



Tuition Fees for International Graduate Students

Introduction

While all students in Canada have faced dramatic fee increases over the last decade, tuition fees for international students have become particularly burdensome in recent years. In fall 2009, average tuition fees for international students surpassed \$15,500—more than three times the already high fees paid by Canadian citizens. At some universities, international masters and doctoral students pay over \$25,000 per year in tuition fees, while those in professional programs such as medicine and law are charged a staggering \$40,000 per year. High differential fees are an unfair burden and a barrier to post-secondary education for international students. Ultimately, such fees could threaten Canada's ability to attract and retain foreign scholars.

The Root Cause: Government Underfunding

International students were not charged differential tuition fees prior to the late 1970s. During the negotiations of federal transfer payments to the provinces in 1976, the federal government suggested that introducing differential tuition fees was an acceptable way for the provinces to generate additional revenue at institutions. Over the next several years many provincial governments responded by cutting or eliminating grants that had previously been provided to post-secondary institutions for the purpose of funding international students. By 1982, all provinces except British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Newfoundland were charging differential tuition fees. In Ontario, fees charged were as high as \$6,960.

Throughout the 1990s, tuition fees in Canada sky-rocketed for both international students and Canadian citizens as federal and provincial governments cut funding for post-secondary education. As a percentage of Gross Domestic Product, federal cash transfers in 2008 were 50% below 1993 levels. Cash-strapped university administrators have increasingly turned to tuition fees to cover operating expenses. In 1995, tuition fees accounted for only 21% of university revenues. In recent years, that figure had risen to almost 35%.

Governments and post-secondary institutions know that high tuition fees are unpopular with students and their families. However, because international students have

little direct political influence in Canada, many provincial governments and institutional decision-makers see them as an easy target. In some provinces, governments have completely deregulated fees charged to international students so that universities are free to exploit them as a replacement for government funding. Differential tuition fees have thus become an important and politically convenient way of generating revenue for many post-secondary institutions in Canada.

Differential Tuition Fees Across Canada

As shown in Table 1, tuition fees for international graduate students during the 2008-09 year vary dramatically between provinces and institutions. Overall, tuition fees for international graduate students tend to be highest at some institutions in Ontario and the Maritimes, where ten universities charged user fees of at least \$12,000. At less than \$2,000, Newfoundland and Labrador had the lowest tuition fees in Canada for international graduate students, followed by students in Saskatchewan who paid slightly more. In British Columbia, the fee differential between Canadian and international graduate students was lower than at the undergraduate level.

A similar phenomenon occurs at the University of Saskatchewan. In fall 2005, international undergraduate students at the University of Saskatchewan were saddled with a 38.4% fee increase, a un-subtle tactic used to circumvent the tuition fee freeze for domestic students in Saskatchewan. However, international graduate students were spared the hefty increase. Given the premium placed on importing great researchers, shielding international graduate students from the massive fee increase is an acknowledgement of the deterrent effects of high tuition fees.

Recently, students have successfully mobilised to defeat tuition fee increases for international students. In August 2008, the Minister of Education and the Minister of Human Resources, Labour and employment in Newfoundland and Labrador wrote a joint letter to the Board of Regents and suggested that Memorial University consult with the Canadian Federation of Students and shelve a proposed 10% fee hike. The Board agreed to stop the hike and study the issue further.

Differential Fees: Short-sighted and Unfair

Access

High tuition fees have already put post-secondary education in Canada beyond the reach of many international students. Low- and middle-income students—and particularly students from developing countries—face tremendous obstacles in accessing post-secondary education. In fact, international tuition fees in Canadian universities are usually more than the annual wage of most families in the Global South.

Continued increases could ultimately see access to Canadian universities and colleges choked off to all but the wealthiest international students and a limited number of poorer students lucky enough to receive full scholarships.

Until recently, the detrimental effects of excessive tuition fees were compounded by regulations that prevented international students from earning money while studying in Canada. However, the Canadian Federation of Students has successfully lobbied to have these restrictions eased. In April 2007, the federal government announced that international students could apply for off-campus work permits.

Some of the support for relaxing the off-campus work regulations came from university and college presidents, some of whom may see the potential for increased income as an excuse to increase tuition fees.

Diversity

International students enrich Canadian academic and social life in innumerable ways. Differential tuition fees are a threat to the intellectual, cultural, and social benefits that a diverse international student population adds to Canadian campuses. The presence of international students in this country also provides a foundation for strengthening relationships between Canada and other societies around the world.

Canada's Immigration Needs

Charging differential tuition fees to international students is drastically out of step with the long-term needs of Canadian society. By 2011 immigration will account for all new labour force growth in Canada. According to the

federal government's own research, immigrants who have previously worked or studied in Canada have the easiest time integrating into the Canadian workforce and prospering in Canadian society. Differential tuition fees are a barrier that will discourage such talented people from studying, and eventually settling, in Canada. High tuition fees work directly against the Canadian government's professed goal of building an educated, prosperous, and innovative society.

Canada's International Obligations

As a wealthy country, Canada has both a duty and the material resources to provide assistance to countries and individuals in developing countries. Providing access to affordable education should be an important part of Canada's contribution to international development.

Towards Full and Equal Access for International Students

Restoring funding for post-secondary education to the provinces would reduce the incentive for universities to rely on tuition fees as a means of generating revenue. Provincial re-regulation of differential fees for international students would also help bring skyrocketing costs under control.

In the long term, federal agencies such as Human Resources and Social Development, Industry Canada, and Citizenship and Immigration must co-ordinate with provincial governments and university administrators to develop strategies that improve access and financial support for international students wishing to study in Canada. Particular attention needs to be focused on ensuring access for international students from low-income backgrounds. Removing barriers faced by international students should be an important component of Canada's international and foreign policy objectives. Improved access for international students would also be an important step towards ensuring Canada's own future as a destination of choice for skilled immigrants.

TABLE 1: Minimum tuition fees for international graduate students, 2008-2009

University	Tuition Fees
U. College of Cape Breton	\$17,500
Ryerson University	\$14,250
University of Toronto	\$13,892
Dalhousie University	\$13,641
Mount Saint Vincent U.	\$12,910
Trent University	\$12,896
St. Francis Xavier U.	\$12,895
McMaster University	\$12,525
U. of Western Ontario	\$12,400
Nipissing University	\$12,000
University of Calgary	\$11,686
École Polytechnique	\$11,610
Université de Montréal	\$11,308
McGill University	\$11,307
Concordia University	\$11,070
Queen's University	\$11,025
University of Waterloo	\$10,172
University of Windsor	\$10,050
Université Laval	\$9,963
Lakehead University	\$9,467
U. of New Brunswick	\$9,450
Université d'Ottawa	\$9,311
Laurentian University	\$9,236
Wilfrid Laurier University	\$9,041
Carleton University	\$8,900
Brock University	\$8,872
University of Manitoba	\$7,936
York University	\$7,515
University of Alberta	\$7,040
University of Victoria	\$5,662
University of Guelph	\$5,650
University of PEI	\$4,918
Brandon University	\$4,095
U. of British Columbia	\$4,059
Simon Fraser University	\$3,070
University of Regina	\$3,000
University of Northern BC	\$2,704
U. of Saskatchewan	\$2,000
Memorial University	\$1,896

