

Caen Suni
Public Relations and Communications Officer
Canadian Alliance of Student Associations
Tel: (613) 236-3457 ext. 224
Mobile: (613) 868-6605
casacomm@casa.ca

Charting the Course:

A Pan-Canadian Vision for Post-secondary Education

Presented to the Council of the Federation's Summit on Post-Secondary Education

presented by:



Who are we?

We are a collective of provincial and national student organizations representing approximately 600,000 post-secondary students from across the country. Recently, our organizations met to discuss some of the many challenges facing our post-secondary education system. In the course of our discussions, it became evident that our post-secondary education system was in need of a pan-Canadian vision and a supporting dedicated federal education transfer.

In recent years, both the federal and provincial governments have introduced financial and legislative initiatives regarding post-secondary education. These investments demonstrate that post-secondary education is truly a pan-Canadian priority. Unfortunately, these initiatives have been incomplete and often unfocused. Canada's post-secondary system is currently being managed by a scattered hodgepodge of programs and initiatives that lack cooperation and consistency.

The following statement, '*Charting the Course: A Pan-Canadian Vision for Post-Secondary Education*', outlines our **3 step plan** to remedy the shortcomings of the post-secondary education system in Canada.

Partner organizations

Alliance of Nova Scotia Student Associations

Alberta College and Technical Institute Student Executive Council

Canadian Alliance of Student Associations

College Student Alliance

Council of Alberta University Students

Graduate Students' Association of Canada

New Brunswick Student Alliance

Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance

Post-secondary education is at the forefront of the public agenda, more so now than at any time in recent memory. Canadians understand the need for an improved and revitalized post-secondary education system and their governments are responding. Provincial and territorial governments across the country are introducing innovative post-secondary education policies and the newly-elected federal government has made commitments to reforming funding for higher learning as well as student assistance.

It is important that Canadians work together to improve our post-secondary system. The decision by the Council of the Federation to hold the *Competing for Tomorrow* summit is forward-thinking, and is the kind of leadership needed to begin the process of improving higher learning in Canada.

Students are united in this endeavour as well. We are a collective of eight national and provincial student organizations from across the country, representing over 600,000 undergraduate and graduate students at Canada's universities, colleges, and technical institutes. We believe that the federal and provincial governments must work with the public, students, teachers, and administrators to make Canada's post-secondary education system the best in the world. To achieve this goal, we have identified three priorities that require urgent pan-Canadian action.

1. A Pan-Canadian Accord on Post-Secondary Education

A Pan-Canadian dialogue on post-secondary education is needed in Canada. We support the Council's call for a First Ministers' Conference on the issue. The provincial, federal, and territorial governments should work towards a Canadian vision for higher learning through the development of a Pan-Canadian Accord on Post-Secondary Education.

In recent years, both the federal and provincial governments have responded to the needs of Canadians by introducing new financial and legislative initiatives aimed at improving our post-secondary education system. Unfortunately, these initiatives have often been piecemeal and unfocused. Many of the problems facing our post-secondary system are not simply a result of under-funding, but rather a lack of vision and cohesion. Various federal and provincial programs are not integrated towards a common purpose. We are guilty of spending too much time worrying about jurisdiction – or worse how to get around jurisdiction – that our efforts do not yield the results Canadians deserve.

It is clear to all parties that a Pan-Canadian dialogue on post-secondary education is desperately needed. The Council of the Federation has taken the first steps towards developing such a dialogue with this summit, and we must ensure we progress towards the goal of a Canadian vision for post-secondary education. The Council has called for a First Ministers' Conference on post-secondary education, and Canada's students strongly support this call. We are urging the Prime Minister to call such a meeting, and we hope this summit will advance this call.

Students are calling on the provincial, territorial, and federal governments to work towards developing a Pan-Canadian Accord on Post-Secondary Education. Such an accord would lay out a Canadian vision for higher learning, the objectives of such a vision, and an action plan for improving our post-secondary education. Our leaders have worked towards such visions before with the Health and Early Childhood Development Accords, and Canada's students are confident that post-secondary education will benefit from such cooperation.

2. Re-investing in High-Quality Post-Secondary Education

In order to provide quality education and to remain globally competitive, Canada must re-invest in its post-secondary education system. The Council of the Federation should support the federal government in the establishment of a dedicated post-secondary education transfer payment, which should provide the provinces and territories with adequate, stable funding to meet Canadians' need for education, training, and innovation.

To develop a more prosperous society, Canada requires a post-secondary education system of the highest quality. This is especially important as we strive to compete with other countries that are investing heavily in higher education. To ensure our post-secondary education system is the best in the world, governments must cooperate on the development of a *Pan-Canadian Accord on Post-Secondary Education*, which will lay out the vision and principles for developing lifelong learning in this country. An accord alone will not address Canadians' concerns regarding the quality of our post-secondary education system, however. A reinvestment in post-secondary funding is desperately needed.

The first step towards a solution to the funding crisis facing Canada's colleges and universities is clear. Canada's students, teachers, researchers, and administrators are united in calling for the federal government to create a dedicated transfer payment for post-secondary education. After such a transfer is instituted, it would be the responsibility of each provincial government to construct agreements with the post-secondary institutions within their jurisdiction. Canadians wish to see significant and sustainable funding to the provinces and territories to advance higher learning. While this funding should not be hampered by excessive constraints, the money should be targeted at meeting the objectives of a Pan-Canadian Accord and address the unique needs of students in each province and territory.

In the recent election, the federal government committed to the creation of a Canada Education and Training Transfer. Students are calling on the Council of the Federation to support the federal government in creating such a transfer; and, students will work to ensure that such a transfer provides stable and predictable funding for a high quality post-secondary education that is affordable and accessible to all Canadians.

3. Reform Student Financial Assistance to Improve Access and Affordability

Canada's student financial assistance system is in urgent need of reform to ensure our post-secondary education system is both affordable and accessible. Students require assistance to cover the realistic costs of their education without giving them an unfair debt load. More non-repayable targeted grants are required to ensure that all Canadians can achieve their potential, regardless of social or economic background. In order to improve our student financial assistance system, the provincial, territorial, and federal governments should work together on a holistic review of Canada's student financial assistance system.

Improved funding for post-secondary education will allow the provinces to reverse the trend of increasing tuition that has seen university and college education become increasingly unaffordable.

Skyrocketing tuition over the past decade has been the major contributor to ever-increasing student debt. Post-secondary education is seen as inaccessible to many Canadians. Individuals from low-income families are 2.5 times less likely to attend university than those from high income families, and it is those with fewer resources that are shouldering the highest student debt loads.

Improving funding and addressing tuition rates alone will not be enough to ensure affordable, accessible post-secondary education in Canada. It is due time that our country's system of student financial assistance is reviewed and reformed. It is a complicated mix of student loans, grants, scholarships, tax incentives, and savings programs delivered by both orders of government, costing over \$5 billion per year. It is a prime example of ineffectiveness due to a lack of vision and cooperation. Many programs introduced in recent years have overlapped or duplicated programs from other orders of government.

The federal government committed to reviewing the Canada Student Loans Program in the recent election. Canada's students believe that the student financial assistance regime as a whole must be reviewed. This will require the cooperation of the federal government, provincial and territorial governments, the Millennium Scholarship Foundation, and stakeholders, but it is an action that is long overdue.

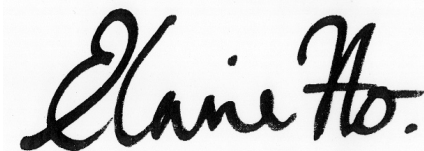
Canadians value equality of opportunity and this can only be truly achieved by supporting the idea that we should all have access to affordable lifelong learning. Students are asking the Council of the Federation to call for a pan-Canadian review of student financial assistance by the federal, provincial, and territorial governments.

We need more grants for underrepresented students such as those from low-income families and aboriginal communities. We must guarantee that students have access to financial aid that realistically covers the true cost of a post-secondary education, and are not unfairly penalized because of parental or spousal income. We must ensure that those who do rely on student financial assistance are not burdened with unreasonable debt loads. Governments should place efforts into reducing the unfair debt levels that are a reality for students studying in Canada. And above all, we owe it to Canadians to ensure their tax dollars are being spent wisely and that our student assistance programs are creating an affordable, accessible post-secondary education system.

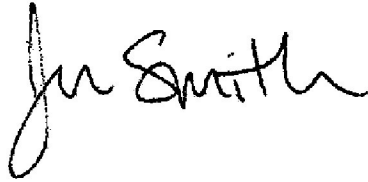
Sincerely,



Tyler Charlebois
Director of Advocacy
College Student Alliance



Elaine Ho
Provincial Director
Alberta College and Technical Institute
Student Executive Council



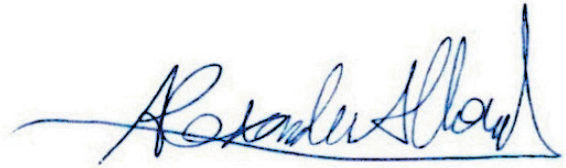
Jen Smith
Chair
Council of Alberta University Students



Scott Courtice
Executive Director
Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance



Mathieu Gazaille
Executive Director
New Brunswick Student Alliance



Alex Abboud
Executive Director
Alliance of Nova Scotia Student Associations



Jeremy Shragge
Chairman
Graduate Students' Association of Canada



Phillippe Ouellette
National Director
Canadian Alliance of Student Associations