

# Academic Matters

OCUFA'S JOURNAL OF HIGHER EDUCATION  
LA REVUE DE L'ENSEIGNEMENT SUPÉRIEUR DE L'OCUFA

Spring 2018

## *How should we fund Ontario's universities?*

**Graham Cox**

The case for publicly funded universities

**Gyllian Phillips**

It's time to invest in faculty renewal

**Nour Alideeb**

Building solidarity on campus



# OCUFA Report

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# Academic Matters

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Academic Matters is published two times a year by OCUFA, and is received by 17,000 professors, academic librarians and others interested in higher education issues across Canada. The journal explores issues of relevance to higher education in Ontario, other provinces in Canada, and globally. It is intended to be a forum for thoughtful and thought-provoking, original and engaging discussion of current trends in postsecondary education and consideration of academia's future direction.

Readers are encouraged to contribute their views, ideas and talents. Letters to the editor (maximum 250 words) are welcome and may be edited for length. To provide an article or artwork for Academic Matters, please send your query to Editor-in-Chief Ben Lewis at [editor@academicmatters.ca](mailto:editor@academicmatters.ca).

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## The slow erosion of public university funding

ONTARIO'S PUBLIC universities are vital institutions that deliver education to thousands of students, produce thought-provoking and groundbreaking research, and provide good jobs that support many diverse communities.

The province's vibrant and renowned public postsecondary education system has been evolving for over a century. Core to its development has been a foundation of robust public funding delivered primarily through the provincial government.

Unfortunately, that bedrock of public financial support has been eroding for years, both on a per-student basis and as a share of university operating revenues. Since 2008, Ontario has ranked last among Canadian provinces in per-student funding and, for the first time in more than sixty years, tuition fees now account for more than half of university operating revenues.

A failure to maintain adequate levels of public funding threatens the quality of education and research provided by our universities. This approach inevitably shifts their activities to align with other sources of revenue (fundraising from private sources, higher fees from both domestic and international students, commercialized research) and creates pressure to reduce expenses (more students per class, higher faculty workloads, more contract faculty).

The government's approach to university funding has profound implications for the student experience and research contributions.

A government that makes university funding a priority and maintains a high level of public investment is not just investing in institutions and educational outcomes, but in people, their communities, and our collective future.

This spring's provincial election campaign presents a valuable opportunity to discuss these challenges. It's a lot to cover, but in this issue of *Academic Matters* we explore why public funding is so important for our universities and how we can work together to make funding postsecondary education a priority for the next government.

Graham Cox elaborates on the essential role universities play in our society and how public funding is vital for them to effectively fulfill their mandates. He explores the structure of the funding model changes being proposed by the government and how they will impact postsecondary education in the province.

Gyllian Phillips addresses the stagnation of full-time faculty hiring at Ontario's universities during a period in which student enrolment has increased dramatically. She suggests how the government should be investing in a robust faculty renewal strategy.

Jeff Noonan discusses the importance of publicly funded basic research. He notes that this research continues to play second fiddle to research linked to short-term commercial profits (much of which is actually publicly funded), and how this approach undermines innovation.


Reflecting on a poll commissioned by OCUFA, André Turcotte and Heather Scott-Marshall describe some of their findings and provide some thoughts on how postsecondary education can become a more prominent issue in current and future provincial elections.

Nour Alideeb recounts her experiences navigating campus conflicts as a student and illustrates the dangers of allowing students and faculty to be pitted against each other. She highlights the benefits of university students, faculty, and staff coming together to build alliances that advance their priorities, locally and provincially.

In a special two-page spread, we illustrate the composition of Ontario university funding over the decades, showing how events like World War II, changes in federal-provincial relationships, and tuition fee policies have impacted the makeup of university funding.

Finally, the always funny Steve Penfold returns with a new edition of his *Humour Matters* column.

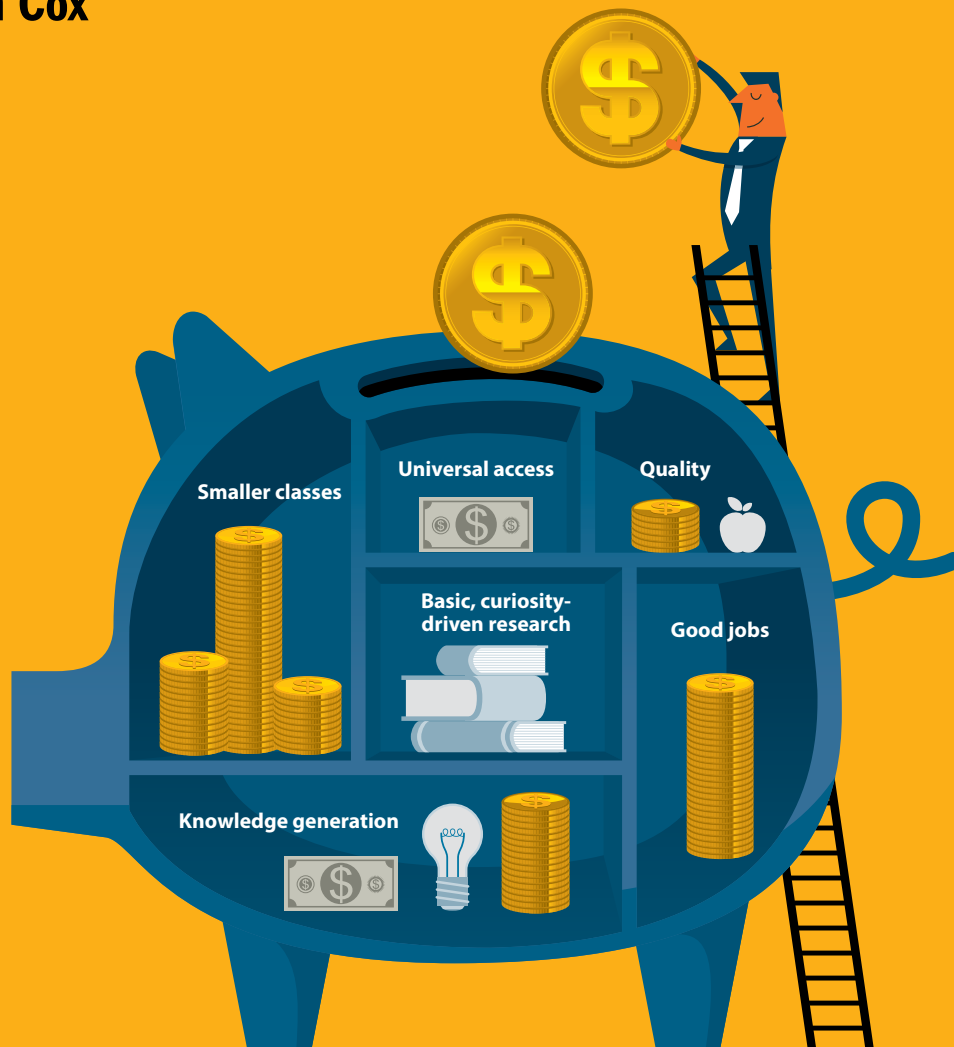
There are many important considerations when it comes to postsecondary funding—how it is informed by government priorities, how it informs university priorities, and how students, faculty, and staff can use their collective power to influence those priorities. We have only been able to explore some of these questions, but this issue of *Academic Matters* serves as a reminder of why public university funding is a vital investment for the future of Ontario.

We hope you enjoy reading this issue as much as we enjoyed putting it together. We think it's an important one. As always, we love to hear your thoughts. A reminder that every article in this issue, and many more, are available on our website: [AcademicMatters.ca](http://AcademicMatters.ca). Thanks for reading. 

*Ben Lewis is the Editor-in-Chief of Academic Matters and Communications Lead for OCUFA.*

# The case for publicly funded universities


**Graham Cox**



Ontario's universities are important public spaces that depend on robust public funding to thrive. When the structure of the funding model changes, how does that impact the fundamental mandate of the university?

*Les universités de l'Ontario sont des espaces publics importants qui dépendent d'un financement public solide pour prospérer. Lorsque la structure du modèle de financement change, quelles sont les répercussions pour le mandat fondamental de l'université?*





Universities are complex public systems embedded in the heart of our communities. By sheer size, they can be larger than smaller municipalities, have more physical infrastructure than a city, and provide a comprehensive array of public services.

All told, Canadian public universities are massive employers of students, teachers, researchers, librarians, academic and research support technicians, academic support workers (custodians, building services, food services, grounds and building maintenance), apprentices, councillors, utility workers, administrators, clerical workers, bartenders, security guards, and parking staff.

Together, all of these workers maintain a space that fosters the advancement and dissemination of knowledge.

A functioning university system should provide inclusive spaces, welcoming to the broader community. Academics need supportive environments so they can ask the hard questions required to advance academic (and social) interests. Students depend on these supportive environments to develop and expand their understanding of themselves and the world—and sometimes even the universe—around them.

In Ontario, as in many other jurisdictions, public universities provide a distinct and important academic experience. Unlike many K-12 or trades colleges, a university education is supposed to provide an organic process that immerses students within an active process of advanced research, analysis, and discovery, not just routine memorization.

Academic research is the foundation for the rest of the research community (primarily state and industry research) and allows for the development of many of the scientific and cultural advancements produced for the public.

Unfortunately, the Ontario government has been neglecting the university as a space for true academic work for years. (Neo)Liberal govern-

ment funding policies have ignored the fundamental importance of the academy and its unique role in advancing knowledge for the benefit of society. Successive governments have introduced policy that prioritizes outcomes that can be commercialized. This approach negates the historic role of the academy—one in which the search for knowledge has inherent value for society as a whole and not just the narrow commercial interest.

In the latest round of university funding model changes, the government has re-imagined the funding formula as a tool to further corporate trends. The structure of the formula compels universities to shift their priorities and resources to reflect current fads in management policy and short-term labour market goals. This new model is focused on cost minimization, commercial research subsidization, and skills development for new workers to support profit generation at “Ontario” companies. The essential and unique experience of academic research and study as a space for curiosity-driven knowledge generation has been all but abandoned—except in promotional rhetoric.

## REMAKING THE ONTARIO FUNDING FRAMEWORK

Funding priorities set by government and university administrators have far-reaching impacts on the form, function, and focus of academic programs. If funding is focused on basic research, students learn in a supportive environment where free thought reigns. If funding is focused, as it increasingly has been, on the short-term exploitation of research results for profit, then students learn in an environment where true academic freedom is discouraged if it does not advance those goals.

Universities should provide an environment where students are taught how to think critically and creatively, not focus on teaching a narrow



A functioning university system should provide inclusive spaces,  
welcoming to the broader community.



set of skills currently deemed to be in high demand in the workforce. Students need to develop methods of critical analysis, so that they are equipped to begin trying to solve some of society's more complex problems. Those who defend the academy understand its social and economic benefit—that it produces the minds and knowledge able to deal with the future's known (and as yet unknown) problems and invent needed solutions. This requires prioritizing funding basic, curiosity-driven research.

Why then is the government changing the model through which Ontario's universities are funded? Their motivation seems to be embedded in two pieces of rhetoric: 1) that the existing structures of funding were old and 2) that the existing structures of funding were overly complicated. Given that universities themselves are old and complex, this hardly seems to justify such a fundamental shift. But, if one digs deeper, the true motivation is revealed: reforming universities so that they run more like corporations and are structured to prioritize the interests of for-profit businesses—instead of as public services.

The current provincial Liberal government's attempts to shoe-horn market-based indicators into a public funding program simply furthers the marketization of access of the university system started by the federal Liberal government in the 1990s. The result of federal reforms—and their provincial knock-on effects—have led to sky-rocketing tuition fees, an undermining of basic academic research, an undervaluing of the social sciences and humanities, an explicit focus on commercialization of (even core) research programs, and the promotion of short-term “entrepreneurial” values among students. In short, this represents the reforming of the university from an academy for the advancement of thought and understanding to one focused on supporting private commercial interests.

The goal has been clearly outlined in policy papers. Publicly, however, the government continues to argue that the existing funding model was just simply “complicated” and “old”.

## ENROLMENT AS A METRIC FOR FUNDING

The numerous new metrics the government has introduced into the funding model are inspired by the profit-driven metrics so popular in the private sector. If the reforms were truly about advancing access to education and properly funding universities in the province, then funding would not be assessed at the institutional level through the tweaking of Strategic Mandate Agreements that are drafted and signed by administrators. Instead, funding would be tailored to supporting students and faculty. After all, education and research are the whole point of universities and it is students and faculty who actually do those things, not administrators.

As complex as the funding mechanism is, the base funding for an educational institution, regardless of its particular mandate, is not hard to calculate. An institution is allocated a proportion of available operating funding primarily on the basis of its student enrolment. In most cases, the source of fiscal challenges faced by our institutions, isn't the complexity of the model, but simply that universities are woefully underfunded. Inadequate public funding leaves institutions struggling to fulfill their mandates to provide support to all those who come through their doors. This situation is exacerbated as more money is diverted to the new entrepreneurial objectives of neoliberal governments and business.




## QUALITY AS A METRIC FOR THE COMMODIFICATION AND MARKETIZATION OF EDUCATION

The metrics being put forward by the government as part of the new funding framework undermine the ability of



The metrics being put forward by the government as part of the new funding framework **undermine the ability of universities to serve the public.**



universities to serve the public. Funding should be structured, first, so that it provides universal access for the public (who funds it through their taxes), and, second, to ensure that all who have access are provided with the highest quality education possible. Maximizing “quality” without prioritizing universal access is, in itself, a marketization of the academy. It means that students from working class or socially marginalized communities who cannot afford a university education cannot get one.

As an example, consider a comparison of the US and Canada when it comes to healthcare. Private healthcare markets are concerned with the maximization of quality (regardless of cost) as they compete with others in the private marketplace for their products. The result is some very high-quality healthcare that is out of reach for a majority of the US public. Alternatively, the Canadian healthcare system offers the best quality service it can while providing universal access that attempts to address the healthcare needs of all Canadians. This means sacrificing what the market would identify as the highest quality option, such as assigning a single doctor to each patient. These different incentives result in fundamentally different structures of service provision.

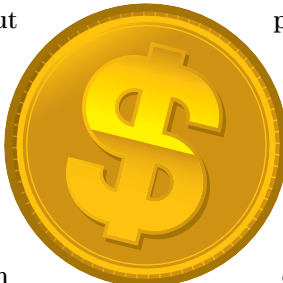
University research and education is a significant expenditure (public and private). As such, the broader public should be involved in a conversation about what role society wants the academy to play and how those desires align with the long-term implications of proposed funding structures. The broader social and economic impacts of the academy are far too important to allow business leaders and corporate ideologues in government drive the process. Unchallenged, these policies will transform universities into “colleges with research arms” and divorce the practice

of teaching from research, thereby undermining both.

This quasi-professionalization of the development of academic policy is the de-democratization of the academy and its social mission. The commercialization of university research, the focus on entrepreneurial development, and the prioritization of STEM over the social sciences are the natural result of this approach.

## A NEED FOR CONSULTATION

If the goal is to build an academy that will serve students today and advance social and economic prospects in the future, we should start where academic researchers would start: detailed critique, broad education and consultation, and proposals debated by knowledgeable peers. Only then would policy makers be properly equipped with the understanding needed to implement changes to university funding.



The development of metrics that support the corporate orientation of new university programs purposely ignore broader social impacts. As policy researchers know, social impacts are not as easily measured as commercial profit-margins or sector-specific hiring numbers. The current metrics put forward by the liberal government should be abandoned and replaced with measures of access and academic output that form the core mission at the heart of all public universities.

The marketization of university research has also led to the increased casualization of both academic and academic support work, the declining social value of degrees in the humanities, and the corporatization of the university. Left unmeasured is the loss of the important social innovation that academic work generates. The de-commodification of university access and research will help reverse the casualization of teaching and learning environments.

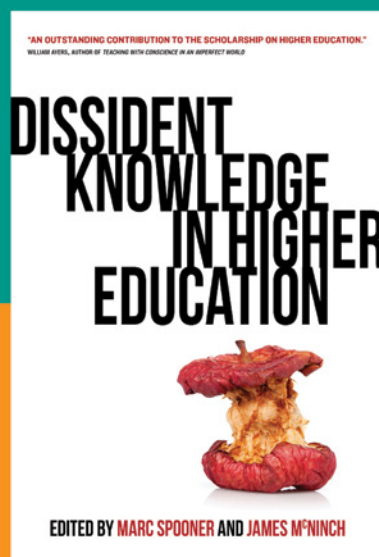




To build an inclusive and supportive environment for all workers and students at Ontario's universities, the government should not only eliminate university access fees, but provide robust and sustainable base funding to institutions and allow for research funding to be set and administrated at the peer level. **AM**

*Graham Cox is a researcher at the Canadian Union of Public Employees who has been doing research for student and labour movement organizations in the academic sector for over 15 years.*

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# It's time to invest in a faculty renewal strategy for Ontario's universities

Gyllian Phillips

For years, full-time faculty hiring has stagnated at Ontario's universities, even as student enrolment has increased dramatically. It's time for the government to invest in a robust faculty renewal strategy.

*Depuis des années, l'embauche de professeurs à plein temps stagne dans les universités de l'Ontario, alors que les inscriptions des étudiants ne cessent d'augmenter à un rythme effréné. Le temps est venu pour le gouvernement d'investir dans une stratégie solide de renouvellement du corps professoral.*



*The stagnation in public university funding and faculty hiring is putting a strain on our higher education system.*



Public funding is foundational for a postsecondary system that provides accessible, quality education to students from all socioeconomic backgrounds. While recent efforts have increased accessibility to postsecondary education through a refinement of the Ontario Student Grant (OSG), over the past decade, Ontario has been losing ground to the rest of the country when it comes to funding our universities. On a per-student basis, Ontario's university funding levels are 35 per cent lower than the Canadian average, and we have ranked last in per-student funding for over eight years. This trend cannot continue. It's time for government commitment to re-investing in Ontario's universities.

Continued underfunding has left Ontario with the highest student-faculty ratio in the country, resulting in dramatically larger class sizes. In the last decade, Ontario university student enrolment has grown seven times faster than full-time faculty hiring. As a result, there are now 31 university students for every full-time faculty member, far surpassing the rest-of-Canada average of 22 to 1. The increasing student-faculty ratio has drastic implications for the overall quality of education and student experience at our universities.

I am fortunate that I hold a tenured position at a small university in a program with relatively small class sizes. I know first-hand how engaged students are with their education when I am able to appreciate them as individuals,

respond to their different ways of learning, and bring my research into the classroom every day.

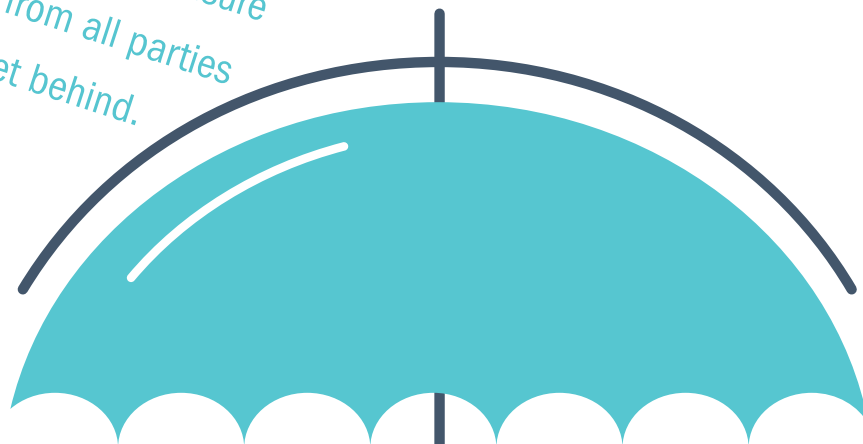
The disparity between student enrolment and faculty hiring has impacted education quality by generating larger classes with less one-on-one student-faculty engagement. Among other concerns, this leads to fewer opportunities for mentorship and academic or career advising. Renewed public investment in full-time faculty hiring is integral to closing the gap between the number of students studying and faculty working on our campuses.

Every student's learning experience and every university's capacity to produce research relies on the faculty members who teach, research, and engage in their communities. The stagnation in public university funding and faculty hiring is putting a strain on our higher education system. Larger class sizes mean that faculty are increasingly facing time and capacity constraints. With only so much time in the day, faculty research is under threat.

As research capacity becomes strained, Ontario's knowledge economy will lose out on the most innovative ideas and developments. These exciting possibilities will also be lost to the students in our classrooms, as professors are less able to contribute to forward-thinking curriculum development.

This stagnation in full-time faculty hiring has paralleled the estimated doubling of courses taught by contract faculty at Ontario universities since 2000. Research by the

*Supporting good academic jobs  
is a popular measure  
that candidates from all parties  
should be able to get behind.*



Council of Ontario Universities suggests that 58 per cent of faculty are now working on contract. This growing reliance on precariously employed contract faculty is another of the consequences of the underfunding of Ontario's postsecondary institutions. It has grave repercussions for the individuals working in these positions and for our public educational institutions more broadly.

Contract faculty are highly qualified and experienced teachers and researchers. Unfortunately, they lack job security, face unpredictable scheduling, and often juggle jobs at multiple institutions. Their working conditions make it difficult to provide students with one-on-one engagement and continuity throughout their degree program. This can have a significant impact on student learning outcomes, with some students choosing not to take the next course in a sequence or, more worryingly, not completing their programs. Moreover, contract faculty receive a fraction of the pay of their full-time counterparts for doing the same work. I think this is simply unfair and 87 per cent of Ontarians agree that contract faculty should receive the same pay for teaching the same courses as full-time faculty.

We currently stand at a point where precarious work is becoming the new norm in our institutions and our universities are engaging in labour practices that run counter to the public's strong desire that their universities should be model employers. Instead of denying contract faculty fair pay, job security, or benefits, our

publicly funded universities should embrace the values of equity and social justice so important in our communities and throughout postsecondary education.

Moving forward, both the provincial government and individual universities need to invest in a faculty renewal strategy that begins reversing these worrying trends—trends that raise class sizes, increase precarious work, and threaten education quality. This strategy should include measures that provide pathways for converting more contract faculty into full-time, tenured positions. Such an initiative is strongly supported by Ontarians, 85 per cent of whom believe that contract faculty should be offered full-time positions before more contract faculty are hired. This strategy would improve faculty working conditions and, in doing so, improve student learning conditions.

Levels of investment in faculty renewal should support enough full-time faculty hiring to deliver substantive improvements in province-wide student-faculty ratios. OCUFA estimates that an investment of \$480 million over the next three years would support the creation of over 3,300 full-time tenure-stream positions, improve the student-faculty ratio by a modest margin, and bring Ontario substantially closer to matching the rest-of-Canada average.

This faculty renewal strategy must also help to ensure that retiring full-time tenured faculty members are

replaced with new tenure-stream positions. Too often, when full-time faculty members retire, departments will turn to precariously employed contract faculty members to take over the teaching responsibilities, leaving the remaining full-time faculty members to pick up the slack on university service responsibilities. Again and again, we hear retiring professors express concern that the survival of their programs or departments will be jeopardized when they retire, and that the quality of their programs will decline without dedicated full-time faculty hired to replace them.

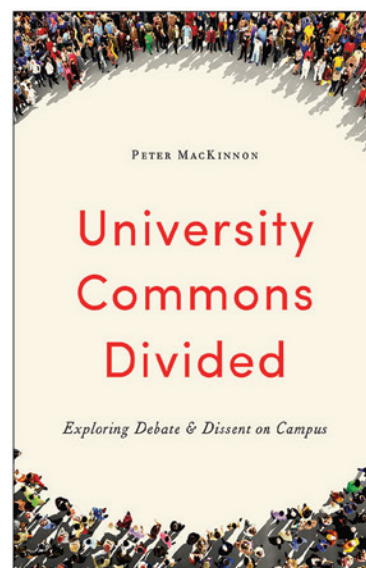
In sum, a robust faculty renewal strategy requires three pillars: hiring additional full-time faculty, replacing retiring full-time faculty, and supporting pathways for contract faculty into secure full-time positions.

With a provincial election on the horizon, supporting good academic jobs is a popular measure that candidates from all parties should be able to get behind. In fact, during the writing of this article, the Ontario NDP released their election platform in which they recognize the need to address precarious academic work and faculty renewal. Hopefully, the other political parties will take this opportunity to follow suit. Not only does the Ontario public overwhelmingly believe that universities should be model employers, but they understand that investing in better working conditions for faculty, including job security and benefits for contract professors, is an investment in education quality.

For too long, Ontario's faculty have struggled to figure out how to do more with less. Our students deserve better. Bolstered by much needed funding from the provincial government, faculty renewal would represent a vital investment in our campuses, our communities, and our students. **AM**

*Gyllian Phillips is a Professor at Nipissing University and the President of the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations.*

## New from University of Toronto Press



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# What might the 2018 Ontario Budget mean for university faculty?

Given the upcoming election, it is widely understood that the 2018 Ontario Budget is as much a campaign platform document as a budget. While the continued implementation of reforms to student assistance are expected to further improve access for students, faculty are concerned that operating funding for universities remains stagnant, threatening the high-quality education students expect and deserve.

The lack of increased funding to support the government's stated goals of providing fairness for contract faculty and encouraging faculty renewal is disappointing. Operating funding over the next three years is now on track to decline slightly (by 0.1%), which, when adjusted for inflation and enrolment, amounts to an even larger reduction in funding. Ontario's universities already receive the lowest per-student funding in Canada and this budget will leave our province further behind.

The changes to student assistance announced in 2016 continue to be implemented, with parental and spousal contributions reduced for next year. This will result in more students qualifying for the grants and loans they need to afford the cost of tuition fees, which continue to increase. Investments in access are welcome, but they must be matched with operating investments in quality that support improved student-faculty ratios, smaller class sizes, full-time faculty hiring, and fairness for contract faculty. Investments in quality were missing from this year's budget.

A one-time "support quality programs and student outcomes" fund, including \$32 million for universities and \$125 million for colleges will be directed towards the implementation of new labour laws passed in *Bill 148, Fair Workplaces, Better Jobs Act*. In the university sector, we understand that it is expected to fund a portion of the cost of new minimum wage, vacation

pay, and leave provisions, but no funding has been allocated to support the implementation of new equal pay provisions. It is also concerning that this funding has only been allocated for a single year, since supporting fair working conditions will require ongoing investment in Ontario's universities.

Other ongoing initiatives noted in the budget, include continued support for eCampusOntario's Open Textbooks Library, continued investments for mental health services, newly announced capital funding scheduled to begin in 2020-21, new experiential learning and labour market focused programming, and continued progress towards the proclamation of a French-language university.



This budget also included the expansion of OHIP+ prescription drug coverage to seniors, which will result in cost savings for benefit plans that provide drug coverage for employees over 65 or retirees. Through negotiations, this could lead to benefit improvements or premium reductions for faculty associations.

Overall, this budget leaves important faculty concerns unaddressed. Following the June 7<sup>th</sup> election, OCUFA will continue working with the new government to advocate for re-investments in

universities to support improvements in per-student funding levels; establish a more robust consultative process for Strategic Mandate Agreements; ensure core operating grants are not linked to performance metrics; establish funding to support fairness for contract faculty, including equal pay; and develop a faculty renewal strategy that supports full-time faculty hiring.

*This article originally appeared in OCUFA Report.*

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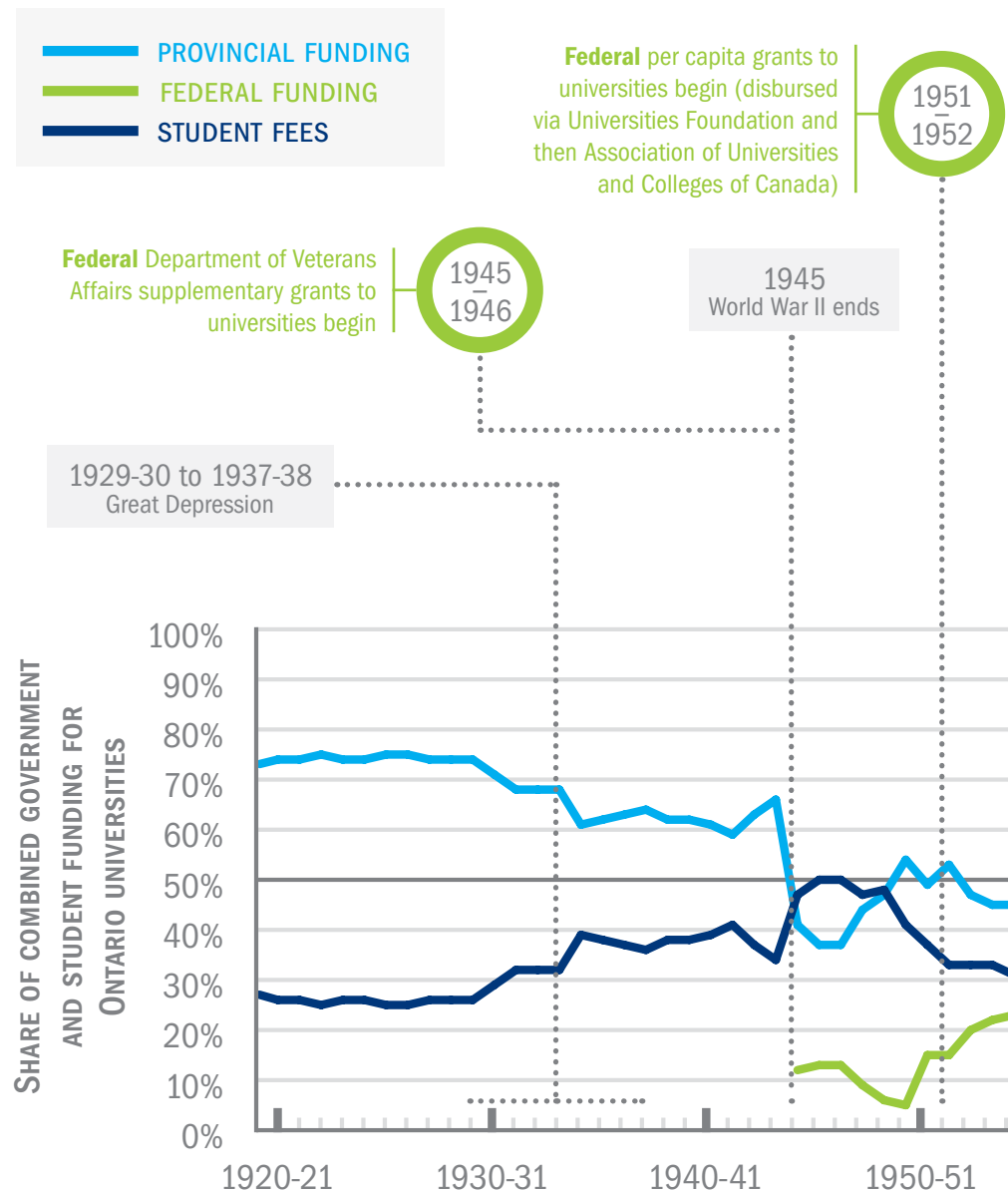
# LOOKING AT THE BIG PICTURE:

## A breakdown of university funding in Ontario through the decades

### UNIVERSITY REVENUES BY STUDENT AND GOVERNMENT FUNDING SOURCES

Ontario student fees have accounted for a greater share of current university revenues (primarily operating and research) than provincial government grants in only two stretches over the course of nearly a century. The first was a five-year stretch beginning in 1945-46 when the federal Department of Veterans Affairs paid tuition fees on behalf of veterans. The second started five years ago in 2012-13.

A similar trend occurs when examining the percentage of combined revenue contributed by student fees compared to provincial and federal operating funding. In only two years have student fees outweighed the magnitude of funding from both the provincial and federal governments—in 1947-48 and again almost exactly sixty years later in 2016-17 in what could be the beginning of a new era.



## ABOUT THE DATA SERIES

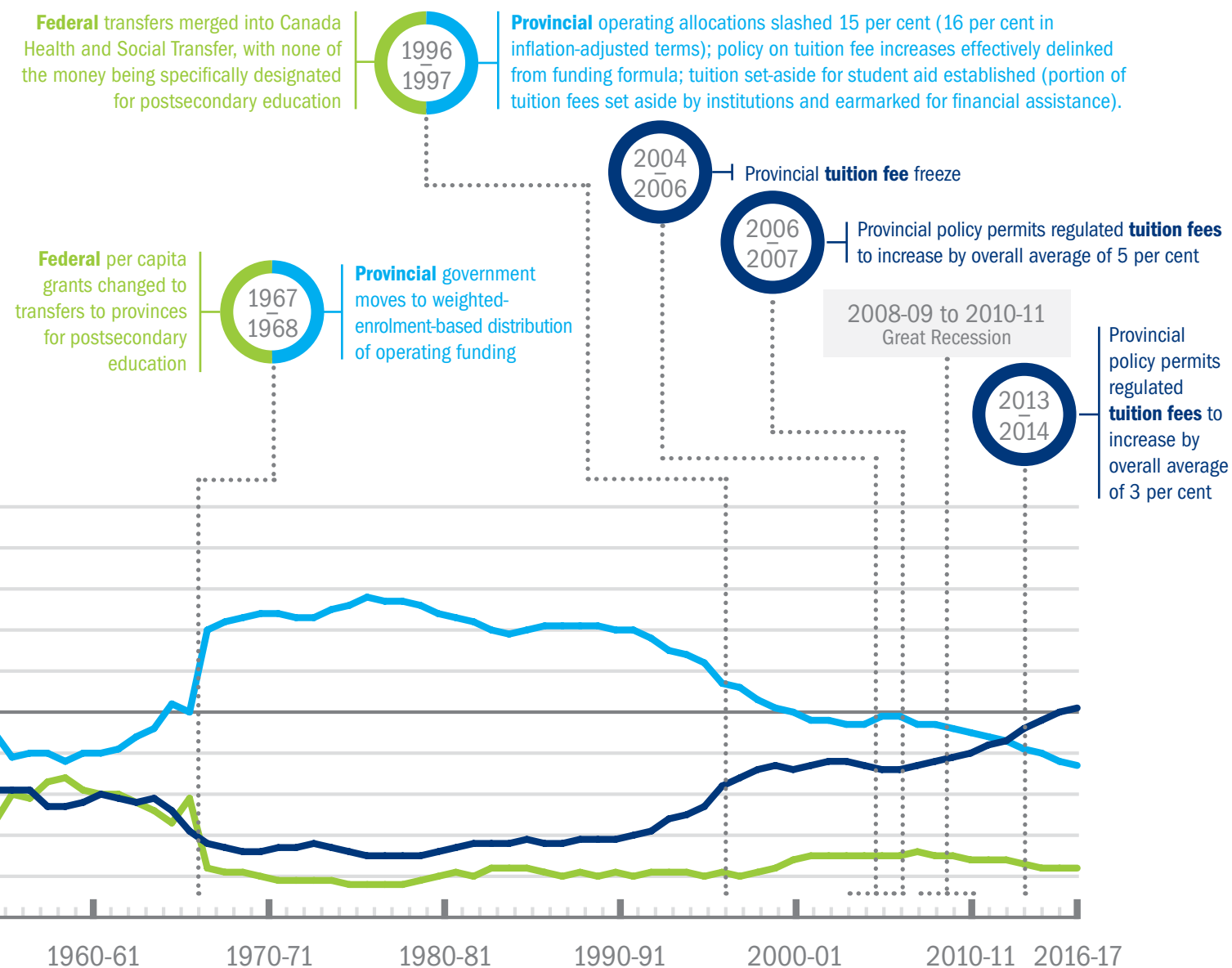
The data series is developed from two main sources:

1. Data from 1920-21 to 1969-70 are derived from the Statistics Canada dataset on University education expenditures, by direct source of funds and type of expenditures, annual (dollars). The principal data on university revenues are based on the Financial Information of Universities and Colleges and predecessor surveys.
2. Data from 1970-71 to present are based on the Financial Report of Ontario Universities produced by the Council of Ontario Financial Officers (COFO). COFO data are based on a sum

of funds for operating, sponsored research, trust and special purpose, and net income/loss from ancillary enterprises. Capital funds and designated endowment income are excluded.

Federal funding in one form or another has long figured in the picture of university revenues, and has been included for three reasons. First, substantial university operating support was provided by Veterans Affairs supplementary grants and then through federal per capita grants until 1967-68, when federal funding was redirected to provincial governments to distribute. How much was directed to universities and colleges became

purely notional once the federal government combined and reduced provincial transfers with the creation of the Canada Health and Social Transfer in 1996-97. Second, before 1960-61, Statistics Canada data on university revenues do not distinguish funds as being operating or assisted/sponsored research—research in addition to that already supported by operating funds. Finally, the proportions of federal and provincial government operating and sponsored research money for universities vary over time and between jurisdictions according to government policies and priorities.



### DATA SOURCES

- Statistics Canada, CANSIM table 478-0007 – University education expenditures, by direct source of funds and type of expenditures, annual (dollars) (accessed: December 16, 2013) for years 1945-46 to 1969-70. Data for intervening years 1946-67 to 1949-50 and 1951-52 to 1953-54 are drawn from Dominion Bureau of Statistics, Survey of higher education, 1946/48-1961/62, CS81-402-PDF. For 1946-47 and 1947-48, the federal total was reported: Geographic distribution was estimated by assuming it was the same as the average distribution for 1945-46 and 1948-49. Additional data drawn from Dominion Bureau of Statistics, Higher education in Canada, 1936/38-1944/46, CS81-402E-PDF for years 1920-21 to 1944-45.
- Council of Ontario Finance Officers, Financial Report of Ontario Universities, for years 1970-71 to 2016-17 (Committee of Finance Officers, Revenue and Expenses of Ontario Universities before 1982-83).

# The public value of public funding for research

**Jeff Noonan**



Basic, curiosity-driven research continues to take a backseat to privately and publicly funded research linked to short-term commercial profit. We must push back against this trend and reinvest in the core mission of the university.

*La recherche fondamentale suscitée par la curiosité continue de s'effacer devant la recherche financée par les entreprises privées et l'État qui est liée aux profits commerciaux à court terme. Nous devons repousser cette tendance et réinvestir dans la mission de base de l'université.*



What machine has changed social life more than the networked computer? If we could go back in history to the point where computing technology was just emerging, armed with the knowledge of how essential computers have proven to be, who would not have invested in their development?

Now change the picture somewhat. From the current user's perspective, the computer is part television, part calculator, part typewriter, part phone, and part stereo. We think of it as a multipurpose physical machine, attractively designed and marketed as an essential lifestyle and business device. However, the real heart of the machine beats beneath the design, the high-resolution display, the wiring, and the microprocessors—at the heart of every iteration of the computer has been the machine language that enables the computer to receive instructions from its user and process information.

Now, imagine that you are an investor looking at a messy chalkboard scrawled with the mathematical logical proofs that would one day become the foundation of computer machine language. This mathematical logic would have been, and still would be as indecipherable to most people as hieroglyphics were to Europeans before the discovery of the Rosetta Stone. Most likely, you would not have understood that you were looking at the future of communications and information processing, not to mention science and entertainment. You would have kept your money in your pocket and gone off to invest in the soybean futures market instead. Nothing against soybeans, but that would have been an unwise investment decision in the long run.

## SHORT-TERM PROFIT VS LONG-TERM KNOWLEDGE GENERATION

Private investors tend to only think in terms of the short run, the immediate pay-off that will come in the next business quarter or year. Human knowledge, by contrast, develops only over the long term. The step to the next plateau, the breakthrough, is often not visible; it sometimes depends on happy accidents, and almost always involves formal or informal cooperation and collaboration. Further, it often is not coextensive with the immediately useful or saleable. These conditions are opposed to the typical requirements upon which private investors would insist: predictable, low-risk returns; exclusive control over the product; secure intellectual property rights; and immediate marketability.

Private investors want some assurance that what they are investing in will pay off. Universities are institutions whose entire purpose is the production and dissemination of knowledge in the widest and deepest sense of the term, and they cannot fulfill these missions if they are forced to rely upon private funds. Private investors seek to grow their capital by funding the development of products and tech-



Whether one accepts the focus on the growth of money-value as ultimately important or not, it is incompatible with the growth of knowledge.

niques that can be commodified and eventually sold. Whether one accepts the focus on the growth of money-value as ultimately important or not, it is incompatible with the growth of knowledge.

Even if we disregard every other social and human interest and think only about the importance of innovation to the growth of GDP (business leaders and politicians chant this mantra non-stop), these innovations will dry up unless basic scientific research is funded. Basic research—as the example of mathematical logic illustrates—often has no short term use-value, can be inscrutable to non-experts, has uncertain practical implications, and thus can appear as a waste of money from a perspective concerned with short-term gains. If researchers have to rely on nothing but private funds geared to short-term returns, basic research would soon become impossible and the impact would be devastating to the economy and GDP.

Venture capital pools (groups of investors that target emerging companies), to some extent, understand the problem of short termism and try to correct for it. Even if they are successful in overcoming that problem, two more decisive incompatibilities with private funding appear.

## THE MARKET ONLY CARES ABOUT CERTAIN TYPES OF KNOWLEDGE

The first incompatibility is that the set of issues worth investigating is not the same as the set of products that can be sold. Universities are not the appendages of commodity markets, but institutions that create and protect spaces where free inquiry and creation are possible—spaces unconstrained by factors extraneous to the problem being investigated. Without public funding, it would be impossible to pursue research in any field that could not prove itself useful in the crucible of business competition. This would rule out most social scientific and humanistic research, most artistic creations, and also much of the basic but important research done in the sciences. The market does not care whether string theory turns out to be true or about the weight of the Higgs boson. That, however, does not mean that those problems are not worth solving or will not prove vital to future innovation.

The second incompatibility is that the set of problems worth solving is not coextensive with the set of commodities the solution might potentially generate. A problem is important to solve when its solution will improve a crucial dimension of human life. Human beings are not simply bellies and wallets; we are questioning minds who want to know who we are, where we are, why we are here, whether it matters, and what we ought to do with our lives. These questions are philosophical, but their solution is not the province of philosophy alone. Natural and social sciences help explain where we are (what the origin and structure of the natural world is, what the history and structures of various social worlds are, and how we can keep ourselves healthy). Religion, art, and the humanities, broadly construed, offer answers to the question of why we are here and whether it matters. None of these answers is worth any money, but no sort of human life is imaginable without exploring these questions. No human culture over the past several thousand years has failed to pose them in one form or another. The belief that there is some sort of algorithmic solution that can provide final and definite answers to these questions will prove a peculiar but transient delusion of our capitalist technocratic culture.

Thus, work will have to go on in all the fields engaged by these problems. The history of the disciplines of human inquiry is formed from the criticism of attempts to solve these problems. Through the criticism of given answers, the natural and social sciences overcome constricted paradigms, humanistic research becomes conscious of exclusions and false constructions of others, and the arts overcomes derivative and moribund forms to find fresh ways to say what needs saying. Since public funding is not, in principle, answerable to any sectional or private interest, it is the best means to ensure that this history of critical inquiry continues.



Since public funding is not answerable to any private interest, it is the best means to ensure that this history of critical inquiry continues.

## PUBLIC FUNDING FOR THE PUBLIC'S BENEFIT

Unfortunately, public funding is often held hostage by sectional and private interests and so it is important to distinguish between the principle that underlies public funding and its source—the government. When public funding is tied to the short-term interests of governments seeking re-election, bogus metrics unconnected to the real mission of universities, military prerogatives, or short term business priorities, public funding becomes entangled in the same problems as private funding.

The investments announced in the most recent federal budget are uneven in this regard. On the one hand, the increases in base funding to the Tri-Councils is good news. The budget announced an investment of \$925 million dollars over five years for NSERC, SSHRC, and CIHR. It also targeted investment in indigenous scholars, early career researchers, and interdisciplinary research. On the other hand, this funding is only just over half the amount recommended by *Investing in Canada's Future: Strengthening the*

*Foundations of Canadian Research*, a report commissioned by the Federal Government and delivered by former University of Toronto President David Naylor. The sort of “high-risk” interdisciplinary research the government wants to fund seems to privilege work that promises to lead to spectacular monetary rewards. Still, whatever criticisms might be made of the details, the federal budget certainly recognized the essential role that public funding plays, and will hopefully become a model that provincial governments follow.

Researchers, whatever their discipline, must insist that the values served by universities are public, as are their benefits. What are those values? First, the good of knowledge in and of itself as the (open-ended) satisfaction of the human need to understand ourselves and our world. Second, the good of criticism as (the open-ended) satisfaction of the need of suppressed voices, marginalized perspectives, and dissenting theories to be heard. Third, the good of creation and invention as the (open-ended) satisfaction of the human need to exercise our intellectual and practical capacities as the real substance of meaningful lives. Finally, the good of social and scientific change towards more comprehensive and coherent understanding and more enabling inclusiveness of social institutions, practices, and relations as the (open-ended) satisfaction of the human need for freedom.

## HIGH-QUALITY RESEARCH DEPENDS ON ROBUST AND STABLE PUBLIC FUNDING


What does that type of public funding mean in practical reality? It means stable funding adequate to the intellectual purposes of the university. In turn, stable funding adequate to those purposes means, in the first instance, investment in full-time, tenure track faculty positions (both new positions, and converted positions for research-active long-serving contract academic staff). In the second instance, it means ensuring that universities can maintain the physical infrastructure research requires, including laboratories and real libraries. In the third instance, it means both adequate funding for granting agencies and regulations that ensure the pre-eminence of peer review and put aside extrinsic considerations about short-term usefulness or “knowledge mobilization” in the distribution of grants. There are, of course, well-known problems with peer review: methodological gate-keeping, refusal to acknowledge marginalized voices, and heterodox approaches. However, none of these problems will be solved by holding everyone hostage to private sector priorities or imagining that there is some magical algorithm that can determine funding priorities.

In order to ensure that these values are served, universities have to continue to press governments for adequate funds (not only targeted research funding but basic funding

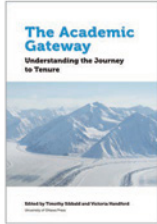
adequate to fulfill their mission). If universities cease to be truly public institutions because they depend on tuition fees for most of their revenue, then they can hardly be a strong voice for public research funding. Moreover, if universities continue to marginalize faculty voices on Boards of Governors, compromise collegial governance, and accept, without critique and resistance, the irrationality of the metrics-as-measure-of-excellence fad, they will fail in their mission to function as institutions of publicly-valuable research and higher education.

None of these goals can be achieved without professors, in alliance with students and other campus groups, working together to ensure that the historic mission of the university is respected and guides all institutional decisions, identify and overcome roadblocks to the coherent fulfillment of this mission, and push for the institutional changes necessary to keep universities connected with the changing social dynamics and problems of the public they serve. ■

*Jeff Noonan is a Professor of Philosophy at Windsor University and President of the Windsor University Faculty Association.*




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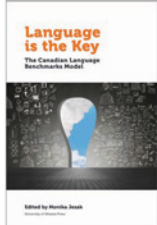
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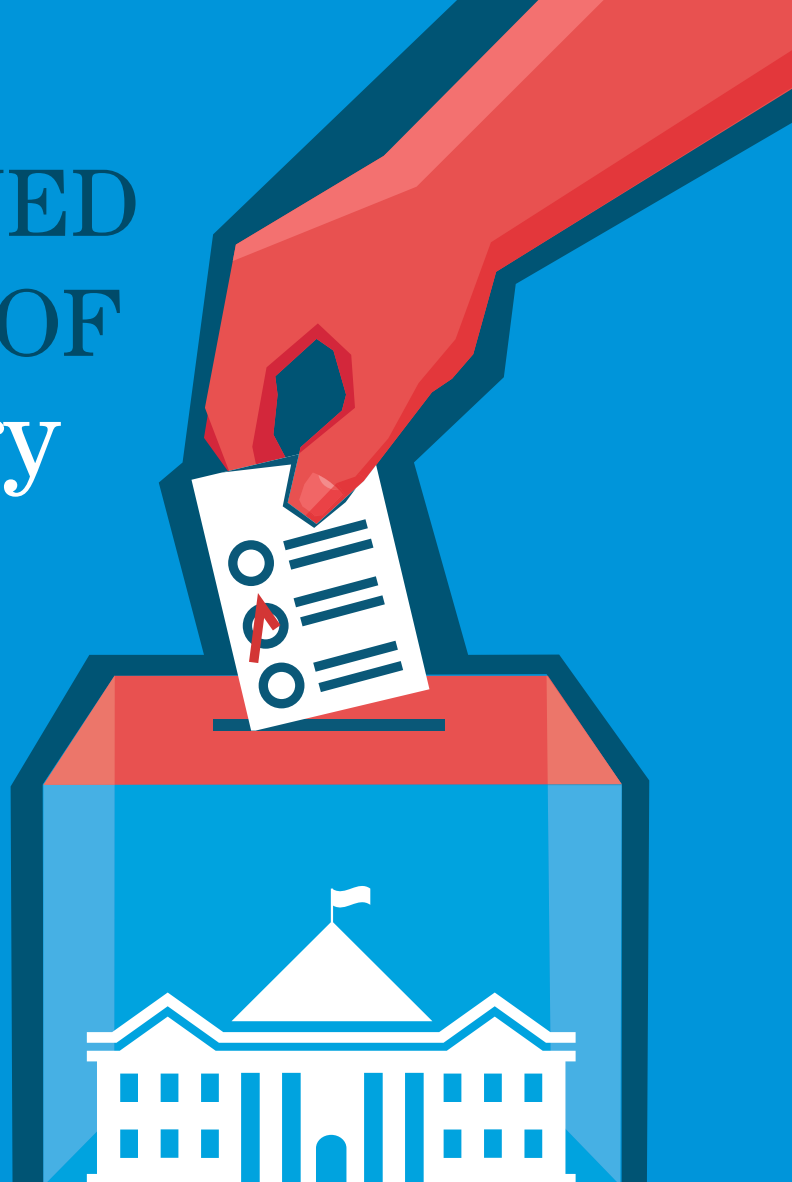
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# WHAT HAPPENED TO THE ISSUE OF postsecondary education?

**André Turcotte and  
Heather Scott-Marshall**



*Postsecondary education is an issue that affects a majority of Ontarians, but it does not often feature prominently in provincial elections. How might this issue be pushed onto the election agenda?*

*L'éducation postsecondaire est un sujet qui touche la majorité des Ontariens, mais elle n'est pas toujours un enjeu prédominant pendant les élections provinciales. Comment peut-on faire en sorte que cet enjeu soit inscrit au programme électoral?*

**E**ducation is an issue that affects a majority of Ontarians. Whether you are a parent with school-aged kids, a student currently enrolled in a school in Ontario, or an adult taking courses or contemplating taking courses to upgrade your skills, this is an issue that touches Ontarians' lives. Despite this reality, issues related to education in general, and postsecondary education in particular, rarely dominate the discourse during provincial election campaigns. From time to time, ancillary issues like faith-based school funding make an appearance in Ontario elections—to detrimental effect. We have to go back to the double-cohort issue more than 15 years ago to find an election when education occupied a dominant place in the public debate. With another provincial election looming, is there any indication that postsecondary education can be pushed onto the election agenda?

To answer this question, we conducted a public opinion study with 2,001 Ontarians over the age of 15. Data was collected between January 22<sup>nd</sup> and February 4<sup>th</sup>, 2018. One guiding assumption of our analysis is that there is a link between electoral outcomes and public policy. Another

important aspect guiding this analysis is that issues matter in influencing voters' choice at election time. Understanding the link between vote choice and issues is too often limited to top-of-mind issues, however, less salient issues can also potentially have an impact on how voters make up their mind. Postsecondary education is one such issue.

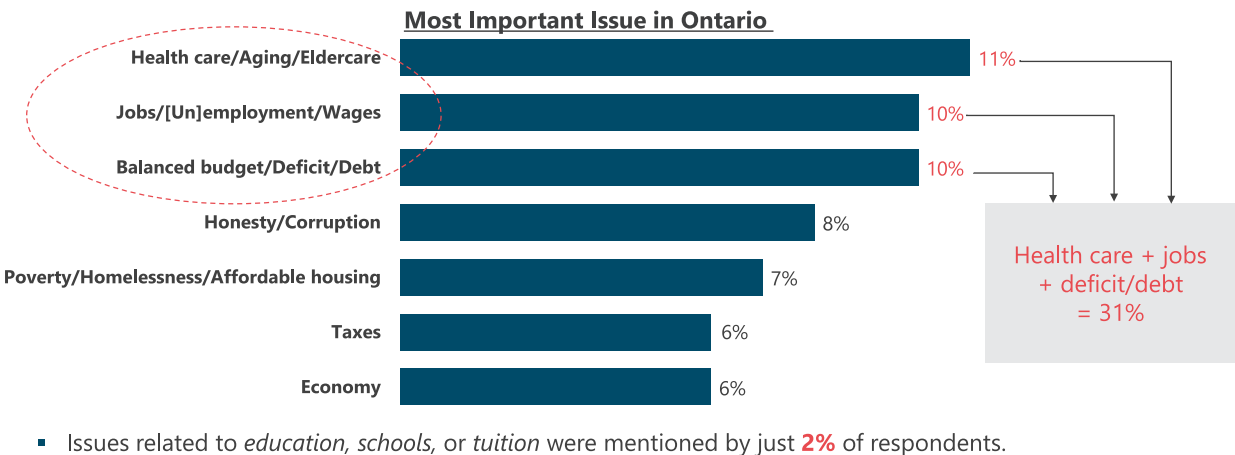
# THE MOST IMPORTANT ISSUES IN ONTARIO

As is generally the case, issues related to education are not particularly salient in Ontario at present. When asked about the most important issue facing the province, 11 per cent of Ontarians mentioned health care, slightly ahead of jobs (10 per cent), balancing the budget (10 per cent) and corruption (8 per cent). Only 2 per cent mentioned education (Table 1).

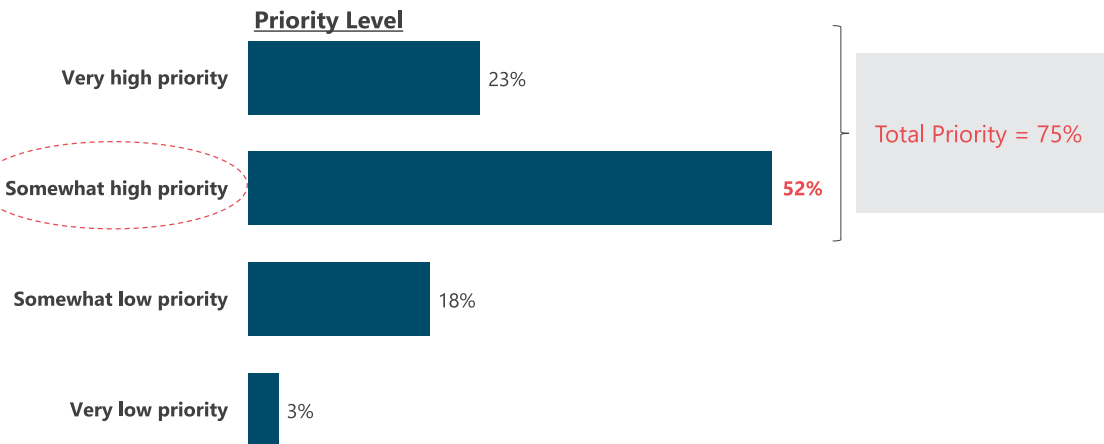
However, when queried about concerns on an issue-by-issue basis, a slightly different picture emerges. Using a 0 to 10 scale where 0 is "not at all concerned" and 10 is "very concerned", concern over *the cost of university tuition fees in Ontario* (6.5) is on par with issues such as *the level of unemployment in Ontario* (6.5) and *the adequacy of funding for Ontario's public services* (6.64) and just behind *the quality of employment in Ontario* (7.1). More importantly, 75 per cent of Ontarians believe that the quality of university education should be a high priority for the provincial government in Ontario (Table 2).

The challenge facing those who want to push postsecondary education to the forefront of the election debate is to find ways to link postsecondary education to other issues so that politicians are more likely to pay attention. The study we conducted offers a few suggestions on how to achieve this objective.

**Table 1 – Most important issue in Ontario**

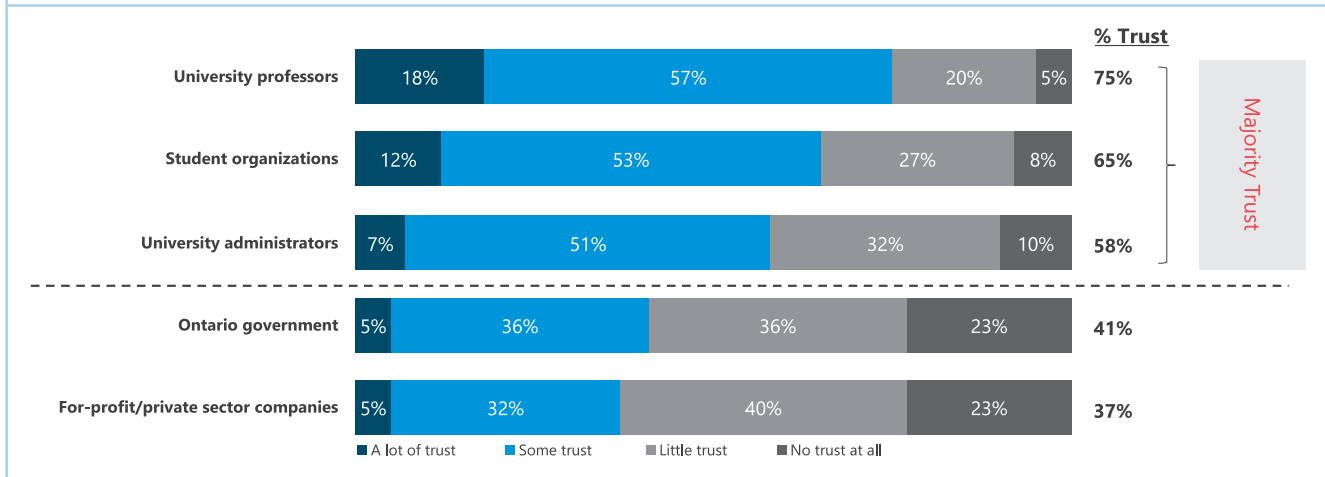


**Table 2 – Quality of university education as a priority**





**Table 3 – Level of trust: Key stakeholders**



75 per cent of Ontarians believe that the quality of university education should be a high priority for the provincial government in Ontario

## ONTARIO'S UNIVERSITIES MAKE IMPORTANT CONTRIBUTIONS

There is high recognition and support for the importance of universities in our society. Specifically, a strong majority of Ontarians agree that: *Ontario universities make an important contribution to the local economy* (80 per cent); *the scientific research undertaken by universities makes an important contribution to the provincial economy* (77 per cent); *universities provide students with a high-quality education* (76 per cent); and, having a university degree is both *more important now than it was to our parents' generation* (71 per cent) and *a necessary asset in today's world* (69 per cent).

These point to a very receptive public opinion environment within which to engage in a discussion about the importance of postsecondary education. While there may not be immediate concern about postsecondary education as an election issue, the electorate can be primed to focus on it if linkages are made between the high value Ontarians place on postsecondary education and its potential impact on issues like jobs and the economy. This is reinforced by the fact that Ontarians clearly see room for improvement on this front since only 12 per cent think the quality of university education has improved over the last five years.

## ONTARIANS TRUST UNIVERSITY PROFESSORS ON ISSUES OF QUALITY

Two more important dimensions need to be considered when looking at ways to increase the prominence of this issue during the upcoming election campaign. The first centres on finding trustworthy spokespeople. On this front, university professors (trusted by 75 per cent of Ontarians), student organizations (65 per cent), and university administrators (58 per cent) have a clear advantage over the Ontario government (41 per cent) and private sector companies (37 per cent). Findings are given in Table 3.

The second dimension to consider constitutes an obstacle that may be difficult to overcome. Despite the perceived importance of postsecondary education and the contribution it makes to our economy and society, none of the provincial parties are seen as being particularly trustworthy on this issue. When asked "which of the provincial political parties would do the best job at ensuring high-quality education at Ontario's universities?", "none of the above" is mentioned by a plurality of Ontarians (32 per cent), ahead of the Progressive Conservatives (24 per cent), the Liberals (23 per cent) and the NDP (21 per cent). Accordingly, the three main parties will likely perceive this issue as more of a minefield than as an issue that can be leveraged for electoral benefit. Only by linking postsecondary education to the other important election issues suggested above can we create a dynamic where political parties find it impossible to ignore such an important public policy domain. **AM**

*André Turcotte is an Associate Professor in the School of Journalism and Communication at Carleton University. Heather Scott-Marshall is the President of Mission Research and an Adjunct Professor in the Dalla Lana School of Public Health at the University of Toronto.*

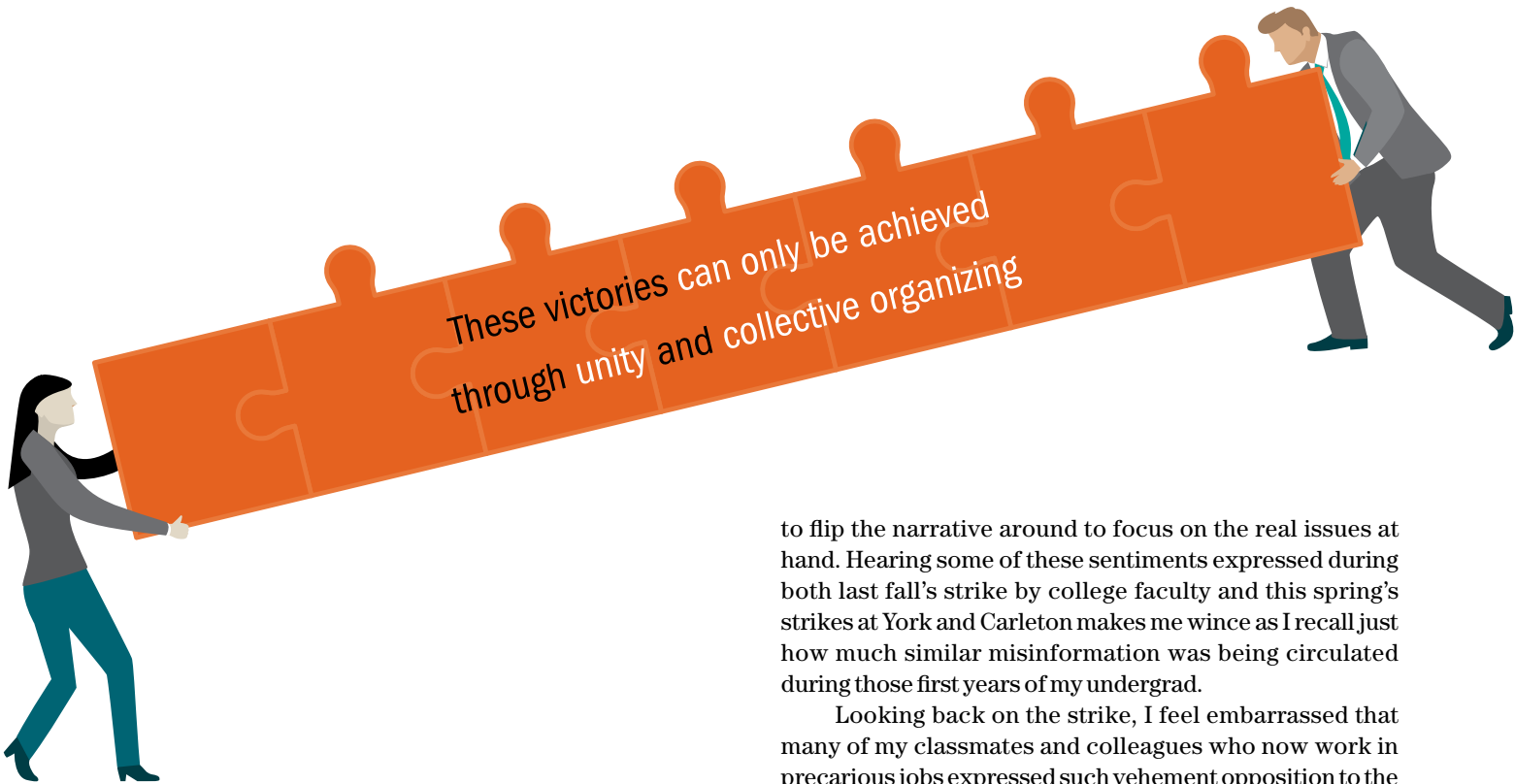
# BUILDING SOLIDARITY on Ontario's university campuses

**Nour Alideeb**

University administrations often seek to advance unpopular agendas by attempting to pit students and faculty against each other. Through campus alliances, we can develop stronger relationships that bolster our ability to advance our own priorities.

*Les administrations des universités cherchent souvent à faire accepter des programmes peu populaires en tentant de dresser les étudiants contre les professeurs. Grâce à des alliances du campus, nous pouvons tisser des liens plus solides qui favorisent notre capacité à faire progresser nos propres priorités.*





## AWAKENING

The CUPE 3902 strike in March of 2015 at the University of Toronto was my first exposure to some of the underlying issues in postsecondary education. At the time, I was a volunteer at my students' union and recently elected as the Vice-President University Affairs and Academics. It was through my involvement in my students' union that I began learning the realities faced by faculty, contract workers, and teaching assistants (TAs) while unlearning the myths so often propagated to pit students against academic workers.

Many thoughts raced through my mind as I joined concerned students to camp outside the principal's office at the University of Toronto Mississauga to show our solidarity for the striking workers. The principal sat on the floor with us and began claiming that the situation was out of his hands. The students gathered were unimpressed with his attempts at shifting the blame, but it was easier for him to do that than actually deal with our concerns.

The four-week strike was an uncomfortable time to be a student on campus, as we maneuvered through picket lines to attend classes and continue our academic lives. Reflecting on it now, I never should have crossed the picket lines, but at the time I did not understand what such an action represented (a common struggle for undergraduate students). Tensions ran high as many students turned against their TAs, claiming that they were selfish, inconsiderate of student realities, and obligated to teach because students paid their salaries through tuition fees. It was hard

to flip the narrative around to focus on the real issues at hand. Hearing some of these sentiments expressed during both last fall's strike by college faculty and this spring's strikes at York and Carleton makes me wince as I recall just how much similar misinformation was being circulated during those first years of my undergrad.

Looking back on the strike, I feel embarrassed that many of my classmates and colleagues who now work in precarious jobs expressed such vehement opposition to the actions taken by their TAs. At the time, we did not realize that their fight was our fight too.

## REALITY

Government cuts to postsecondary education funding have driven an overreliance on precarious, low-wage work, and skyrocketing tuition fees to balance institutional budgets. On campus, this results in contract faculty balancing multiple jobs at different institutions to make ends meet, and living with the uncertainty of whether or not they will have a job the following semester. Precarious, low-wage work means teaching assistants do not get paid for the additional time spent marking assignments or preparing content for students. It means that, despite students paying exorbitant tuition fees, the high-quality education promised by our institutions is being steadily eroded.

Students are no strangers to this reality. Many students juggle multiple part-time jobs, withdraw mortgage-sized loans only to pay them back with interest, and join a work force where precarious work is the norm. It's a bleak future after investing so much time and money into a post-secondary education.

The anti-worker narrative that loomed over campuses across the province in 2014 and 2015 began to shift as more students were subjected to the same working conditions as their professors, contract faculty, and staff.

I was at a loss for words when I stood outside Queen's Park with the thousands of college contract faculty unionized with the Ontario Public Sector Employees' Union (OPSEU) who were on strike. Over those five weeks in

October 2017, the number of students I saw on the picket lines, at actions, and on Facebook defending workers' right to strike was heart-warming. Students took on the responsibility of explaining how, despite their absence at the bargaining table, workers were still fighting for students' rights to a high-quality education and fair working conditions. It was then that I realized just how much had changed in the previous three years and I attribute this shift to the ground-shaking work of cross-campus solidarity groups. These grassroots organizing groups acknowledge and organize around the fact that students' learning conditions are dependent on the working conditions of those teaching and working to keep postsecondary institutions running. This symbiotic relationship implies that harm done to one will inherently affect the other and vice versa—a victory for one is a victory for all.

These victories can only be achieved through unity and collective organizing, so the support of students and community members during campus strikes and labour disputes are integral. Students, staff, and faculty at York University have mastered this method of organizing and have set the standard for other groups across the province.

## THE YORK CROSS-CAMPUS ALLIANCE

York University has always been a hub for progressive organizing and often takes stances on issues that are considered trail-blazing in the sector. This has been achieved, in part, because community members are active in the university community's cross-campus alliance. The alliance consists of faculty; undergraduate and graduate students; labour unions that represent TAs and RAs; and labour unions that represent support staff like food workers, janitorial workers, and groundskeepers. The cross-campus alliance tackles various issues affecting the community, including supporting collective agreement negotiations and working on initiatives to unionize other workers. It is the success of this cross-campus alliance that has resulted in continuous worker support during strikes, a vast majority of students at York campus support their striking TAs, and consistent pressure on the York administration. This is an environment that was missing for us during the University of Toronto strike in 2015.

## MOVING FORWARD TOGETHER

As stakeholders in a system that is often threatened by political shifts, students and faculty face an uphill battle in this provincial election—a battle that will continue long after the election is decided. Over the past few years, we have seen great improvements in labour laws and access to postsecondary education. However, we must continue the

fight to protect what we have gained and strive for the marks that were missed. We are all in desperate need of a government that prioritizes funding for public education, but more than ever we need a shift in public discourse around the value of empowering people through higher learning.

It is crucial for students and faculty associations to develop strong relationships that are rooted in our commonalities and that push us to show up publicly for each other. There are many problems plaguing our education system. This may seem intimidating, but it is an opportunity to collectively organize on a variety of issues, ranging from workers' rights to education quality to fighting discrimination to mental health resources on campus for students, faculty and staff—issues that will inspire our friends and colleagues and build an even strong sense of solidarity on campus.

Leaders in the labour and student movements have always been at the forefront of change; we must remember that together, we are stronger and united, we will never be defeated. **AM**

*Nour Alideeb is the Chairperson of the Canadian Federation of Students-Ontario.*


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# 2018 Worldviews Lecture: The challenges of free speech on campus

**At this year's Worldviews Lecture, Professor Sigal Ben-Porath addressed the increasingly heightened debate around free speech on campus. Her lecture was followed by a panel discussion that explored challenges for democratic values and minority rights in academia and beyond.**

**In her lecture, Professor Ben-Porath reflected on campus free speech controversies of recent years—from cancelled speakers to physical fights—and suggests that campuses need to reaffirm their commitment to both free speech and inclusion, with the understanding that both are tightly linked to the academic mission.**

Referring to ideas she wrote about in her book, *Free Speech on Campus*, Professor Ben-Porath presented three levels of the debate for discussion:

**Substance:** What can be talked about, and are there things that should not be said? Must universities stay neutral regarding campus speakers?

**Impact:** Are certain views too hurtful to voice? Must they be silenced to avoid negative psychological or social consequences? Are universities considering the impacts of their decisions around these issues?

**Public perception:** Campus speech debates are often inaccurately portrayed and ineffectively addressed in the media. Open inquiry and the discussion of controversial ideas are an integral part of the academic mission, even if institutional practices could be improved. How can postsecondary institutions ensure the public's understanding of their work reflects their academic mission?

Professor Ben-Porath argued that universities must become places that protect inclusive freedom, where ideas can be challenged, but where all feel safe to make their opinions heard. She distinguished between intellectual safety and dignitary safety, stating that, while university campuses are places where students should be challenged intellectually, challenging the abilities, rights, or legitimacy of a group of people (particularly those whose voices are already marginalized) actually suppresses speech. Further, she noted that the attempt to weaponize the issue of free speech actually chills speech itself.

Pointing out that debates around speech are not unique to our era, Ben-Porath argued that universities must maintain public standing as institutions that serve the broader community and public interest, not just a small group of loud voices.



# The Worldviews Lecture is a lively forum to advance mutual understanding of the relationships, challenges, and potential of the academy and media.

She concluded by stating that inclusive campus speech requires understanding:

- the existing norms for disseminating knowledge on campus (the voices and speech currently accepted);
- who is responsible for including people and speech topics;
- the resources available to community members if their expressive or dignitary needs are not being met; and
- how to ensure university campuses are spaces where a productive dialogue can be sustained.

Professor Ben-Porath's lecture was followed by a panel discussion moderated by Globe and Mail higher education reporter Simona Chiose, and which featured questions from members of the audience and those watching online.

**Jasmin Zine**, Professor of Sociology and the Muslim Studies Option at Wilfrid Laurier University, observed that allowing white supremacists space on campus to speak legitimizes their views, regardless of attempts by universities to distance themselves from the debate and claim neutrality. She argued that universities must take responsibility for the consequences of that legitimization. Professor Zine spoke of the need to distinguish between controversial speech and hate speech, and to balance speech rights with human rights. She also spoke to the emotional and intellectual labour required to counter intolerant racist and sexist speech—labour that often has to be undertaken by those already struggling to have their voices heard.

**Paul Axelrod**, author, retired York University professor, and former Dean of York's Faculty of Education, agreed with Professor Zine that Canadian hate laws should be applied on campus, but that if there are any doubts about the type of speech, we should err on the side of allowing the speech. He discussed the new dimensions of the debate, which has seen increased harassment online. He believes that the values and practices of free expression and inclusivity can and should be reconciled, and that the policies we adopt should reflect these commitments.

**Shree Paradkar**, a Toronto Star journalist who writes about discrimination and identity issues, pointed out that many of these controversial speakers already have well-established platforms, and that denying them the right to speak on campus has very little impact on their ability to make their voices heard. She argued that speech rights are far too important to be used to protect bigotry and that human rights should not be up for debate. Paradkar illustrated how free speech advocates don't come to the defense of all speech, revealing that this debate isn't necessarily about speech but about ensuring only certain groups have the right to speech.

**Scott Jaschik**, CEO and Editor of Inside Higher Ed, started by pointing out that speech laws in the United States (where there is less protection against hate speech) are very different than those in Canada, and so comparing developments in both countries can be problematic. He argued that we need to reject the idea that free speech is disappearing from campuses and that, in fact, it continues to thrive. He described how, in the US, the free speech issue is often tied to money and controversial speakers are paid to tour college campuses to promote their views.

Without the financial incentive, Jaschik argued these individuals would be far less likely to travel around disseminating their views. He also agreed with Paradkar that free speech defenders seem to be very selective about who they choose to defend. Jaschik concluded by stating that he thinks blocking speech is counterproductive, and actually boosts the notoriety of the speaker, affirming and enabling those who want to sensationalize these issues.

The full lecture and panel discussion were recorded and can be watched online by visiting the Worldviews website at:

[worldviewconference.com](http://worldviewconference.com).

## It's time to make meaningless words great again



WHEN IT COMES TO humour about public funding, there really is no way to compete with reality. The last time the basic funding model for Ontario universities was changed, the Maple Leafs were winning Stanley Cups. Read that sentence again—the Maple Leafs were winning Stanley Cups. Unless you are a scholar of ancient history, you'll probably have to Google the date.

But only a fool would advocate a wholesale budgetary revision, since the direction of change always seems to be down. Even with contract workers teaching 237 per cent of courses, funds seem perpetually short. Tuition has gone up and up, while students spend more time working for wages than ever before, which surely explains the small crowds for my lectures on Canadian wheat and nineteenth century railways.

In general, it's hard to be optimistic about the future. Although, with so many picket lines ready to be deployed, at least Woody Guthrie songs will be back in fashion.

That said, the prospect of hours doing experiential learning on cold picket lines got me thinking about new revenue streams. Like, if we could put a tax on buzzwords, half our

problems would be solved. All I hear from universities nowadays is transform, commercialize, incentivize, innovate, mobilize knowledge, and cultivate Excellence (that's Excellence with a capital "E" thank you very much), words that sound emptier than the methodology section of my last grant application.

I mean, the family swear jar has exercised a powerful hold on my children. They say a bad word, they throw their allowance in the jar, incentivizing their mouths to avoid the interesting vocabulary they pick up during sleepovers at Granny's. Perhaps the academic equivalent—let's call it the iJAR—could be strategically placed on the podium at ministerial press conferences. Not only would this incentivize the mobilization of less meaningless changicity, but university revenues would skyrocket.

Or, since conservatives like user fees so much, we could charge them two dollars for every use of the term "political correctness." Talk about meaningless words: undergrads won't even stay to the end of my lectures, but apparently I have some totalitarian ability to fill their minds with neo-Marxist postmodernism.

That doesn't even consider the amount of carbon dioxide being expelled during my cranky old-man lectures, no doubt accelerating climate change even as its existence is being discussed. Could we figure out a mechanism to regulate and monetize my hot air? Just for convenience, we'll call it Grouch and Trade.

There must be a million missed chances for new revenues, from co-branded experiential exams to transformative commercialization of empty classes through Airbnb. The list just goes on and on. But, if you want to hear those empty words, you'll have to drop a toonie in the iJAR.

I suppose that if we really want to mobilize knowledge and cultivate generalized Excellence, we could fund universities by having citizens contribute a percentage of their income to the government, based on a sliding scale, with the funds distributed to public goods based on widely shared objectives. Nah, forget it, that utopian scheme will never work. Only a Leafs fan could dream so big. ■

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