

BEHIND THE ISSUES: Ontario 2003

Providing the quality university education our students deserve

There will be a huge surge in demand for a university education over the next decade. Some projections forecast up to 90,000 more university students will be knocking at the door by 2010.

Why? The government decided to eliminate Grade 13. Participation rates are going up. What's been called the baby boom echo generation means demographics will add to the enrollment pressure.

In the 1960s the government responded to a similar huge increase in demand by creating seven new public universities that provided a full range of programs and funding them appropriately.

How has the current government responded?

- Established one new narrowly-focused public university and expanded the mandate of community colleges to allow applied degree programs to be offered at the expense of their current diploma and certificate programs
- Promised to fund all new enrolment at the inadequate level of \$6800 per student when it costs universities almost \$14,000 to educate each student.
- Allowed private postsecondary institutions into the province, most of which have tuition levels many times higher than public institutions.
- Allowed Ontario private vocational schools - with OSAP default rates almost 4 times higher than public universities - to offer degree programs.
- Made universities less accessible to mature students, other Canadians, and community college transfer students by demanding that public universities admit the double cohort class before anyone else.

Crisis: Critical Shortage of Faculty

A recent Ekos study "Public Perceptions on Quality" concluded that "teaching is the key factor that resonates most strongly in the minds of Ontarians when

thinking about quality and the university." One of the key quality factors at Ontario universities is the interaction between students and faculty.

Recent government promises of funding increases do not begin to address the current faculty needs of the university system much less the future needs. Ontario will require 15,000 new faculty from 2002-2012 to replace retirees, accommodate increased enrolment and reduce the student/faculty ratio to a reasonable level.

- One-third of faculty members in Ontario are between the ages of 55 and 64. Replacing retirees will require more than 7,000 new hires within the next decade.
- Student/faculty ratios at universities in the rest of Canada are 15% better than Ontario. Peer jurisdictions generally boast a 35% better ratio over Ontario.
- Improving Ontario's student-faculty ratio and accommodating dramatically increased enrolment will require 8,000 new hires.

A full complement of qualified tenured and tenure-stream faculty is critical to the quality of education and the research capacity at Ontario universities.

Public Support for a Public University System

Ontario's public universities need a consistent and adequate funding base for operating, capital and research purposes. If qualified Ontario applicants are to have a realistic chance at being admitted to the public university and program of their choice, stable and sufficient government support is necessary. Rising tuition fees and private donations are no substitute for adequate government funding.

- The 2002-03 operating grant to universities was over \$15 million lower than in 1995-96. Public universities were expected to accommodate

- many thousands more students with less money.
- The real value of the operating grant dollar has eroded by about 30% because the government refuses to provide inflation adjustments.
- About 6% of university enrolment is entirely unsupported by the university operating grant costing universities over \$100 million per year.
- Substantial cuts made to the university operating grant by the Tory government in 1995, 1996, 1997, and 1998 put the system deeper into the hole. Recent funding increases have not matched the cuts to the system.
- The deferred maintenance bill is now estimated to be over a billion dollars, putting expensive infrastructure at risk.

Restore Reasonable Tuition Fee Levels

Tuition fees as a proportion of university revenue are at an all-time high level in Ontario. Over 40% of university operating income comes from tuition and related fees, an exorbitant increase from 29% in 1995. This has obvious implications for accessibility and affordability of a university degree. Higher tuition fees limit access, especially for lower-income applicants who may react differently to taking on huge amounts of debt.

- In their 1999 election platform document, *Blueprint*, the Tory government said tuition fees should account for a "reasonable and affordable" 35% of the cost of providing university and colleges courses.
- A student studying in a regulated arts and science undergraduate program at one of Ontario's universities in Fall, 2003 will pay average tuition fees of \$4,638. In 1995, the fee was \$2,451, almost double the costs in a brief eight years.
- Worse, in 1997 the Tory government decided to deregulate tuition fees for some graduate and professional programs. In 2002-03, a University of Western Ontario medical student will pay \$14,280 for one year. Several recent surveys have indicated that students from very high in-

come families increasingly form the student population in these deregulated professional programs.

- 30% of any tuition increase must be used for student financial assistance, which means that students are paying for a significant part of student aid for other students in need.

To remain economically competitive, Ontario cannot afford a public university system that is accessible only to students from wealthy families.

To ensure Ontario has a secure, high quality public university system, we need to:

- immediately freeze tuition fees and institute a five-year rollback of tuition to 20% of the average cost of offering an undergraduate degree program (about \$14,000 now);
- re-regulate unregulated tuition fees;
- restore the real value of the university operating grant by automatically raising it to match inflation;
- spend \$100 million to fund unfunded enrolment;
- increase government operating grants \$106 million immediately to allow universities to begin to address the next crisis - the impending faculty shortage and the present unacceptable student to faculty ratio;
- establish a dedicated fund of \$200 million a year to begin to bring our public universities' campuses to a state of good repair;
- return to longstanding public policy that private universities can only offer degree programs that public universities cannot or will not offer;
- provide funding to expand public universities' degree program capacity in the North, rural areas and for Francophones and Aboriginal populations.

For more information on the Ontario Alternative Budget, visit the CCPA's web site at: <http://www.policyalternatives.ca>.



Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives
410-75 Albert Street, Ottawa, ON K1P 5E7
tel: 613-563-1341 fax: 613-233-1458
<http://www.policyalternatives.ca>