

Evolve.

UPEI STUDENT UNION POLICY PRIORITIES 2019-2020



2019-2020 Executive Committee

President

Emma Drake

Vice President Academic and External

Sweta Daboo

Vice President Student Life

Tessa Rogers

Vice President Finance and Administration

Keesha Ryan

Our Mission

The UPEI Student Union exists to represent the interests of UPEI students and improve the student experience at UPEI.

Our Vision

Through our efforts, students will enjoy the best possible academic and social experience while enrolled at UPEI.

Our Core Values

Integrity and Accountability: Entrusted with handling students' resources and advocating on their behalf, our employees and elected representatives will conduct themselves in an honest and ethical manner and show consistency in their actions. We commit to what we say, we take responsibility for our actions, and we will work diligently to rectify any mistakes we might make.

Openness and Transparency: Our members, staff, and the greater community want to know what is happening in our organization, and we will communicate with them in a transparent way that meets their expectations. We will practice transparency by default, even when it is uncomfortable or difficult. We believe that justification is required to keep things private, not to make them public.

Inclusivity: We represent a diverse range of students from different places of origin and with different lived experiences. We will endeavour to make our organization as accessible as possible by actively incorporating all voices and dismantling barriers to participation so that all students feel included in student life.

Evidence-led: The use of evidence enhances the quality of our work and lends legitimacy to our positions and decisions. We will rely on consultation and research to guide our work in all aspects of the organization.

Financial and Environmental Sustainability: We will conduct our operation in a fiscally and environmentally responsible manner. Meeting the needs of our current members will not compromise the ability of future members to meet their needs.

Table of Contents

Including Post-Secondary Student in the PEI Rent Supplement Program

1-2

Investment in a Post-Secondary Research and Innovation Fund

3-4

Proposal: Post-Secondary Research Fund Pilot Project

5-6

PEI Research Fund Pilot Project

7-8

Exempting Parental Income as an Asset for Student Loan Assessments

8-9

Supporting the International Student Experience

9-10

Including Post-Secondary Student in the PEI Rent Supplement Program

Principle

All students should have secure, affordable and accessible housing over the course of their studies.

Concern

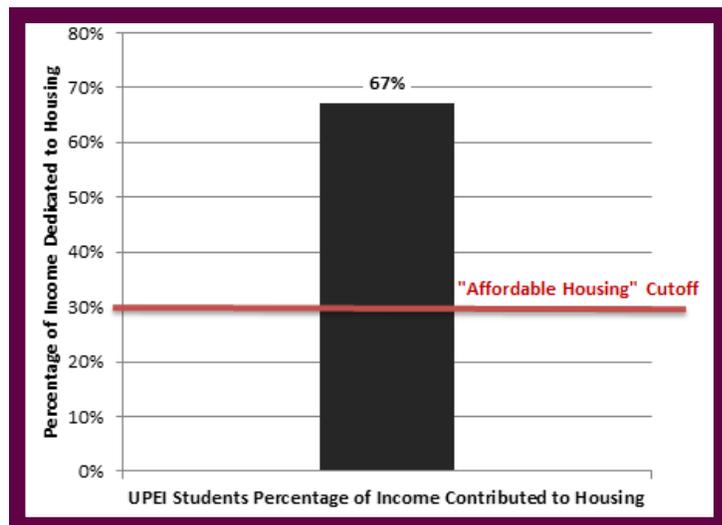
The cost of housing has consistently increased over the past few years, thereby requiring students to spend larger proportions of their income on housing.

Recommendation

That post-secondary students, as a group with low income, be included in the PEI Rent Supplement Program.

In 2018, according to a UPEI Student Union survey, UPEI students reported paying an average of \$538 on rent, which represented over 67% of the average monthly income of a student¹. The Charlottetown Youth Matters *Youth Housing Report* furthermore found on average, 65% of students spent over 30% of their income towards housing². This is over twice the 30% threshold established by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation for the proportion of one's income to be spent on affordable housing.

The 2019 Provincial Liberal and Progressive Conservative Platforms both mention rent supplements, or mobile rental vouchers, the latter directly citing "island students" as a target group for the implementation of those^{3,4}. The 2019-20 PEI Provincial Operating Budget includes a \$2.2 million investment into rent supplements.



¹ UPEISU Housing Survey. Summer 2018.

² Youth Housing Report. *Charlottetown Youth Matters*. 2018.

³ PEI liberal Platform. "*PEI is working*". Accessed in July 2019.

⁴ PEI Progressive Conservative Platform. "*It's About People*" Accessed in July 2019.

⁵ Government of Prince Edward Island. *PEI Provincial Budget 2019-20*. Accessed in July 2019

As of now, there exist two provincial housing assistance programs on PEI that incorporate rent supplements: the Senior Assistance Program and the Family Housing Assistance Program. The latter operates on a needs-based level and covers up to 80% of the market rate for rent for eligible families, as long as the individuals contribute 25% of their income to housing⁶. This focus on families automatically excludes most students. Despite the mention of island students on the platform, they are thus not eligible for housing assistance in most cases.

Numerous provinces have rent supplement programs that students are eligible for: Alberta offers “Direct to Tenant Rent Supplements” where subsidies are determined by the difference between 30% of the household’s income and market rent up to a maximum subsidy⁷. Ontario has a similar program with the “Short-Term Rent Supplement Program”. Within the Maritimes, New Brunswick’s Rent Supplement Assistance Program is available to students who occupy “crowded or inadequate dwelling” that costs less than 30% of their income while adequate housing would require more than 30% of their income, or to those who “pay 30% or more of their income for shelter and an adequate and suitable dwelling available in their market area would consume 30% or more of their income”⁸.

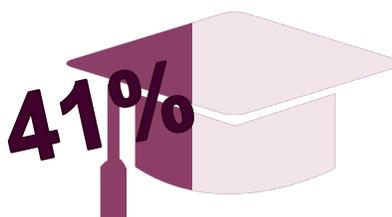
Students are in an especially precarious position financially. According to the 2018 *Demographics of Low Income* report, which is the Poverty Reduction Action Plan Backgrounder, 11.7% of youth on PEI had low income, which is the highest for any demographic⁹. This percentage is considerably higher in Charlottetown, where 17.8% of youth are in low income. Within this report, student status is recognized as a leading cause to the percentage of youth who have a low income.

Most students rely on part-time shift work to pay for their bills, which makes budgeting difficult due to the uneven distribution of shifts from month to month.

With the low vacancy rate of 0.2% in Charlottetown¹⁰, students face a lack of choice in housing thereby subjecting them to unaffordable housing just to have a roof over their heads. Housing has been identified as the second highest expense for students after tuition, thus playing a considerable role in their financial situation.



54% of the 2018 UPEISU Housing Survey respondents



41% stating their academic ability has been affected¹¹.

stated that the cost of housing directly impacted the full-time status of their studies, with

Subsequently, students’ mental health is negatively impacted.

⁶ Government of Prince Edward Island. *Housing Assistance*. <https://www.princeedwardisland.ca/en/information/family-and-human-services/housing-assistance> Accessed in July 2019.

⁷ Alberta.ca. *Affordable Housing Programs*. <https://www.alberta.ca/affordable-housing-programs.aspx>. Accessed in July 2019.

⁸ Government of New Brunswick. *Rent Supplement Assistant Program*. Accessed in July 2019.

⁹ Government of Prince Edward Island. *Demographics of Low Income*. May 17, 2019.

¹⁰ Canada. Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation. *Rental Market Report: Charlottetown CA 2018*. CMHC, 2018.

¹¹ UPEISU Housing Survey. Summer 2018.

We recommend that students, as a group with low income, be included in the PEI Rent Supplement Program, as these directly address the barrier of housing unaffordability for students.

Investment in a Post-Secondary Research and Innovation Fund

Principle

Research is a key component of post-secondary education. All post-secondary students, undergraduate or graduate, regardless of their field of study, should have access to research funding opportunities.

Concern

There are extremely limited research opportunities for post-secondary students in Prince Edward Island, none of which are provincially funded. This implies that undergraduate students are unfamiliar with research, thereby being ill-prepared to embark on graduate studies or to enter the labour market. Graduate students, on the other hand, have insufficient access to resources over the duration of their studies.

Recommendation

The Government of Prince Edward Island develop a Post-Secondary Research and Innovation Fund.

UPEI currently ranks 41st out of 50 universities when it comes to research, and this lag can be directly attributed to the very limited pickings in terms of research funding to its students¹².

On the undergraduate level, research has consistently been directly linked to student engagement and success¹³. Undergraduate research funding at UPEI is however only available via the NSERC Undergraduate Science Research Awards, the UPEI Science Undergraduate Research Awards, or the UPEI Engineering Undergraduate Research Awards. These three awards offer on average a combined 25 grants for research to students per year¹⁴. **This lack of options has two major implications:**

1. There is very strong competition every year for students of these faculties to have access to research funding.

2. There is no research funding allocated to other faculties, which comprise over 60% of undergraduate students.

Students are underprepared as to what research entails, thereby not obtaining a complete university education, and are less competitive when applying to graduate programs due to their lack of prior experience.

At the graduate level, students are eligible for very limited funding provincially. Indeed, most provincial grants are dedicated towards the obtention of a first degree or diploma, thus excluding graduate students by default.

¹² <https://researchinfosource.com/top-50-research-universities/2018/list>

¹³ Fechheimer M, Webber K, Kleiber PB. How well do undergraduate research programs promote engagement and success of students?. *CBE Life Sci Educ.* 2011;10(2):156–163. doi:10.1187/cbe.10-10-0130

¹⁴ Leslie Cudmore. UPEI Research Services.

In PEI, the only faculty recipient of dedicated funding is the Atlantic Veterinary College, as part of an interprovincial agreement within the Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission (MPHEC)¹⁵. This funding is dedicated to the functioning of the AVC, from day-to-day operations to research. The Government of Prince Edward Island introduced a “Graduate and Post-Doctoral Fellowship” Program to support innovative research on Industry-relevant projects¹⁶. This program, while promising, had several shortcomings. Firstly, its scope being restricted to very specific fields within graduate research made it inaccessible to those pursuing research in fields outside of Bioscience, Information & Communication Technology, Aerospace and Advanced Manufacturing. Secondly, the program only supported research with commercialization potential, thereby excluding those whose focus is not industry. Thirdly, and most importantly, there has not been a call for applications in over two years as of June 2019¹⁷. This program is thus inadequate in fostering research for graduate students.

As a result, Prince Edward Island is currently one of only two provinces to effectively not have dedicated provincial funding towards furthering student research.

The Government of British Columbia announced in 2018 the investment of \$12 million into a Graduate Scholarship Fund that would support 800 merit-based awards of \$15,000 for students pursuing Master’s or Doctorates. The Government of Manitoba hosts a similar program in partnership with numerous institutions such as the University of Manitoba¹⁸ and the University of Winnipeg¹⁹. These Manitoba Graduate Scholarships entitle research-based graduate students to \$15,000 over a period of 12 months.

The Province of Saskatchewan operates the Saskatchewan Innovation and Opportunity Scholarship program via a fund-matching model for post-secondary institutions²⁰.

Here, the province matches the monies raised by the University for scholarships that may be made available for innovative research pursued by students in Undergraduate or Graduate levels²¹. The Ontario Student Assistance Program furthermore offers the Ontario Graduate Scholarships, where eligible students may receive \$5000 per consecutive term for up to 6 consecutive terms over a 2-year period²² to undertake research. In this program, the province pays two-thirds of the cost of the scholarship and the institution matches the remaining third²³.

Other provinces collaborate with or fund research and innovation agencies that administer scholarships to students undertaking research at post-secondary institutions. The Alberta Innovates agency, for instance, funds Graduate Student Scholarships for students in the fields of Information and Communications Technology, Nanotechnology and Health²⁴. *Les Fonds de Recherche du Québec (The Québec Research Funds)*, funded by the Government of Québec, provide scholarships to students undertaking research in three areas: Health²⁵, Society and Culture²⁶, and Nature and Technology²⁷.

¹⁵ <http://www.mphhec.ca/funding/Veterinary.aspx>

¹⁶ Government of PEI. <https://www.princeedwardisland.ca/en/information/innovation-pei/graduate-students-and-post-doctoral-fellowship>

¹⁷ Phone call with Innovation PEI. June 27, 2019.

¹⁸ https://umanitoba.ca/faculties/graduate_studies/funding/605.html

¹⁹ <https://www.uwinnipeg.ca/graduate-studies/funding/uw-fgs-awards/the-mgs/index.html>

²⁰ <http://publications.gov.sk.ca/documents/139/79351-Saskatchewan%20Innovation%20and%20Opportunity%20Scholarship%20Administrative%20Guidelines%202018.pdf>

²¹ Ibid

²² <https://osap.gov.on.ca/OSAPPortal/en/A-ZListofAid/PRDR019245.html>

²³ <https://gradstudents.carleton.ca/awards-and-funding/external-awards/ogs/>

²⁴ <https://albertainnovates.ca/funding-post-secondary-investments/>

²⁵ <http://www.frqs.gouv.qc.ca/en/bourses-et-subventions>

²⁶ <http://www.frqsc.gouv.qc.ca/en/bourses-et-subventions>

²⁷ <http://www.frqnt.gouv.qc.ca/en/bourses-et-subventions>

We recommend the Province of Prince Edward Island create a post-secondary research fund to support students in their research endeavours and ensure they are up to par with other students from across Canada.

Proposal

Post-Secondary Research Fund Pilot Project

Research is one of the pillars driving innovation and real-life application of academic concepts. Its impacts include industry reinvigoration, discovery and societal progression. The UPEISU has thus developed a pilot project proposal based off of programs in different provinces, as well as existing research programs at UPEI.

Les Fonds De Recherche du Québec Research Grant Examples

Undergraduate Introduction to Research Scholarships²⁸

This grant aims at stimulating research interest in students, and provide financial assistance to the best candidates so they can dedicate themselves fully to university research over the course of the grant.

This grant is targeted to full-time undergraduate students having completed at least two years of university courses. Successful students then dedicate themselves full-time to research over the summer for research in the fields of social sciences, humanities and arts.

Grant Amount
\$5,000

Number of Recipients
2 per year

Duration: A full summer

Criteria:

- 1.** Any student residing in Québec for at least 6 months, having completed two years' worth of university courses.
- 2.** Full-time enrollment in classes for at least 2 semesters prior to the application

²⁸ Undergraduate Introduction to Research Scholarships. Fonds de recherche Société et Culture. Summer 2019. <http://www.frqsc.gouv.qc.ca/bourses-et-sbvventions/consulter-les-programmes-remplir-une-demande/bourse?id=mp20f1nx1548878785181>

Grants for Summer Research ²⁹

Grant Amount
\$5,000

Number of Recipients
1 per institution

Duration: Full- or part-time
over ten weeks

This grant aims at initiating students into research in the fields of physical sciences, mathematical sciences, and engineering. While the research has to be within these realms, the students can themselves be full-time students in any field, including Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences.

Criteria:

- 1.** Non-graduating full-time undergraduate students

Ontario Graduate Scholarships Program ³⁰

This grant is awarded on a merit-basis to students enrolled in a full-time graduate program in an Ontario post-secondary institution.

Criteria:

- 1.** Full-time enrollment for at least 2 terms for the year of application .
- 2.** Enrollment in one of approved Ontario schools

Grant Amount
\$5,000 per term

Number of Recipients
Undisclosed

Duration: A maximum of 2 years for Masters students and 4 years for Doctorate students

British Columbia Graduate Scholarship ³¹

Grant Amount
\$15,000

Number of Recipients
800 Over three years

Duration: One year

These are graduate scholarships open to students of any field of study. There is an emphasis on STEM and research for Indigenous students.

Criteria:

- 1.** Full-time enrollment in a graduate program at one of the ten approved BC institutions

²⁹ Bourse pour stages d'été au collégial. Fonds de recherche Nature et Technologies. Summer 2019. <http://www.frqnt.gouv.qc.ca/en/bourses-et-subventions/consulter-les-programmes-remplir-une-demande/bourse/bourses-pour-stages-d-ete-au-collegial-m2neb0ew1554817029093>

³⁰ OGS. Ontario Student Assistance Program. Fall 2019. <https://osap.gov.on.ca/OSAPPortal/en/A-ZListofAid/PRDR019245.html>

³¹ British Columbia Graduate Scholarship. University of British Columbia. Fall 2019. <https://www.grad.ubc.ca/awards/british-columbia-graduate-scholarship>

PEI Research Fund Pilot Project

What?

Proposal Amount : \$75,000

Breakdown of costed proposal ask:

1. Graduate Research Scholarships

These would be grants available to students starting or continuing a full-time Master's or Doctorate Program at UPEI. It is not meant to replace any stipends or other financial assistance already received by the students.

Graduate students undertaking research are subjected to long hours whereby they are often unable to pursue employment alongside their studies. These research grants aim to facilitate focus on research by alleviating financial strain on students.

Grant Amount: \$5,000

Number of Recipients: 6 for the Academic Year

Duration: An academic term

Criteria: Full-time graduate students not having already received this grant in the same Academic Year.

2. Undergraduate Summer Research Scholarships

As of now, only students in the faculties of science and engineering have access to research funding over the summer. These grants, which can be internal Undergraduate Research Awards, or NSERC Undergraduate Science Research Awards, are extremely competitive and exclude students from all other faculties at UPEI.

Undergraduate Summer Research Scholarships would provide students with research opportunities at the undergraduate level, providing them with an immersion in their field of interest and making them more competitive when it comes to graduate program applications. It would also increase accessibility to education by ensuring students do not have to choose between advancing their academic pursuits and employment.

Grant Amount: \$5,000

Number of Recipients: 4 per summer

Duration: 12 weeks over the summer

Criteria: Full-time third-or fourth-year undergraduate students from any faculty at UPEI, who have been approved to carry out research under the supervision of a UPEI Faculty member.

3. Undergraduate Research Awards

These would be awards allocated to students pursuing research during the Fall or Winter semesters for credit. These can be in the form of Directed Studies courses, Honours Research, or other upper level research courses.

As of now, there is limited or no assistance available to students who choose to pursue research as part of their academic endeavours. Considering these courses require significant amounts of time and energy to undertake, these scholarships would ensure compensation of resources put in.

Grant Amount: \$3,125

Number of Recipients: 8 per year

Duration: 12 weeks of part-time research

Criteria: Full-time undergraduate students from any faculty at UPEI, who are undertaking research courses.

Who?

We recommend these grants be administered by UPEI Research Services as the department is equipped with an understanding of the programs and courses. They also already have systems in place for grant administration and application evaluation.

How?

Students would apply by submitting a resume, description of the research being undertaken, as well as a letter of support from their supervisor.

The UPEISU sees the value of investing into research and innovation in terms of enabling students obtain a deeper understanding of their fields of study. This is an investment with enormous payback in terms of economic growth and the development of a qualified, skilled workforce.

Exempting Parental Income as an Asset for Student Loan Assessments

Principle

Parental contributions should not be assumed assets to a student's post-secondary education.

Concern

Parents from low- and middle- income families are expected to contribute to their child's post-secondary education. This is unrealistic in the current economy.

Recommendation

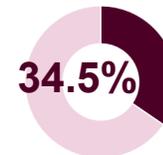
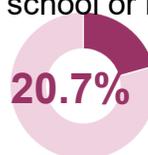
That the Government of Prince Edward Island no longer consider or assume parental income when carrying out student loan needs-based assessments.

As of now, the Province of Prince Edward Island includes parental income as an asset for provincial student loan needs assessments. **This is poor practice as it makes 3 major assumptions:**

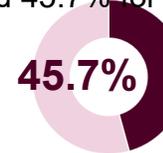
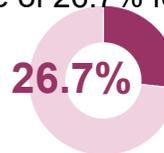
1. That parents value post-secondary education as an investment and are willing to contribute to that investment.
2. That parents are willing to contribute to their child's education and still consider them to be their dependent.
3. That parents are able to afford contributions to post-secondary education.

Assuming that parents value post-secondary education is dangerous as it paves the way to systematic differences in educational attainment based on parents' educational backgrounds.

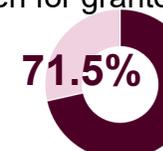
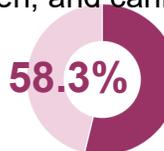
Only 20.7% of young men and 34.5% of young women will participate in university if their parent(s) had an education which ended with high school or less³².



Those with parent(s) who had a college level education attained a university education at a rate of 26.7% for men and 45.7% for women.



Students whose parent(s) attained a Bachelor's degree had an attainment rate of 53.8% for men and 71.5% for women³³. Parental contributions depend on the value given, and cannot be taken for granted.



³² Access and Barriers to Postsecondary Education. CSSHE (2015) (p. 235)

³³ Ibid

Whether or not parents value post-secondary education, they contribute much less to post-secondary education than in the past. In 1965, parents contributed 29.4% of their child's student income. By 2002, that had dropped to just 15%. In addition, family loans have dropped to 1.95% of a child's student income³⁴. Furthermore, as of 2009, the average household on Prince Edward Island was only contributing 5.8% of their household expenditures to tuition fees³⁵. As of 2016, the average PEI household contributed less than 1% of their household expenditures to tuition³⁶.

The third point in particular, expecting parents to afford to help pay for tuition, is damaging. This manifests itself in university participation differences between income brackets: **47.1% for the lowest quintile versus 78.7% in the highest quintile**³⁷.

Much better practice exists in Alberta, where parental contributions to post-secondary education are input on a voluntary basis as opposed to being assumed³⁸. This provides a much clearer assessment of the needs and contributions to the student's education, and ensures that students are receiving the aid they require. The Canada Student Loans Program has, as of 2015, scaled back the expected parental contribution, thereby recognizing the decreased contributions of parents.

Not being eligible for government loans leads to students resorting to private loans to finance their education, which have higher interest rates, and place students in vulnerable positions.

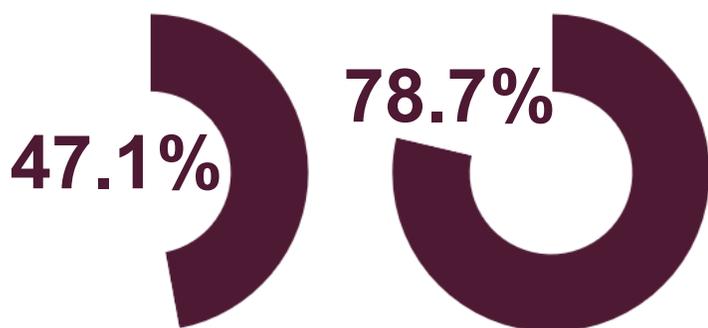
³⁴ The More Things Change...: Undergraduate Student Living Standards After 40 Years of the Canada Student Loans Program. (2004) (p. 11)

³⁵ Survey of household spending (Table 2): Statistics Canada. (2009)

³⁶ Survey of household spending: Statistics Canada (2016)

³⁷ Postsecondary Enrolment by Parental Income (StansCan 2017)

³⁸ Alberta Student Aid. <https://studentaid.alberta.ca/before-you-apply/what-you-contribute/>. Accessed October 2019



We recommend that the Government of Prince Edward Island no longer assume parental contributions in student loan needs assessments.

Supporting the International Student Experience

Principle

International students in Prince Edward Island should be supported throughout their studies to ensure a positive academic and social experience.

Concern

There are insufficient resources available for international students in post-secondary institutions on PEI, thereby leading to difficult integration into the community and obstacles in the pursuit of studies.

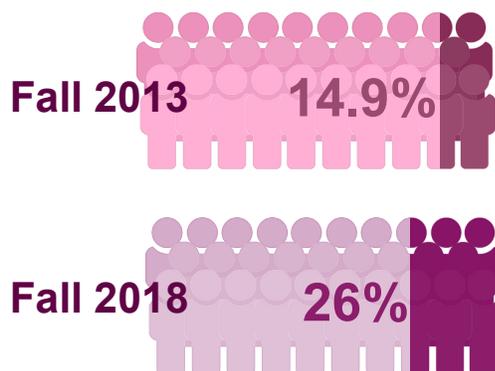
Recommendation

That the Province invest in a per-student funding model allocated to supporting the improvement of the international student experience in post-secondary institutions on Prince Edward Island.

The number of international students at UPEI has doubled over the last five years. In the Fall of 2013, there were 598 international students enrolled at UPEI, representing around 14.9% of full-time students³⁹. In the Fall of 2018, this number had reached 1211 students, or 26% of the student body⁴⁰.

This is an upward trend that can be expected to increase over the next few years as well, as international recruitment is prioritized at UPEI. In October 2018, for instance, post-secondary institutions received \$1.5 million in government funding to recruit more international students⁴¹.

Recruitment to more countries implies a diverse student body with different backgrounds, but also different needs. While recruitment has seen the attribution of considerable resources, however, the same cannot be said for supports after arrival to UPEI.



³⁹ UPEI by the numbers 2013.

⁴⁰ Neatby, Stu. "UPEI, Holland College to receive \$1.5M to help keep more international students in the region". The Guardian. October 10, 2018.

⁴¹ Yarr, Kevin. Williams, Nicole. "PEI schools get \$1.5M for International student recruitment". CBC. October 10, 2018.

The International Student Office currently counts two International Student Advisors for all International students, representing a ratio of over **1:605**. This skewed ratio implies a long waiting period when accessing visa or study permit advice or immigration support, especially at peak times of the year. Not only does this put advisors in a high-stress situation where they have to deal with numerous issues a day, but it also makes students vulnerable in cases where they require timely assistance.



One of the cornerstones in facilitating the integration of international students into the campus community is events and programming. Existing programs on campus are increasingly popular, with high registration and retention. One example of this, the International Buddy Program, sees the pairing of a new International student with a returning student so as to provide them with a friendly face on campus who would support them in their transition to university life.

As of Fall 2019, this program has around 250 students registered, with consistent high participation. This is a 150% increase from 2017, when the number of students involved was around 100⁴². This increased participation requires significantly more resources than in previous years to run smoothly.

The international student population at UPEI is expected to represent 30% of the student body by 2020. International students bring in considerable cultural and economic capital, with each student contributing around \$39,400 per year to the PEI economy⁴³. Currently, 85% of international students leave PEI after their studies⁴⁴. There are a number of factors explaining this, one of which is the lack of integration in the campus community⁴⁵. It is imperative that these students are adequately supported, should we wish to retain them after graduation and have access to a young and qualified workforce.

⁴² Campbell, Malcolm. "Easing the transition: UPEI buddy program aims to help international students". CBC. August 26, 2017.

⁴³ Pinfold, Gardner. The Economic Impact of International Students in Atlantic Canada. Council of Atlantic Ministers of Education and Training (CAMET). February 2018.

⁴⁴ "While some remain, most international students leave P.E.I. after graduating". The Guardian. July 10, 2018.

⁴⁵ Esses, Victoria. Sutter, Alina. Ortiz, Alejandro. Luo, Ning. Cui, Jean. Deacon, Lisa. Retaining International Students in Canada Post-Graduation: Understanding the Motivations and Drivers of the Decision to Stay. Canadian Bureau for International Education. June 2018.

We recommend that the Province invests in a per-student funding model allocated to supporting the enrichment of the international student experience in post-secondary institutions on Prince Edward Island.



Sweta Daboo
VP Academic and External
vpax@upeisu.ca

Emma Drake
President & CEO
president@upeisu.ca