189	\$13,781	266%	\$13,337	\$12,702	\$12,214	\$11,522
Carleton	\$5,174	\$15,270	295%	\$14,406	\$13,786	\$12,765	\$12,042
Guelph	\$5,212	\$16,922	325%	\$16,149	\$15,496	\$14,828	\$13,730
Lakehead	\$5,100	\$13,600	267%	\$13,000	\$12,500	\$12,000	\$10,000
Laurentian	\$5,114	\$13,700	268%	\$11,913	\$11,913	\$11,015	\$10,591
Laurier	\$5,213	\$14,951	287%	\$14,650	\$14,100	\$13,550	\$13,050
McMaster	\$5,150	\$15,422	299%	\$14,549	\$13,725	\$12,948	\$12,948
Nipissing	\$4,930	\$12,500	254%	\$11,500	\$11,000	\$10,500	\$10,000
OCAD	\$5,180	\$15,280	295%	\$14,760	\$14,067	\$13,500	\$13,000
UOIT	\$5,214	\$14,040	269%	\$13,371	\$12,734	\$12,128	\$11,550
Ottawa	\$5,188	\$15,815	305%	\$15,134	\$15,134	\$13,858	\$13,262
Queen's	\$5,230	\$18,730	358%	\$17,030	\$15,765	\$15,086	\$14,790
Ryerson	\$5,207	\$15,390	296%	\$15,390	\$14,250	\$13,507	\$12,925
Toronto	\$5,216	\$23,478	450%	\$21,334	\$19,404	\$17,640	\$16,800
Trent	\$5,214	\$14,497	278%	\$13,684	\$13,030	\$12,407	\$11,930
Waterloo	\$5,230	\$18,110	346%	\$17,582	\$17,070	\$16,414	\$16,092
Western	\$5,159	\$15,530	301%	\$14,240	\$13,561	\$12,916	\$13,040
Windsor	\$5,090	\$14,850	292%	\$13,750	\$12,730	\$11,790	\$10,920
York	\$5,214	\$15,614	299%	\$14,989	\$14,774	\$14,568	\$12,370
<b>ONTARIO AVERAGE</b>	<b>\$5,190</b>	<b>\$18,189</b>	<b>350%</b>	<b>\$16,994</b>	<b>\$15,999</b>	<b>\$14,973</b>	<b>\$14,168</b>

## FAIRNESS

One reason tuition fees for international students are higher than those for domestic students is that universities do not receive government operating funding for these students and thus recoup costs exclusively through tuition and ancillary fees. While domestic undergraduate students have approximately half of their post-secondary education funded by the provincial and federal governments,<sup>10</sup> the Ontario government declared all “non-exempt” international students ineligible for funding in 1996.<sup>11</sup> This does not explain the size of the gap, however, as universities receive more revenue per undergraduate international student than they do from the combination of a domestic student’s tuition fees and accompanying government revenue.<sup>12</sup> OUSA does not believe the government should subsidize the cost of education for international students, as they and their families have typically not contributed to the tax system; however, it is unfair to expect undergraduate

i. A small number of international students are exempt from the policy and are considered eligible for subsidy due to sponsorship agreements with different agencies and countries.



international students to contribute more to their institutions than the revenue derived from their domestic peers. We know that fees paid by domestic undergraduate students already subsidize the cost of providing graduate education, and, while this fact presents problems itself, it is unfair to ask international undergraduates to subsidize other activities to an even greater degree.

A closer look at university revenue streams indicates that international students are being asked to pay more than their fair share of educational costs. The Task Force on Competitiveness, Productivity and Economic Progress estimates international undergraduate students pay between \$4,000 and \$5,000 more than what institutions receive from domestic students through tuition and government operating grants. A more detailed analysis, outlined in Exhibit 1, shows a similar result, with international undergraduate students paying at least \$4,500 in excess of the revenue available to universities for domestic students.

This discrepancy in revenue between domestic and international undergraduate students raises serious concerns that international students are being used to compensate for funding gaps in other areas. It also calls into question whether the intent of the internationalization agenda is to attract the best and the brightest students, or simply those who can afford to study in Ontario, especially given how many international students report coming from a high-income background (see Financial Assistance). Students are adamant that international tuition must not be used as a revenue stream to support institutions in the absence of sufficient government funding. Attention should be paid to the level of international tuition as compared to domestic revenue per student to ensure that international students are not exploited to further subsidize university costs not met by domestic tuition and government revenue.

Students also wish to emphasize the dangers that can result from institutions relying too heavily on international students as a revenue generator. The United States has seen declines in the international enrolment growth rate for the past several years. From 2006-07, to 2008-09, the growth in international enrolment declined from 4.3 to 3.0 per cent, posing a problem for institutions that planned on a sustained level of growth. Australia also had many universities build budget models on international student revenue growth.<sup>13</sup> When the 2009 recession and immigration changes caused enrolment to drop, many institutions faced severe reductions in revenue and were forced to make significant budget cuts.<sup>14</sup> Exorbitant international tuition rates should not compensate for underfunding of Ontario's post-secondary institutions. Relying on international tuition for base funding creates an unsustainable funding model that could negatively affect Ontario's institutions over the long term.

While studying at one of our institutions, Ontario acts as a temporary home for students from other countries. Ontario's future in international education relies on reputation, which is undoubtedly shaped by the student experience of those currently in the system. As hosts, it is the responsibility of all Ontarians to ensure that visiting students are treated fairly, and it is the responsibility of our institutions and governments to lead by example. The status quo of deregulated tuition clearly provides room for institutions to take advantage of international students. The provincial government should ensure that international students do not leave Ontario feeling taken advantage of by unfair fees.

**RECOMMENDATION:** International student tuition should be regulated within the Ontario tuition framework to ensure fairness for students, such that international tuition is equal to the government and tuition revenue generated for a comparable domestic student plus additional reasonable costs associated with educating an international student.

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At least one-quarter of international undergraduate tuition fees appear to be unaccounted for in a direct comparison of revenue derived from their domestic peers.



## EXHIBIT 1: ARE INTERNATIONAL TUITION FEES FAIR?

International undergraduate tuition fees in Ontario are more than triple the average fees that Canadian students are charged. A common question that then arises is ‘are these fees fair?’ or, more specifically, are international undergraduate tuition fees higher than the total cost of educating these students?

Unfortunately, a straightforward answer to the question is elusive. The cost of educating a single undergraduate student, international or domestic, is not easily determined, since universities expenses do not easily break down on a per-unit basis. For example, how much of a university’s library expenses, hydro bill or professors’ salaries are for undergraduates alone?

So rather than focus on costs, we turn our attention to revenue. By comparing international tuition fees to revenue derived from each domestic student through tuition and government grants, one can get an approximation for the fairness of international fees. Many point out, however, that this simplistic comparison ignores several important complexities. First, universities receive other government revenue for domestic students outside of basic operating grants, including significant funds for capital, which is not available for additional international students. Second, a portion of government and domestic tuition revenue is tied to specific initiatives that do not support general operating expenses, which is not true of international tuition revenue. Third, recruiting international students and providing international student support services are additional costs to universities above and beyond the cost of educating domestic students. Fourth, tuition and government revenue varies considerably by program and averages of all students do not tell the whole story.

In light of this, OUSA conducted a comprehensive revenue comparison of undergraduate domestic and international students in three different programs that takes much of this complexity into account (outlined in the following table). The comparison is for 2009-10, the most recent year for which detailed financial information is available, and accounts for all relevant student and government revenue sources, while taking into consideration the additional specific costs of both domestic and international students.

One additional justification proffered for higher international fees is that international students receive support from institutions in the form of scholarships, grants or teaching assistantships that consume a significant portion of international tuition revenue. After consultation with Student Awards and Financial Aid offices at several Ontario universities, it was verified that, while this claim is true for many graduate international students, international undergraduates on average receive significantly less than domestic students in financial support from university operating budgets. Therefore, in the absence of Ontario-wide data, student support provided from university operating budgets was excluded from this comparison, though we are confident that its inclusion would likely only increase the profit gap between domestic and international undergraduate students.

As seen in the comparison, at least one-quarter of international undergraduate tuition fees appear to be unaccounted for in a direct comparison of revenue derived from their domestic peers, resulting in average revenue differences exceeding \$5,000. Furthermore, it has been estimated by Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada that each international student in Ontario generates \$1,560 in government income and sales tax revenue, so it could be argued that at least a portion of this revenue should be spent on reducing the cost of the international student’s education. Even more concerning, it is thought that a majority of international students become permanent residents after graduation and therefore contribute even more to the tax base throughout their working lives.

OUSA recognizes there are some limitations to this comparison. The cost of recruiting international students in various global regions is perhaps underestimated given these costs are not transparent in university budgets. Furthermore, the differences in financial aid available to domestic and international students would likely widen the gap in revenues. Finally, there is significant variation by institution in tuition levels and government revenue that averages do not fully capture. We urge those with more detailed data, namely the government and universities themselves, to contribute to this important public dialogue.

As it stands now, even with many of the complexities of international tuition taken into account, universities appear to be deriving significant revenue from international undergraduate students. To put it more simply, the question ‘are international undergraduate tuition fees fair?’ can be answered now with a definitive no.

	Domestic Arts and Science Student	International Arts and Science Student	Domestic Engineering Student	International Engineering Student	Domestic Business Student	International Business Student
<b>REVENUE</b>						
1. Tuition	\$4,968	\$16,907	\$7,504	\$20,575	\$7,717	\$19,471
2. Compulsory Ancillary Fees	\$757	\$757	\$757	\$757	\$757	\$757
3. Basic Operating Grant	\$5,300	\$0	\$7,067	\$0	\$5,300	\$0
4. Other Government Revenue	\$747	\$0	\$747	\$0	\$747	\$0
5. Government Capital Funding	\$216	\$0	\$216	\$0	\$216	\$0
<b>GROSS REVENUE</b>	<b>\$11,988</b>	<b>\$17,664</b>	<b>\$16,291</b>	<b>\$21,332</b>	<b>\$14,737</b>	<b>\$20,228</b>
<b>SPECIFIC EXPENSES</b>						
6. Student Access Guarantee	\$305	\$0	\$305	\$0	\$305	\$0
7. International Marketing	\$0	\$141	\$0	\$141	\$0	\$141
8. International Support Centres	\$0	\$520	\$0	\$520	\$0	\$520
<b>SPECIFIC EXPENSES</b>	<b>\$305</b>	<b>\$661</b>	<b>\$305</b>	<b>\$661</b>	<b>\$305</b>	<b>\$661</b>
<b>NET OPERATING REVENUE</b>	<b>\$11,684</b>	<b>\$17,003</b>	<b>\$15,986</b>	<b>\$20,671</b>	<b>\$14,433</b>	<b>\$19,567</b>
<b>PROFIT PER INTERNATIONAL STUDENT</b>	<b>\$5,319</b>		<b>\$4,684</b>		<b>\$5,134</b>	

1. Average tuition from the COU's *Common University Data Ontario*, weighted using Fall 2009 full-time headcounts.
2. Weighted average compulsory fees for undergraduates from Statistics Canada's 2009-10 survey of Tuition and Living Accommodation Costs for Full-time Students at Canadian Degree-granting Institutions (TLAC).
3. The value for a single Basic Income Unit (BIU) was calculated as \$3,534 by dividing the total Basic Operating Grants in the *Final University Operating Transfer Payment Totals (FTOT) 2009-10 Summary* by the 2009-10 total Basic Income Units. Domestic arts and science students were then estimated as a weight of 1.5 BIUs, since first-year students are worth 1.0, upper-year arts students are worth 1.5, and upper-year science students are worth 2.0. Engineering students receive a weight of 2.0 and business students are worth 1.5.
4. The sum of other government operating revenue for undergraduate students in the 2009-10 FTOT divided by the 2009-10 total eligible FTEs. This includes all mission-related grants, Key Performance Indicator performance funding, the research overhead infrastructure envelope, accessibility funding for students with disabilities, special purpose operating grants for campus safety and municipal taxes, and funds tied to Multi-Year Accountability Agreements. Some government funding was excluded for initiatives that should not reasonably be contributed to by international undergraduate students, including funds for Ontario Graduate Scholarships, accessibility and bursary funding for Aboriginals, first generation students, Crown Wards and Francophone students, and expenses for nursing and medicine.
5. Average annual capital funding for Ontario universities from 2004-05 to 2009-10 divided by 2009-10 eligible FTEs.
6. A portion of domestic tuition increases are not available for operating expenses, but are spent on student aid to meet the Student Access Guarantee (SAG) through the province's tuition set-aside policy. A total of \$115.3 million was distributed to university students in 2009-10, which divided by the 2009-10 total eligible FTEs results in \$305 per student. International students are ineligible for this aid.
7. The government provided \$3.5 million to universities in 2009-10 through the International Strategy Special Grant for costs of marketing and recruitment of international students, which is equivalent to \$141 for every full-time international student.
8. Based upon an analysis of 2009-10 Ontario university operating budgets, the average university spent \$520 on each full-time international student to operate the campus international student support centre.

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To put it more simply, the question ‘are international undergraduate tuition fees fair?’ can be answered now with a definitive no.”



Students envision a system where government at least regulates the rate of tuition increases beyond the first year, thus ensuring predictability for future years.



## PREDICTABILITY

As noted above, international tuition fees are unregulated and, as such, are completely unpredictable. Over the past four years, international tuition fees for arts and science students have increased at an average rate of 6.4 per cent, which is considerably higher than the 4.5 per cent cap that has been in place on domestic increases in these tuition fees.<sup>15</sup> Universities across Ontario increase international tuition every year and are not required to provide any justification for doing so. Increases in tuition are often based not on increases in costs, but on the institution's ability to meet their international enrolment targets in the global market.

It is not uncommon at Ontario universities for double-digit tuition increases to be sandwiched by increases below domestic inflation, making it impossible for international students to accurately budget in advance how much money they will require to finance their education. At York University there was a 17.8 per cent increase in 2006-07, followed by a 1.1 per cent increase the following year. At Lakehead University, there was a 20 per cent increase in 2006-07, followed by a 4.2 per cent increase.<sup>16</sup> These are just some examples of dramatic and unpredictable fee increases that international students cope with from year-to-year. In addition, since increases in educational costs for institutions should be relatively consistent from year to year, unpredictable fee increases raise the concern that the money is being used to fund other expenditures. The absence of any regulation surrounding international tuition makes it difficult to ensure that international students are being levied fairly and predictably

**Table 3: Average Growth in First-Year Undergraduate Arts and Science Tuition at Ontario Universities<sup>17</sup>**

Period	Domestic Students	International Students
2009 to 2010	4.46%	7.04%
2008 to 2009	4.03%	6.22%
2007 to 2008	4.34%	6.85%
2006 to 2007	5.06%	5.68%
2006 to 2010	19.12%	28.38%

International students deserve to know the total cost of their current and future tuition fees from the moment they first enrol. Universities have the ability to provide this predictability, and while some have attempted to move in this direction, many have not. Thus, it falls to government to ensure, through regulation, the predictability that international students need and deserve.

Students envision a system where government at least regulates the rate of tuition increases beyond the first year, thus ensuring predictability for future years. The capacity for institutions to plan and track individual students over the long-term under a regulated system is already in place, as demonstrated under the current tuition framework for domestic students. This is vital to providing international students with the ability to plan for future tuition increases. Moreover, it should cost nothing to implement.

**RECOMMENDATION:** The provincial government should regulate increases in international student tuition such that increases beyond the first year would be capped at a predictable rate not to exceed the rate of comparable domestic tuition increases.

## FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

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It is widely acknowledged that attracting the best and brightest students from around the world to our colleges and universities is an important investment in Ontario's future. Bright international students contribute to the overall quality of Ontario's post-secondary institutions by introducing new perspectives in the classroom and enhancing the diversity of the learning environment. Moreover, many international students remain in Canada after completing their education, and represent a skilled labour pool vital to success in the knowledge economy. This is particularly important at a time when Canada is facing several pressing labour shortages.<sup>18</sup>

Currently, however, the significant fees charged to international undergraduate students work can deter highly qualified students from studying in Ontario. Indeed, the vast majority of international students come from upper-middle and high-income backgrounds, indicating that studying in Canada is not an option for most international students from low-income backgrounds. The results of the International Student Survey from the Canadian Bureau for International Education show that over the past decade, the number of international students from low-income families has declined. In 2009, only 8 per cent of international students describe their family's wealth as below average, down from 12 per cent in 1988 and 10 per cent in 1999 and 2004.<sup>19</sup> This suggests that studying in Canada is not an option for many international students from low-income backgrounds and the system may be becoming less accessible. These figures call into question whether Ontario is attracting the best and brightest or simply the wealthiest students.

The Ontario government recently recognized that attracting top talent requires addressing the issue of cost when it announced the creation of the Ontario Trillium Scholarships for PhD students to "help Ontario universities compete with top international universities" and to "keep Ontario at the forefront of the global knowledge economy and strengthen academic, cultural and business ties with key markets around the world."<sup>20</sup> While merit-based scholarships are part of competing for top international talent, students stress that a robust need-based assistance system must also be in place to attract and support all qualified students, not just the top 75 doctoral students.

Unfortunately, there is currently limited need-based financial assistance available to international students, especially at the undergraduate level. The same 2009 International Student Survey found that only 4 per cent of international students had received financial assistance from governments in Canada.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, the availability of financial assistance was not widely cited as a reason for studying in Canada, indicating that there is substantial room for improvement in this area.<sup>22</sup> While at least 12 of 20 universities in Ontario offer emergency loans and bursaries to international students facing exceptional circumstances (see Student Support), only 9 of 20 provide any form of up-front, need-based assistance, and usually only to a maximum of one or two thousand dollars, as outlined in Table 4. With undergraduate international tuition fees topping \$15,000 at a majority of universities and cost of living adding thousands in additional expenses, this level of need-based assistance is largely insignificant, and likely deters highly qualified middle- and low-income students from pursuing post-secondary studies in Ontario.

If we are truly serious about attracting top talent to Ontario, then more must be done to assure that financial circumstances do not prevent bright, qualified international students from studying in Ontario. Efforts should be made to attract all qualified, high-calibre students, regardless of socioeconomic background. To accomplish this in a systemic manner, the provincial government must show leadership by establishing a program to provide need-based assistance to international students, including those at the undergraduate level. Public funding for such a program should be viewed as an investment in the future, as attracting the best and brightest to Ontario will generate significant returns. The presence of need-based aid would also differentiate Ontario from most global study destinations, where such assistance is limited.

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Over the past decade, the number of international students from low-income families has declined.

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OUSA recommends the creation of a tuition set-aside for international students.



**Table 4: Merit-Based and Need-Based Financial Assistance for Undergraduate International Students<sup>23</sup>**

University	Merit-Based Scholarships Available	Need-Based Bursaries Available*
Algoma	Yes	No
Brock	Yes	No
Carleton	Yes	Yes (max \$1,000)
Guelph	Yes	Yes (max \$2,000)
Lakehead	Yes	Yes
Laurentian	Yes	No
Laurier	Yes	Yes (average: \$171)
McMaster	Yes	Yes
Nipissing	Yes	Yes (max \$1,000)
OCAD	Yes	No
UOIT	Yes	No
Ottawa	Yes	No
Queen's	Yes	Yes
Ryerson	Yes	No
Toronto	Yes	Yes (max \$1,000)
Trent	Yes	No
Waterloo	Yes	No
Western	Yes	Yes (max \$2,000)
Windsor	Yes	No
York	Yes	No
<b>ONTARIO</b>	<b>20 of 20</b>	<b>9 of 20</b>

\*does not include emergency bursaries, work-study, or endowed merit awards with a need-based component

In addition to the need for the government to provide increased merit- and need-based funding for international undergraduate students, OUSA recommends the creation of a tuition set-aside for international students. Currently, 10 per cent of domestic student tuition fee increases are mandated by the government to be spent on financial assistance for students with need. The same practice should be applied to international student fees to improve international student access to Ontario's post-secondary education system and to attract students from all socioeconomic backgrounds. The advantage of using a tuition set-aside to fund these programs is that it reduces the need for government funding. Rather, bursary programs would be self-funded through the tuition of all international students, enabling those who can least afford to pay to access financial assistance. This would, of course, have an impact on the revenue available to institutions through international tuition fees, and, if implemented, should be taken into account when calculating a fair cost of tuition for international students (see Tuition Fees).

**RECOMMENDATION:** The provincial government should implement a program that provides need-based assistance to international students, including undergraduates, to truly support high-achieving international students in coming to Ontario.

**RECOMMENDATION:** The provincial government should mandate that institutions adopt a set-aside of international tuition to provide funding for need-based financial aid for international students.



## HEALTH COVERAGE

In 1994, the Ontario Health Insurance Plan (OHIP) eligibility requirements were changed to deny coverage to international students. The Council of Ontario Universities (COU) then formed the University Health Insurance Plan (UHIP), a private plan provided through Sun Life Financial, to act as a substitute for OHIP for international students, faculty and their dependants.<sup>ii</sup> Unfortunately, the cost to the student for coverage under UHIP is considerable, as demonstrated in Table 5. Universities collect insurance premiums from international students in the same way they collect any number of other mandatory ancillary fees. These premiums are then pooled centrally and used to purchase group insurance through Sun Life Financial. College students are covered under a similar plan administered by Colleges Ontario.

**Table 5: Cost of UHIP Coverage for Various Groups, 2010-11**

Type of Student	Cost of UHIP Coverage
Single student	\$720
Students with one dependant	\$2,016
Students with two or more dependants	\$3,312

One common concern of international students is the lack of predictability in UHIP premiums. For example, in 2005-2006 there was a rate reduction of 1 per cent, followed by a 30 per cent increase the next year. Moreover, growth rates in UHIP premiums are substantially higher for students with dependants. In the same year that single students saw a 30 per cent increase, an international student with one dependant faced a 58 per cent jump in insurance premiums. Students with two or more dependents experienced the largest increase in rates, with the cost of UHIP increasing by 69 per cent in 2005-2006. It is important to note that since this period of fluctuation, fees have been substantially more stable, though the threat of unpredictable increases remains. Excessive variability in UHIP rates can make it impossible for international students to budget accurately from year-to-year and also could deter middle- and low-income students from studying in Ontario. Moreover, the unpredictability of UHIP premiums puts Ontario at a competitive disadvantage in attracting international students when compared to the more stable public health care systems offered by other provinces and countries.

Breadth of coverage is also problematic. Though UHIP covers the same basic health services as OHIP, any doctor in Ontario is allowed to charge international students well above what UHIP will reimburse. UHIP will cover up to 125 per cent of the OHIP rate for service, but doctors may charge up to 250 per cent of this same rate, forcing international students to pay out-of-pocket.<sup>24</sup> Similarly, UHIP will only cover all hospital expenses if the international student visits a hospital that has agreed to be part of Sun Life Financial's preferred hospital network. At hospitals that have no agreement with Sun Life, the hospital can again charge up to 250 per cent of the OHIP rate, with a few exceptions.<sup>iii</sup> The UHIP website states, "if you choose to be treated at or are admitted to a hospital that is not on this list [of preferred hospitals], it is possible that you will have to pay expenses in addition to what UHIP pays."<sup>25</sup> Restricting the pool of hospitals at which UHIP recipients can receive treatment unfairly compromises the breadth of health care coverage for international students.

These and other drawbacks of the UHIP program act as a disincentive for international students seeking education in Ontario, especially when other jurisdictions both within and beyond Canada provide more affordable and universal health coverage. In Saskatchewan, international students

ii. The University of Windsor is unique among Ontario universities in that it offers its international students its own private health insurance plan with Green Shield separate from UHIP.

iii. Most notably, the UHIP plan will cover 100 per cent for the first 4 days of care at a non-preferred hospital if the member has an emergency admission.

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coverage.”



If international students were covered under OHIP, doctors would be prevented from charging above the OHIP rates for services.



are automatically covered under the provincial health plan free of charge. In other provinces, such as Alberta, British Columbia, Nova Scotia, and Newfoundland and Labrador, international students are covered under the provincial health plan after a six- or twelve-month waiting period. On a global scale, three of the top four international host countries – the United Kingdom, France, and Germany – offer public health care to international students. The majority of these jurisdictions have more international university students per capita than Ontario.<sup>26</sup>

Students strongly believe that international students, who contribute to income, sales and property taxes while in Ontario, deserve full coverage under OHIP. However, given Ontario's current fiscal situation, students understand that the government may not immediately prioritize the estimated \$50 million required to extend OHIP coverage to international students. To overcome the drawbacks of the UHIP program but avoid additional cost to government, students propose that international students be given access to OHIP but continue to pay health premiums directly to the government.

Currently, international students pay health premiums to a private insurance provider in exchange for coverage. If instead of paying a private company, these funds were collected by the student's institution and passed on to government, it would counterbalance the cost to government of covering these students under OHIP. While students would still be paying for health insurance, this arrangement would eliminate some of students' main concerns around the unpredictability of UHIP premiums and the exorbitant fees that are charged by some doctors and hospitals for even the most basic care. If international students were covered under OHIP, doctors would be prevented from charging above the OHIP rates for services.

The UHIP Steering Committee and the Council of Ontario Universities have expressed support for this proposal and have assured OUSA that universities would be willing to continue to collect a health premium through the tuition and fee payment process and simply transfer the funds to government.

An important question in this process is how high the OHIP premiums would need to be to cover the cost to government. Students expect that, because of the size of OHIP and the agreements reached with the Ontario Medical Association for cost of service, premiums would not need to increase and could in fact be lower. That said, both OUSA and the UHIP Steering Committee have stressed that they would not support this change if premiums were to increase above the current UHIP rates.

**RECOMMENDATION:** To further attract top talent and restore the fair treatment of international students, the provincial government should allow international students to enrol in the Ontario Health Insurance Plan.

**RECOMMENDATION:** In the short-term, the provincial government should allow international students to pay insurance premiums directly to OHIP in return for the same coverage given to domestic students.

## EMPLOYMENT

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### IN-STUDY

Meaningful employment allows students to learn specific job skills required to enter into the Canadian workforce after they graduate. In addition, access to employment is important to international students both for experiential learning and to help finance their education and living expenses while residing in Ontario. International student employment also contributes to the overall economy of Ontario and provides the provincial government with additional tax revenues. In recognition of the importance of providing international students with a level playing field in the competition for jobs, the government recently relaxed restrictions that previously made it difficult for international students to work off campus. The 2009 Survey of International Students found that 26 per cent of international university students and 15 per cent of international college students reported working while attending a Canadian post-secondary institution.<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless, barriers remain and the international student employment rate lags far behind the 45 per cent part-time employment rate of their domestic peers.<sup>28,29</sup>

Indeed, international students experience many barriers to employment, both on- and off-campus. International students who receive a scholarship or sponsorship from the Canadian government, a non-governmental organization, or another source are still ineligible to work off-campus.<sup>30</sup> This is despite the fact that some of this financial support is need-based, so these students may have the greatest impetus for seeking paid employment during their studies. In addition, students participating in exchange programs and visiting students cannot work off-campus while holding only a study permit.<sup>31</sup> While virtually all international students can legally obtain on-campus employment, there are often limited on-campus jobs available, and the competition for these jobs is very strong.<sup>32</sup>

### POST-GRADUATION

A 2009 survey found that over 51 per cent of international students planned to apply for permanent resident status, and 71 per cent indicated that they would seek employment in Canada after graduation.<sup>33</sup> Despite government policy that recognizes how international students contribute to economic growth and help to address skilled labour shortfalls in certain fields, international students are faced with barriers to post-graduation employment that a typical domestic graduate does not face. These include delays in receiving work permits and widespread confusion among employers about the feasibility of hiring international students.<sup>34</sup> These employment barriers make it difficult for Ontario to compete with other jurisdictions where international students are treated more favourably in the job market.

While the majority of international students intend to seek employment during or after completing their studies, 80 per cent of international students are pessimistic about employment prospects, and 85 per cent report having some or great difficulty in finding a job.<sup>35</sup> One international student participating in a focus group expressed the pessimistic view of many international students when it comes to employment, stating, “I want to get a job which suits my credentials and career aims. I don’t want to be driving a taxi after getting a PhD or doing a clerical job, in which I can’t use my expertise or knowledge.”<sup>36</sup> In addition, even when international students do find work, some report being unable to capitalize on job offers because employers were unwilling to hold the position until their work permits arrived.<sup>37</sup>

Many employers do not know that they are allowed to hire international students and are unwilling to start until the government provides better information on the rules and regulations.<sup>38</sup> This confusion is due in part to contradictions in government policy concerning international students. Again, while official policy has stated the importance of retaining international students post-graduation as skilled-labourers who can contribute to Canada’s economic and social welfare, Citizenship and Immigration Canada’s website for employers still emphasizes that students with study permits must

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These employment barriers make it difficult for Ontario to compete with other jurisdictions where international students are treated more favourably in the job market.

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Ontario is the only province that charges a fee of any kind to international students for applying to the Provincial Nominee Program.



leave once they conclude their studies.<sup>39</sup> This stands in stark contrast to the United Kingdom where supplying employers with clear information on hiring international students has been a priority through the Prime Minister’s Initiative for International Education. In addition, when compared with a number of other countries that have high volumes of international students, Canada has the longest visa processing times, which can frustrate employers who must wait for a work permit before the student can begin post-graduation work.<sup>40</sup>

Some of the concerns about post-graduation work raised by international students during a focus group were: confusing and inconsistent government policies; communication silos; lack of up-to-date information available to employers; the perceived need at some companies to hire a lawyer to protect the company from risk associated with hiring an international graduate; the inability of a job candidate to start work when a job offer is made; the possible delay of months before a work permit is issued; and inconsistent information or misinformation circulating about the rules and regulations for hiring an international graduate.<sup>41</sup>

The recent changes to the Post-Graduation Work Permit Program were a positive development for international students in enabling them students to stay in the country after graduation and find work. Retaining Canadian-educated international students should remain a priority of government. To enable international students to obtain meaningful work experience in Ontario, both during and following their studies, steps must be taken to make policy guidelines clearer. While many aspects of immigration policy fall under federal jurisdiction, steps can be taken by the Ontario government to clarify and enhance some processes as well.

**RECOMMENDATION:** The provincial government should take a more active role in ensuring employers have accurate information regarding the hiring of international students.

#### OPPORTUNITIES ONTARIO

The Opportunities Ontario program is a provincial program available to international students and others that fast-tracks applications for permanent resident status through Citizenship and Immigration Canada’s Provincial Nominee Program. Through this program, the federal government annually grants a total of 30,000 such fast-track opportunities to the provincial and territorial governments. One thousand spots have been allocated to Ontario – less than 1% of the total immigrants to Ontario each year.<sup>42</sup>

While the Opportunities Ontario program is an important step in facilitating the settlement of international graduates, the program is inaccessible to many of these students. At \$1,500, the application fee for the program is far above any comparable immigration fee at the provincial or federal level. In fact, as summarized in Table 6, Ontario is the only province that charges a fee of any kind to international students for applying to the Provincial Nominee Program.

**Table 6: Cost of Applying as an International Student to the Provincial Nominee Program in Participating Provinces<sup>44</sup>**

Province	International Student Stream	Cost to Student
Alberta	Yes	\$0
British Columbia	No	–
Manitoba	Yes	\$0
Newfoundland	Yes	\$0
New Brunswick	No	–
Nova Scotia	Yes	\$0
<b>Ontario</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>\$1,500</b>
Prince Edward Island	No	–
Saskatchewan	Yes	\$0

Moreover, application to the program does not guarantee gaining permanent residence status, and in the event that you are one of the ten per cent of applicants who are rejected each year, there is no way to obtain a refund of any part of the application fee. Unlike other provinces, Ontario's program is run on a cost-recovery basis which, according to the Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration, ensures tax payer dollars are not used for this pursuit.<sup>43</sup>

Furthermore, and perhaps as a result of unreasonable fees, the Ontario government has yet to fill all its 1,000 Opportunities Ontario placements in any year since the program's inception in 2007, even though there are over 16,000 current international undergraduate students and nearly as many graduate students pursuing post-secondary education in Ontario, not to mention the other groups eligible for participation. To raise awareness of the program, representatives from the Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration conduct outreach trips to colleges and universities, but last year they only reached a third of these campuses. An increased emphasis on publicizing the program is clearly necessary to encourage more international students to take advantage of this opportunity to gain permanent residency in Ontario post-graduation.

The provincial government has recently made changes to eligibility requirements to attract a greater number of applicants. Graduate students no longer require an offer of employment to participate in Opportunities Ontario, making it easier for them to take advantage of the program. However, undergraduate students are still required to have an offer of employment. We know that over half all international students indicate that they intend to apply for permanent resident status upon completion of their studies.<sup>45</sup> Extending the eligibility for the Opportunities Ontario program to undergraduate students who do not hold job offers would increase participation in the program and would significantly improve their chances of gaining meaningful employment in Ontario. Finally, if Ontario is going to expand the number of international students by 50 per cent over the next five years, then the province should continue to work with federal government to expand the number of allocated spots for the Opportunities Ontario program in the new Canada-Ontario Immigration Agreement. Dr. Eric Hoskins, Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, recently noted that only 16 per cent of Ontario immigrants are selected on the basis of economic potential, while the value is 25 per cent in the rest of the country. Increasing the province's intake of international students through Opportunities Ontario would work towards rectifying this imbalance.

Ontario has a vested interest in attracting and retaining the best and brightest undergraduate students. The latest survey of employers from the Canadian Federation of Independent Business showed 34 per cent of corporations cite a "shortage of skilled labour" as their main business constraint, while an additional 13 per cent cite a "shortage of un/semi-skilled labour." The government has set a goal of increasing the post-secondary attainment rate of the province, and facilitating international students staying in the province would be a helpful step in this pursuit. These students are Canadian-educated, yet come at little to no cost to the government. By increasing the number of positions, reducing barriers of cost and pre-existing job offers, and increasing awareness, the Opportunities Ontario program has the potential to keep thousands of highly-educated, highly-desirable graduates in Ontario.

**RECOMMENDATION:** The provincial government should extend eligibility for Opportunities Ontario to undergraduate students without pre-existing job offers.

**RECOMMENDATION:** The provincial government should eliminate the application fee for Opportunities Ontario.

**RECOMMENDATION:** The provincial government should increase efforts to raise awareness of Opportunities Ontario.

**RECOMMENDATION:** The provincial government should work with the federal government to expand the number of eligible candidates in the Opportunities Ontario program.



The Opportunities Ontario program has the potential to keep thousands of highly-educated, highly-desirable graduates in Ontario.







Without adequate student supports, international students may find their education in Ontario less satisfactory than they had hoped, and this could reflect poorly on Ontario's post-secondary system.



## STUDENT SUPPORTS

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Like all students, international students require institutional support networks throughout their studies to ensure that they have the tools they need to succeed in Ontario's post-secondary education system and beyond. But because of their unique circumstances, international students often have specific needs beyond those of domestic students, and thus require specialized support services in order to excel.

Students coming from abroad are new to Canada and may require assistance adjusting to an unfamiliar place and culture, for instance through airport pickups and orientation programs. In addition, despite entrance requirements, some students lack proficiency in English or French and should have access to language training programs to ensure they feel comfortable in the campus community. International students also benefit from career programming that ensures they not only have the skills to compete for jobs, but are also well informed and aware of the specific hurdles they face. Finally, many international students require counselling and in-person support to navigate the often complex and unfamiliar regulations surrounding health insurance, banking, taxes, visa and immigration, work permits, on- and off-campus housing, and need- and merit-based financial aid. Without adequate student supports, international students may find their education in Ontario less satisfactory than they had hoped, and this could reflect poorly on Ontario's post-secondary system, impairing future recruitment efforts.

Furthermore, many international students find it more difficult to participate in outside the classroom learning, making it harder to develop networks and skills necessary for employment. One survey found that seven out of ten international students find it difficult to get involved in extra-curricular activities and volunteer experiences.<sup>46</sup> Student engagement has been demonstrated to be a key factor in academic persistence in university: students who report high levels of engagement are less likely to prematurely abandon their studies.<sup>47</sup> In addition, students who do not engage in extracurricular activities oftentimes do not develop the networks, skills and résumés to be competitive for jobs after graduation. More needs to be done through peer networking to help international students get involved outside of the classroom so that they are better prepared to enter into the Canadian job market and to help them develop their personal and professional skills.

In addition to conventional support services open to all students, Ontario universities offer international student resource centres that almost always act as the hub for the larger international student support network. When comparing across institutions, many of these resource centres have commonalities, though the quality and quantity of the programming varies widely. All Ontario universities offer some degree of orientation, UHIP administration, and visa and permit assistance. Most institutions offer counselling, but the nature and extent of the counselling services offered varies extensively between universities. Peer networking, assistance with housing issues and programming on acclimatization are also offered at many, but not all, institutions. Fewer institutions offer English as a Second Language programs, financial assistance, and links to employment opportunities.

Table 7 details the availability at each Ontario universities of five necessary categories of support services mentioned here. The table was compiled by an examination of university websites, which is the method most likely used by prospective international students. Again, it is important to stress that the existence of a program does not in and of itself ensure it is of sufficient quality.

The inconsistency of the support available to international students at some universities may mean that students at certain institutions are better supported than others. Moreover, it indicates that institutions may need to increase communication and the sharing of best practices between universities. Given the government's interest in attracting international students to Ontario, the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities should proactively address inconsistency in support services through the creation of an international student services task force to identify



and promote best-practices. Furthermore, the government is in a unique position to incentivize or mandate improvement in international support services, either through its Multi-Year Accountability Agreements with institutions or by restricting which institutions are eligible to use the government-controlled *Imagine Education au/in Canada* marketing brand.

**Table 7: Availability of International Support Services at Ontario Universities**

University	Personal Counselling	Peer Networking Opportunities	Language Skills Training	Employment Opportunities	Emergency Loans or Bursaries
Algoma	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Brock	✓	✓	✓		
Carleton	✓	✓	✓		✓
Guelph	✓	✓	✓		
Lakehead	✓	✓			
Laurentian	✓	✓	✓		
Laurier	✓	✓	✓		✓
McMaster	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Nipissing	✓	✓	✓	✓	
OCAD	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
UOIT	✓	✓	✓		
Ottawa	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Queen's	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Ryerson	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Toronto	✓	✓	✓		✓
Trent	✓	✓	✓		✓
Waterloo	✓	✓	✓		✓
Western	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Windsor	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
York	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<b>ONTARIO</b>	<b>20 of 20</b>	<b>20 of 20</b>	<b>19 of 20</b>	<b>11 of 20</b>	<b>12 of 20</b>

Specific support services are required to adequately attend to the needs of international students and further enhance their success at Ontario post-secondary institutions. Consequently, while allowing for institutional flexibility to deliver services in the manner that best suits the needs of their particular international student body, the same overall array of services should be available to all international students regardless of which institution they are studying at. Several countries have begun tracking international student satisfaction, such as the UK International Student Barometer. In a 2010 review of UK universities, an international education consultant noted, “the only way to differentiate convincingly from rivals around the world is to deliver a better student experience.” If the government ensures that all international students receive a minimum level of service from institutions, an excellent student support system would be a strong selling point for Ontario as an international study destination.

**RECOMMENDATION:** The provincial government should create a task force on international student services to identify and promote best-practices.

**RECOMMENDATION:** The provincial government should ensure, through incentive or mandate, that international student offices provide a robust suite of quality international student support services.

“ If the government ensures that all international students receive a minimum level of service from institutions, an excellent student support system would be a strong selling point for Ontario as an international study destination. ”

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The inconsistency of the support available to international students at some universities may mean that students at certain institutions are better supported than others.  
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## EXHIBIT 2: BEST PRACTICES IN INTERNATIONAL STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

### PERSONAL COUNSELLING: UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

One of the most basic international student services offered is personal counselling, though the range and quality of service varies across institutions. The University of Toronto has implemented a strong program through its International Student Centre, which offers both in-person and online advisement and counselling on both personal and non-personal matters. The non-personal advisement connects students with information and advice on living in Ontario. Questions about employment, taxes, off-campus housing, banking, immigration, driving and more can be answered by an International Student Advisor. Meanwhile, the personal counselling aspect is specifically geared to “emotional, personal and/or motivational difficulties that can arise due to cross-cultural adjustment and intercultural conflicts.”

### PEER NETWORKING: McMASTER UNIVERSITY

Beyond a simple orientation week, many international student centres run continuous programming that helps integrate international students into campus life. This includes the facilitation of social activities, as well as mentorship programs that link international students with domestic students. The International Mentorship Program at McMaster University is a student-led initiative that matches new international students with an upper-year international or domestic student who acts as a “peer guide” and helps with the transition to campus life. The program encourages the development of cross-cultural friendships and helps international students get involved in extra-curricular activities.

### ACCESS TO EMPLOYMENT: UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO

Employment is an extremely important issue, given that 25 per cent of international students in 2009 reported that they had experienced problems obtaining enough money to meet basic needs. The International Student Work Opportunity Program at the University of Western Ontario offers international students paid part-time employment on-campus and in the community, providing them with a source of financial assistance as well as “the opportunity to gain and enhance skills, obtain work experience in a Canadian context, engage with the campus community and enhance their experience of studying and living in Canada.” On top of subsidizing wages, the program supplies correct information on hiring international students to employers.

### ACCESS TO SAFETY NETS: UNIVERSITY OF WATERLOO

If something goes wrong with a student’s financial situation, such as a natural disaster at home, international students often lack the safety nets available to domestic students. In these times of unanticipated financial need, the University of Waterloo grants emergency bursaries of up to \$3,000 to international students, much more than is available at most other institutions. Though the majority of students do not access the funds, the emergency bursary is a low-cost method of giving students peace of mind should something go wrong.

### LANGUAGE TRAINING: UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

Language can be a formidable barrier for international students seeking to find their place in campus life. To address this, many institutions offer ESL programs, but the University of Toronto stands out in this regard. The English Conversation Program, offered through the International Student Centre, is designed specifically to ensure international students who speak English as a second language are comfortable with their communication abilities. Importantly, all course fees are \$50 and under, which is very low in comparison to the \$4,539 fee charged by the University of Windsor for their English Language Improvement Program. In addition, the International Student Centre at the University of Toronto can link students to more intensive ESL programs if required.

## BRANCH AND AFFILIATE CAMPUSES

### BRANCH CAMPUSES

In recent years, the number of university international branch campuses has grown substantially, as more universities view these campuses a means of attracting international students, generating revenue, promoting international research collaboration among faculty, and enhancing the international brand of their institution. An international branch campus is defined as a physical presence operated wholly or partially by a source institution from outside the country that grants degrees from the source institution.<sup>48</sup> The number of international branch campuses grew between 2002 and 2009 from 24 to 162. The United States currently provides nearly half of all branch campuses, with the United Arab Emirates, China and Singapore continuing to be the top host countries.<sup>49</sup> In part, the rise in interest has been driven by external incentives, often through financial or capital support from host countries.<sup>50</sup>

There are currently five Canadian campuses abroad, two of which are from Ontario universities. The University of Western Ontario's Richard Ivey School of Business operates a campus in Hong Kong, and the University of Waterloo has an agreement with Dubai where students are taught by Waterloo faculty for two years in Dubai and for two years in Waterloo. The three others are the University of Calgary Qatar, the College of the North Atlantic Qatar, and the University of New Brunswick Singapore. McMaster University has also articulated plans to establish an international branch campus in China. Beyond independent branch campuses, there are several other partnerships and collaborations between Ontario universities and international institutions.

Many post-secondary institutions are strongly attracted to the idea of international campus expansion. McMaster's task force on internationalization expresses this appeal, stating, "An international footprint is no longer a matter of choice, but rather a necessity."<sup>51</sup> Amit Chakma, President of the University of Western Ontario, describes international branch campuses as "the key to Canada's future place in the world."<sup>52</sup> Nevertheless, students have numerous concerns with international campus expansion.

International branch campuses provide no guarantee that students will receive sufficient support or that the quality of education expected of Ontario's post-secondary institutions will be maintained. For example, at Waterloo's Dubai branch campus, there is concern that the quality of student support services is lower than at the domestic campus. Another concern raised is that the academic staff at international branch campuses may frequently be hired on a temporary basis, resulting in a lower quality of teaching.<sup>53</sup> In McMaster's assessment of the feasibility of an international branch campus in China, the institutional report notes that international branch campuses are often less expensive to run than domestic campuses.<sup>54</sup> While this may be beneficial to the bottom line of institutions, if cost savings come at the expense of quality student experiences and teaching excellence, then international branch campuses compromise the international reputation of Ontario universities.

Furthermore, Waterloo experienced initial difficulty in recruiting a sufficient number of students to financially support their international branch campus, forcing the institution to divert additional funding that could have gone to other pursuits. This is particularly concerning, and highlights the struggles that some institutions have had in maintaining economically viable international branch campuses. Eleven branch campuses have been forced to close, five in the last three years, costing these institutions in terms of finances and reputation.<sup>55</sup> Students believe that international campuses should provide the same quality of education and support services as domestic institutions, and should only be pursued if it is clear that they benefit the host country and the expanding institution. Furthermore, attempts to use branch campuses as a profit-making enterprise to generate revenue for domestic campuses is worrisome because it is an unsustainable revenue source, subject to the whims of the international market for higher education.<sup>56</sup>

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A related concern surrounding international branch campuses is whether campuses in host countries will enjoy the same degree of academic and personal freedom as domestic campuses. As Canadian institutions expand their educational involvement to countries with authoritarian governance systems, it becomes more difficult to ensure that academic freedom, non-discrimination, and institutional autonomy are maintained. A joint statement from the American Association of University Professors and the Canadian Association of University Teachers released in 2009 outlined several concerns of faculty relating to overseas campuses, including restricted academic freedom, faculty rights, treatment of non-academic employees in the construction and maintenance of campuses, and lack of collegial governance.<sup>57</sup> An additional concern regarding branch campuses relates to academic imperialism and if the curriculum taught in the overseas institutions is relevant to the location in which it is being taught.<sup>58</sup>

The Canadian Association of University Teachers recommends that standards and rule-based regimes govern the internationalization of post-secondary institutions.<sup>59</sup> Ontario students support this as an important step in ensuring that international branch campuses of Ontario's universities and colleges meet the same academic and student support standards as domestic campuses. Students recognize that branch campuses can have positive impacts on both the source institution and the host country, but believe that we must proceed with extreme caution and only when branch campuses do not compromise the quality and core values of the Ontario public university system. Considering that the federal government is responsible for foreign affairs and international development while education is the responsibility of the provincial government, it is suggested that a regulation regime should be negotiated through the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada to accommodate the intersecting provincial and federal jurisdiction.

Australia has a much longer history of implementing international branch campuses. As a result of a number of campus failures, the Australian government has created a transnational quality strategy aimed at guaranteeing the consistency and quality of post-secondary education services offered abroad. This strategy includes a good-practice guide, a quality assurance and accreditation framework, and comprehensive host country regulations.<sup>60</sup> As Canada's post-secondary institutions expand their research and teaching facilities across the world, it is essential that the government follow in the footsteps of Australia in creating a comprehensive quality strategy for international branch campuses that includes minimum standards for the provision of student services on these campuses.

**RECOMMENDATION:** The Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities should promote the creation of an international branch campus quality assurance strategy through the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada.

## PRIVATE AFFILIATE CAMPUSES

The growing use of private affiliate campuses by Canadian public universities is of concern to students. Some private, for-profit international study programs affiliated with Canadian universities allow international students to bypass academic requirements for university programs by facilitating admission into university for all students who complete the program. This is concerning because there is no regulatory body ensuring that all students completing these programs are qualified to meet the entrance standards of Ontario post-secondary institutions. Rather, agreements between private international colleges and universities are on a bilateral, ad-hoc basis, leaving assurances of competency to be self-regulated by the participating institutions. Further, it appears the primary motivation for these arrangements is not to provide a bridging program for international students, but to earn additional revenue for the universities.<sup>61</sup>

For example, the Simon Fraser International College is run by the private corporation Navitas. The corporation handles recruitment and administration of the college and accepts most students, even if they do not have high school diplomas. After completing the program, most students are granted admission to Simon Fraser University. There are concerns that these corporations are employing dishonest recruitment practices, that the quality of instruction is extremely poor, and that more qualified international students who have not attended affiliate private preparation programs are shut out of international recruitment by partnering institutions.<sup>62</sup>

Students admitted to these international colleges may have few academic qualifications, creating the perception that Ontario's post-secondary system is accessible to those who can afford to pay, rather than the best and brightest students. Moreover, there is a direct conflict of interest in evaluating student performance if the university is deriving revenue from the affiliate college. It is impossible to ensure academic standards are being upheld if the institution that runs the college program is closely affiliated with the university that accepts all graduating students. International college preparatory programs are not a problem in and of themselves, rather the practice of allowing students participating to bypass academic standards is the cause of concern. The Ontario government should create a regulatory framework to ensure that all international students, regardless of preparatory program, are subject to the same admission standards for Ontario's post-secondary institutions.

**RECOMMENDATION:** The provincial government should work to ensure that universities do not partner with private, for-profit international colleges that allow international students to bypass academic standards.

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There is a direct conflict of interest in evaluating student performance if the university is deriving revenue from the affiliate college.

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Students look forward to working with government and other stakeholders to realize this goal.



## CONCLUSION

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With all that international students bring to our universities and to our province, OUSA is hopeful that the conversation around internationalization will expand to include what must be done to provide the supportive learning experience that all students deserve. While the recommendations promoted in this paper are mainly directed at government, it is critical that institutions also take responsibility for meeting the needs of their international students.

Both the provincial and federal governments have recognized that a strong brand is required for long-term success in attracting international students. Scholarships and recruitment initiatives are an important component, but the quality of the experience of studying and living in Ontario must be paramount. Thus, before implementing a strategy for internationalization, it is critical that we reflect on what we are offering these students. Are we charging fees that are fair and predictable? Are we doing enough to support those qualified students who cannot afford the cost? Are we providing a reasonable level of health coverage? Are we providing sufficient opportunity to gain employment and citizenship after graduation? Are we offering enough academic and personal support during the study period? While it is important to recognize all that has been accomplished, as this paper has argued, the answer to all of these questions unfortunately remains no.

OUSA strongly supports further internationalization of Ontario campuses, including the province's goal of increasing the international student population by 50 per cent. Undergraduate students are deeply concerned, however, by indications that international students – their classmates and friends – are increasingly being viewed as a commodity and alternative revenue source. We reject this notion and stress that international students, like their domestic peers, deserve to be treated fairly by our institutions and our government. Students look forward to working with government and other stakeholders to realize this goal.



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