

Dear Honourable Melanie Mark and Premier John Horgan,

My name is Samad Raza and I am the Vice President External Relations at Simon Fraser Student Society (SFSS). Today, I am writing to you with the hope of bringing an important student issue to your attention: post-secondary tuition fee increases amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.

Countless lives have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, including those of students. Many students have lost their jobs and are facing a high level of academic, mental, and financial pressure. In a time when students need as much support as possible, Simon Fraser University (SFU) has proposed to increase tuition fees by 2% for domestic students and 4% for international students for the 2021/2022 year. However, there has been little decrease in full-time equivalent (FTE) student enrollment from Fall 2019 to Fall 2020 that would impact their revenues. For students, particularly the 28.4% of SFU undergraduates that identify as food insecure and the 32% of Canadian youth that have been unemployed<sup>1</sup> during the pandemic, a 2% increase in tuition is significant. Many students are relying on student loans or their own savings and this fee increase will put greater financial pressure on students that are already at the brink. Recently, members of the SFSS voted overwhelmingly in favour<sup>2</sup> of condemning SFU for their decision to increase tuition fees amidst the pandemic. In a May 2020 SFSS survey, students reported that they felt online learning was of lower quality than in-person learning, and would not warrant an increase in tuition.

International students are particularly hard-hit by the tuition increase. International undergraduate tuition in B.C. rose by an average of 34% from 2014/2015 to 2018/2019<sup>3</sup>. Comparatively, domestic undergraduate tuition rose 11% in that same period. Despite depictions in the media of international students coming from wealth, 47% of international students do not have strong financial standing<sup>4</sup>. Nevertheless, they benefit domestic institutions and students in many ways. At SFU, international students make up just 20% of the undergraduate student population, yet they contribute to nearly 50% of the total tuition fee revenue<sup>5</sup>. At North Island College on Vancouver Island, revenue from international students allowed them to enroll an additional 688 domestic students in 2017<sup>6</sup>. Furthermore, it is not just post-secondary institutions and domestic students that benefit from international students' contributions – in 2017,

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<sup>1</sup> Statistics Canada, "COVID-19 and the Labour Market in April 2020," <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-627-m/11-627-m2020034-eng.htm>, May 8, 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Osob Mohamend, "SFSS AGM: Tuition Condemnation", Simon Fraser Student Society, 2020, <https://sfss.ca/sfss-agm-results/>

<sup>3</sup> Statistics Canada, "Canadian and International Tuition Fees by Level of Study," 2019, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=3710004501>

<sup>4</sup> Choudaha, R., & Schulmann, P., "Student Segmentation for an Effective International Enrollment Strategy", World Education Services", 2014, [wenr.wes.org/2013/09/student-segmentation-for-an-effective-international-enrollment-strategy](http://wenr.wes.org/2013/09/student-segmentation-for-an-effective-international-enrollment-strategy)

<sup>5</sup> Simon Fraser University, "Budget and Financial Plan 2019-20", Burnaby, B.C.: Simon Fraser University, 2019.

<sup>6</sup> Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services, "Report on the Budget 2019 consultation", Victoria, B.C.: The Legislative Assembly of British Columbia, 2019.



**Samad Raza** | Maggie Benston Centre 2220  
VP External Relations | Simon Fraser University  
Board of Directors | 8888 University Drive  
Burnaby, BC V5A 1S6  
vpexternal@sfss.ca | **sfss.ca**  
604-767-4890

international students contributed \$2.37 billion to the BC GDP and also helped create 31,400 jobs in the province<sup>7</sup>. However, these students are not eligible for government pandemic financial support, including the \$3.5 million provincial funding for post-secondary students during the pandemic. International students are not covered by the provincial Tuition Limit Policy, capping annual tuition increases to 2% per year. We ask the BC government to regulate international tuition fees by including international students in the Tuition Limit Policy so they can continue their studies in Canada.

In 1979, nearly 90% of operating revenue for B.C. post-secondary institutions came from federal or provincial sources<sup>8</sup>, compared to just 47.4% from both levels of government in 2018<sup>9</sup>. In 2015, tuition revenue surpassed provincial funding as the main source of operating revenue for SFU, with 36% of operating revenue coming from tuition, and 31% from the Province in 2019<sup>10</sup>. This change has put a large financial burden on students, with average student debts doubling from 2006 to 2016<sup>11</sup>. Increasing student debts are one of many factors that can affect students' education and quality of life, and more importantly, act as a barrier for them to continue their studies and ultimately obtain jobs. We ask the BC government to increase operating grants to safeguard students from financial burden.

Youth, particularly post-secondary students, have been disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic in many ways, including financially. Rising tuition fees only add to that burden. On behalf of the Simon Fraser Student Society and my fellow students, I urge the BC government to take notice of this issue and act.

Thank you,

**Samad Raza**

Vice President External Relations

[vpexternal@sfss.ca](mailto:vpexternal@sfss.ca)

Simon Fraser Student Society

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<sup>7</sup> Roslyn Kunin & Associates Inc., "An Assessment of the Economic Impact of International Education in British Columbia: An Update in 2017: Final report", presented to: British Columbia Council for International Education, 2019, [bccie.bc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Kunin-report-2019.pdf](http://bccie.bc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Kunin-report-2019.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> Igluka Ivanova, "Paid in Full Update: Who Pays for University Education in BC?", Vancouver, B.C.: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 2012.

<sup>9</sup> Canadian Association of University Business Officers, "Financial Information for Universities and Colleges: 2017/2018", Ottawa, ON: CAUBO, 2019.

<sup>10</sup> Simon Fraser University, "Budget and Financial Plan 2020/21", Burnaby, B.C.: Simon Fraser University, 2020.

<sup>11</sup> Statistics Canada, Tuition and accommodation costs (2006/2007) to (2016/2017), Ottawa, ON: Statistics Canada, 2018.