



Fact Sheet International Student Tuition Fees in Manitoba

While all students in Canada have faced dramatic fee increases over the last decade, tuition fees for international students have become particularly burdensome. In 1995, the Government of Manitoba encouraged post-secondary institutions to increase fees for international students: this was the beginning of the fee differential between international and Canadian students in the province. In 2002, the Government of Manitoba clarified for the universities and colleges that fees for international students were not subject to the tuition fee freeze. International student fees began to rise once again, and by September 2005 international students in Manitoba were paying about 100% more than their Canadian counterparts. In 2008, international students across the province are paying up to 200% more than domestic students. Although a Canadian undergraduate student pays about \$3,500 in tuition fees, an international student is charged over \$10,000 for exactly the same education. These high differential fees are an unfair burden and a barrier to post-secondary education for international students. Ultimately, such fees will threaten Canada's ability to attract and retain the skills base and ideas needed to prosper in the future.

The Root Cause: Government Underfunding

During the 1990s, tuition fees in Canada skyrocketed for both international students and Canadian residents as federal and provincial governments cut funding for post-secondary education. When accounting for population growth and inflation, federal cash transfers to Manitoba make up only 15% of funding for post-secondary education, compared to 25% in 1993. University administrators have increasingly turned to tuition fees to cover operating expenses.

In 1990, fees accounted for only 15% of revenues at most Manitoba colleges and universities. That figure has now risen to over 30% for most institutions, or as high as 50% in some programs. Governments and post-secondary institutions know that high tuition fees are unpopular with students and their families. However, because international students are disenfranchised in federal and provincial elections

and therefore have little direct political influence in Manitoba, governments and institutional decision-makers see them as an easy target for tuition fee increases. In Manitoba, tuition fees for international students have been completely deregulated, so that universities are free to exploit them as a replacement for government funding. Differential fees have thus become an important and politically convenient way of generating revenue for all colleges and universities in Manitoba.

Differential Fees: Short-Sighted and Unfair

Once international student fees began to increase, starting in 1995–1996, universities and colleges aggressively recruited wealthy international students. For the smaller post-secondary institutions in Manitoba, which are more vulnerable to changes in enrolment, this resulted in a drop in international enrolments immediately after 1995. Rather than increasing revenues through a coordinated effort to secure additional government support, post-secondary institutions used international students as a cash-grab.

Restricting Access

High tuition fees have already put universities in Manitoba beyond the reach of many international students. Low- and middle-income students, and particularly students from developing countries, face tremendous obstacles.

Continued fee increases will ultimately choke off access to universities in Manitoba for all but the wealthiest international students, and this runs counter to the principle of knowledge-sharing on which universities are founded. All eligible students should be able to attend universities and colleges, regardless of their country of origin or their ability to pay.

Undermining Diversity

International students enrich academic and social life. Differential tuition fees are a threat to the economic, intellectual, cultural, and social benefits that a diverse international student population adds to our campuses

and communities. The presence of international students in this province also provides a foundation for strengthening relationships between Manitoba and the world.

Failing to uphold Canada's International Obligations

As a wealthy country, Canada has both the duty and the material resources to provide assistance to developing countries and their citizens. Canada is a signatory to the United Nations' International Covenant on Social, Economic, and Cultural Rights, which recognises the right of everyone to education, including post-secondary education. Other countries do a better job of fulfilling these obligations. In Sweden, for example, 7.5% of students are international students, compared to less than 6% in Manitoba. Like Swedish residents, they pay no tuition fees. A similar system is in place in Norway. Honouring the Covenant should be an important part of Manitoba's contribution to the international community.

Out of Step with Manitoba's Immigration Requirements

Charging differential tuition fees ignores not only the social and cultural benefits of welcoming international students, but also the economic and fiscal contributions these residents make by paying taxes, spending in the local economy, and providing labour. It is drastically out of step with the province's long-term needs to increase barriers for international students. In fact, by 2011, it is estimated that immigration will account for virtually all labour force growth in the country. According to the federal government's research, immigrants who have previously worked or studied in Canada have the least difficulty integrating

into the Canadian workforce and prospering in Canadian society. Differential tuition fees and massive student debt create a barrier that will discourage such motivated and skilled people from studying, and possibly settling, in Canada. Nevertheless, high tuition fees work directly against the Canadian government's professed goal of building an educated, prosperous and innovative society.

Towards Full and Equal Access for International Students

The federal government needs to restore funding for post-secondary education to the provinces and implement policies and practices that reduce

the incentive for universities to rely on tuition fees as a means of generating revenue. In the meantime, Manitoba must re-regulate all fees charged to students, ensuring that international students are protected under the provincial tuition fee freeze, and end the practice of charging differential fees to international students.

In the long term, federal departments and agencies

such as Human Resources and Skills Development, Industry, Citizenship and Immigration, and the Canadian International Development Agency must co-ordinate with provincial governments and universities to develop strategies that improve access and financial support for international students wishing to study in Canada. Particular attention needs to be focused on ensuring access for international students from lower income backgrounds. Removing barriers faced by international students should be an important component of Canada's international and foreign policy objectives. Improved access for international students would also be an important step towards ensuring Manitoba's own future as a destination of choice for students and skilled immigrants.

