

University Funding in Ontario

A Perspective from University Support Staff

The core components of a university degree in Ontario are not limited to buildings, mortar and professors. It is the experienced, professional and dedicated staff at each university that ensures students are provided with the support services that enable them to succeed. University staff deliver vital services such as counseling, research assistance, academic, technical and administrative support, funding assistance and procurement, security, maintenance, and alumni and graduate support to students each and every day. But as enrollment in Ontario Universities has continued to grow, the funding dedicated to supporting students has not. Support structures are shrinking in the face of growing enrollment largely because university funding is neither dedicated nor transparent.

It has been OSSTF/FEESO's experience over the past several years that while funding for support staff has remained static or decreased, new management positions, which do not directly support student achievement, have been created at a significant rate over the same period. This has resulted in disconnected senior administrators and an overburdened university support staff, which in turn means diminished quality and quantity of vital student services. It is not uncommon that undergrads spend upwards of 40 hours per week on campus. While 15 to 20 of those hours are spent in lectures, discussions or labs, the balance of that time is spent in independent study and research. These students expect and require the ancillary academic and social services provided by support staff to ensure the success of their academic endeavors.

Even with enrollments higher than ever, universities are closing campuses and laying off staff. This doesn't make sense and it wouldn't be happening if funding for universities was stable, dedicated, and enhanced, because all stakeholders would then have the ability to be part of the allocation of funding process.

Two specific planks in OSSTF's Public Education Platform state that 1) the government should ensure consistent, dedicated funding for all post-secondary institutions so that student services are maintained year-over-year and that 2) funding to all levels of education should be enhanced to eliminate financial barriers for all students and allow for a full range of services to students.

Funding should be dedicated (i.e. directed to individual programs and services) so that universities are not able to starve critically needed student services by side-tracking available funding to other priorities. And funding should be transparent so that universities can be held accountable to the public as to their spending decisions. Without dedicated, transparent, and enhanced funding, the services provided by university support staff – services that lead to higher rates of student success – will be in jeopardy.

