



Prosperity:

**UPEI Student Union
Policy Priorities
2016-2017**

Introduction

The UPEI Student Union is the only student-driven organization in Prince Edward Island that dedicates resources to the advancement and improvement of post-secondary education at both the provincial and federal levels. Additionally, it is the sole collective voice for students recognized by the UPEI Board of Governors, the governing body of this post-secondary institution. At the UPEISU, a grassroots approach is taken in order to identify the pressing concerns that face a membership of roughly 3,800 full-time students. Policy consultations are held by the UPEISU annually, at which the general membership is invited to come together for a large-scale consultation and collaboration session. Students also have the opportunity to submit policy proposals to the UPEISU.

Led by the UPEISU Vice-President Academic & External (VPAX), these sessions reveal a variety of issues and potential solutions that the membership would like the UPEISU to pursue. Following the annual consultation and collaboration session with the membership, the VPAX and a team of students review the results and determine the overarching issues currently facing students. A proposed timeline for research and policy is then presented to the UPEISU Student Council, the governing body of the organization. Should the student council approve the proposal, the VPAX then pursues the research and development of the policies that subsequently become priorities in the organization’s lobby efforts.

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About the UPEISU

Our Mission:

The UPEI Student Union is a non-profit democratic representation of students. We are dedicated to fostering pride in the university, the betterment of university life, and enhancing the student experience at UPEI. We value our independence as an organization while maintaining effective relationships with the university and surrounding community.

Our Vision:

As a unifying body, the UPEI Student Union strives to provide leadership while assisting students as they obtain the highest standards in their academic and personal life; enhancing their quality of life now and into the future.

Our Values:

Providing representation for all students while remaining transparent, honest, and accountable.

Promoting sustainable environmental, financial, and social progress with an emphasis on the participation and engagement from our members.

UPEISU 2015-2016

Executive Team

President & CEO:

Nathan Hood

VP Student Life:

Kaylee Jabbour

VP Academic & External:

Johnathan Rix

VP Finance & Administration:

Clayton Smith

Executive Summary

The UPEI Student Union represents approximately 3,800 full-time students at the University of Prince Edward Island. Being that a post-secondary education is a necessity for our success in the labour market today, we want to ensure that public policy decisions are being made with our student's best interests in mind.

It is the opinion of that UPEI Student Union that issues exist within post-secondary education, and while we continue to make strides in the right direction, we need continual progress to create prosperity in Prince Edward Island. For example, PEI has one of the highest rates of youth unemployment in the country. If students are going to be making investments in education to further themselves, there needs to be viable job opportunities available post-study, and they need to feel like they are ready for the workforce. The Province should get involved and ensure that students are being supported with successful transitions into the workforce.

Secondly, with the expansion of needs-based grants in other provinces and with the Government of Canada, it is time for Prince Edward Island to review current bursary programs and move towards a more progressive option, putting money in the hands of those who need it most. Lastly, PEI can make huge strides in the area of providing Open Educational Resources, which will allow for innovative teaching, and cause a reduction in textbook costs.

The Government of Prince Edward Island had done a good job moving forward with the promises made in the 2015 election, but prosperity will require going beyond election promises and taking a deeper look at issues affecting students.

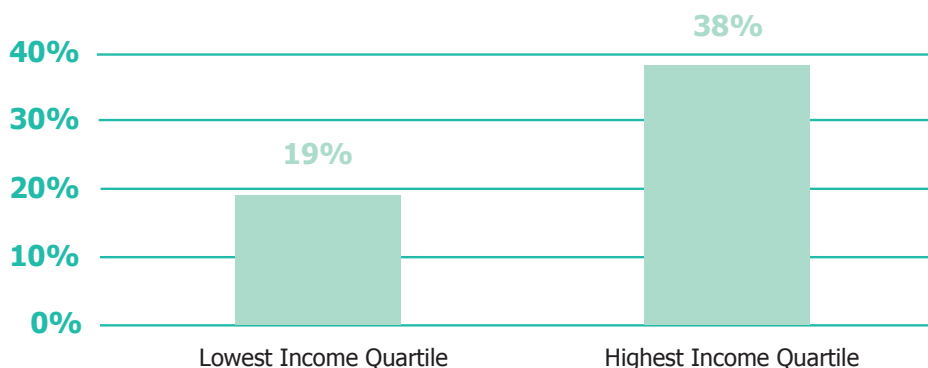
Accessibility

The UPEI Student Union believes that any student in Prince Edward Island who is capable and desires to obtain a post-secondary education should be able to do so regardless of their socio-economic background. Unfortunately, participation in University has been much higher for those from higher income backgrounds with only 19% participating from the lowest income quartile in Canada, compared to 38% from the highest income quartile ¹. In order to address this gap, governments have been trying to find ways to increase accessibility to higher education. For example, the Government of Canada just increased its contributions to the Canada Student Grants by 50% for low and middle income families ². The Government of Ontario also announced the Ontario Student Grant that will be providing enough money in the form of grants to students from family incomes of less than \$50,000 to cover the entire cost of their education through non-repayable aid ³.

A couple of months after that, the Government of New Brunswick announced the Tuition Access Bursary with a threshold of \$60,000 ⁴. 2016 has been a big year in Canada for the increasing the accessibility to post-secondary education.

In Prince Edward Island, we have the George Coles Bursary which provides financial aid to Island students who remain in Prince Edward Island for post-secondary after the completion of high school. One of the problems with the George Coles Bursary is that it provides aid to everyone, regardless of whether they need the aid or not. One could argue, that it would be much more effective to take the money in the program and target it to those who need it most. The upfront aid is nice for students from low-income families in the first year of University, but the decrease in support for second and third year can be a lot to handle. A provincial needs-based grants system would be money better spent for the Province of Prince Edward Island.

University Participation Rate



¹ Participation in Post-Secondary Education: Evidence from the Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics (StatsCan2005) (p. 15)

² Budget 2016 - Help for the Middle Class. Avail: <http://www.budget.gc.ca/2016/docs/plan/ch1-en.html>

³ "New Ontario Student Grant" Avail: <https://www.ontario.ca/page/new-ontario-student-grant>

⁴ "Tuition Access Bursary (TAB): Avail: http://www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/departments/post-secondary_education_training_and_labour/promo/TAB.html

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Now - what about the dip in support for middle income families who currently benefit from the George Coles Bursary? The Government

of Canada has addressed this problem by changing the way we assess someone's need for financial aid. Essentially, grants will be assessed on family income, but all other financial aid will be assessed on a flat rate contribution rather than pre-study, and in-study incomes. If a student contributes a certain amount to their education, they will receive the appropriate financial aid. One more very important note, the George Coles is currently not extended to graduate students in the Province, and with the changing federal government policy (the cancellation of tax credits, and no extension of Canada Student Grants to them), graduate students in Prince Edward Island will soon have little to no financial aid from government. This is a situation that needs to be addressed immediately by government.



The UPEI Student Union recommends:

That the Government of Prince Edward Island either create a new program, or modify existing programs, to provide needs-based financial grants.

That the Government of Prince Edward Island replace all current needs assessments for student loans with a flat-rate contribution.

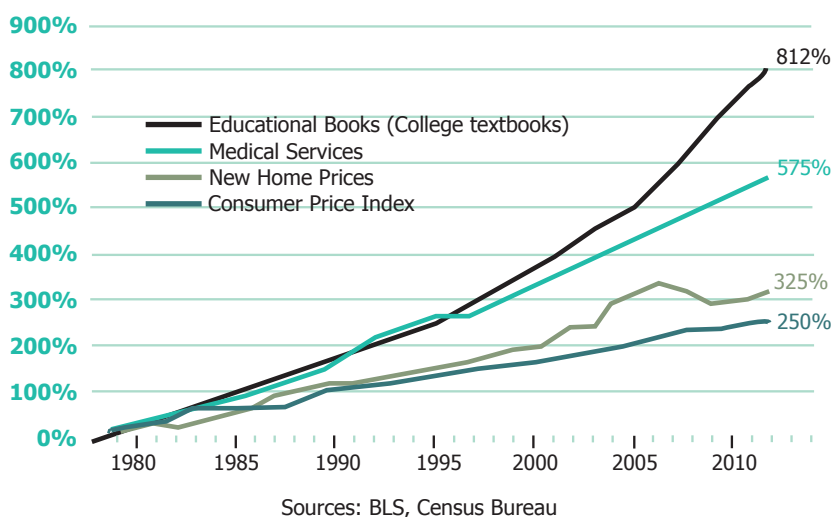
That needs-based financial grants be extended to graduate students.

Affordability

The cost of traditional educational resources, such as textbooks and academic journals, have long been known to have very high costs. More alarming, however, is the rate at which these costs are increasing. In the United States, textbook costs have risen at triple the rate of inflation since 1978 ⁵. This trend is echoed in Canada: according to a University of Alberta Students' Union study, textbook prices have increased at a rate 2.8 times higher than that of inflation from 1995 to 2007 ⁶. Textbooks are not the only educational resources suffering from hyperinflation: from 1986 to 2004, North American research library spending on academic journals increased by 273% ⁷. This is a problem because a study in the United States found that over 75% of students do not buy all their required texts. A similar study found that the rate was 83% in the UK. It would not be unreasonable to assume that Canada would have similar rates.

What do we do about this? The Government of Prince Edward Island and the University of Prince Edward Island need to buy into the Open Educational Resource (OER) movement. Open Educational Resources are teaching and learning materials that are freely available online for everyone to use, whether you are an instructor, student, or self-learner. The UPEI Student Union believes at the very least; all first year courses should be taught using Open Educational Resources. Generally speaking, first year courses are considered survey courses and the material that comes with them is broad, common knowledge, to the point it is not anyone's intellectual property. The information can easily be assembled at low cost or free.

Percent Change Since 1978 for Education Books, Medical Services, New Home Prices, and CPI



⁵ "The college textbook bubble..." American Enterprise Institute: Mark Perry. Avail: <http://www.aei-ideas.org/2012/12/the-college-textbook-bubble-and-how-the-open-educational-resources-movement-is-going-up-against-the-textbook-cartel/>

⁶ "A textbook case of sky-high prices" The Ottawa Citizen. Avail: <http://www.canada.com/ottawacitizen/news/city/story.html?id=c28b9b6a-8f13-48e6-8622-d8b99100cf5f>

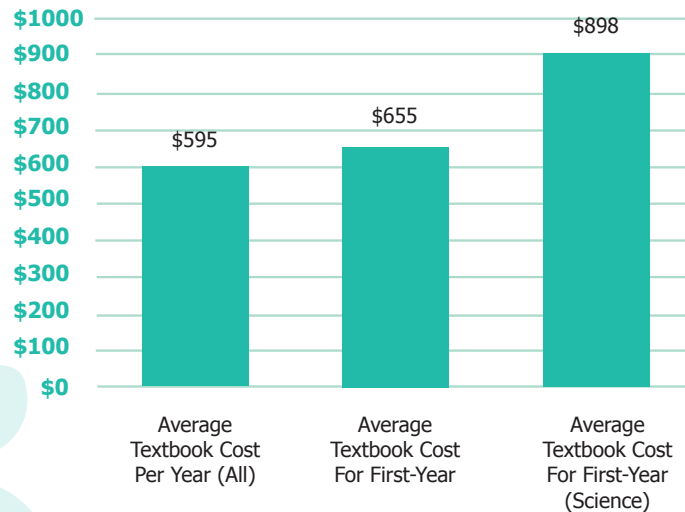
⁷ "CASA Policy Statement: Open Educational Resources

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An incredibly successful initiative called the "Open Textbook Project" was adopted in British Columbia in 2012. The Open Textbook Project is funded by the BC Ministry of Higher Education and is managed by an organization called BCcampus. The open textbooks in BC are openly licensed a Creative Commons license so they can be offered free of charge. Since the adoption of this government-funded initiative, BCcampus has had their open textbooks adopted by 28 educational institutions, used by 14,311 students, and had amounted to roughly \$1.8 million is savings for BC students ⁸.

Such an initiative, as shown in British Columbia, requires significant buy-in from both government and post-secondary institutions.

Textbook Spending at UPEI



The UPEI Student Union recommends:

That the Government of Prince Edward Island fund an Open Textbook Project to ease the cost of accessing educational resources.

⁸ Open Textbook Stats. BC Open Campus. Avail: <https://open.bccampus.ca/open-textbook-stats/>

Accountability

Education does not come cheap, and most students are attending post-secondary education with the plan of entering the workforce following their studies. However, students are also accumulating student debt at a record rate, while simultaneously facing discrimination in the labour market. PEI's youth unemployment rate stood at 15.7% in December 2015, 50% higher than the general unemployment rate at both the provincial and federal levels ⁹. That's just the unemployment rate, which would likely be less than the underemployment rate. Equally as alarming, is the rate of young Canadians engaging in non-permanent jobs with no pensions, health benefits, or advancement opportunities. This grew from 6.9% in 1997 to 11.6% in 2012 ¹⁰. Although there are no clear statistics, it would be reasonable to assume that the provincial rate is equal or higher than the national rate, especially given the disparity between other provincial and national figures like the unemployment rate.

There is an identifiable group in OECD countries, Canada included, that have been called the Poorly Integrated New Entrants or PINEs. This group of young people are educated and qualified enough to gain employment, but find difficulty integrating into the labour force. They slip between temporary jobs and unemployment, even when the economy is showing signs of growth. Prince Edward Island is no exception to this ¹¹.

Addressing the PINEs issue can be done in two ways. First, the development of experiential learning opportunities such as co-op and internship placements that students can undertake while in-study. Second, creating an incentive for the private sector to re-invest in training for our workforce.

Co-ops and internships have long been considered an effective way of teaching students real world skills that will be applicable in the workforce. The classroom is a place where experiential learning happens, but when students get to leave the classroom for such opportunities learning becomes more powerful, according to the University of Texas ¹². However, in doing so, the Province and UPEI should avoid the temptation to turn towards unpaid internships. Unpaid interns are not provided with the same high quality experience as paid interns. According to the National Association of Colleges and Employers in the United States, only 37% of unpaid interns receive a job offer following their Bachelor's degree, compared to 63% of paid interns ¹³. Currently, there is nothing in the labour code specifically protecting young people from the problems that can arise with unpaid internships. The UPEI Student Union believes that Prince Edward Island should create a six-point test like Ontario, to determine whether an intern must be paid or not ¹⁴.

⁹ "A Report by the Youth UnDERemployment Committee. Access: <http://scasey.liberal.ca/files/2016/03/Youth-UnDERemployment-Committee-Report.pdf>

¹⁰ Youth Employment and Un(der)employment in Canada. K. Foster. 2012

¹¹ Bell, D. & Benes, K. Transitioning Graduates to Work: Improving the Labour Market Success of Poorly Integrated New Entrants (PINEs) in Canada

¹² Experiential Learning Defined. University of Texas Faculty Innovation Centre. Access: <https://facultyinnovate.utexas.edu/teaching/engagement/experiential-learning/defined>

¹³ National Association of Colleges and Employers. Class of 2013 Student Survey. Accessed: <http://www.nacweb.org/s05292013/paid-unpaid-interns-job-offer.aspx>

¹⁴ Canadian Intern Association. What is the law? Access: <http://www.internassociation.ca/what-is-the-law/>

Another way to ensure that young people are receiving training is to ensure the private sector is making its fair contributions as well. Canada is currently experiencing an “employer training gap” and is falling behind other OECD countries. Currently, Canadian employers pay 64 cents for every dollar American employers spend on training. According to the Conference Board of Canada statistics, spending on training has declined about 40%. It peaked in 1993 with \$1,207 per employee and stood at \$705 per employee in 2013. Quebec has taken steps to address the PINEs issue by creating the Quebec Training Tax. In Quebec, companies are required to spend 1% of their total payroll on training that includes formal courses, apprenticeships, salaries to interns, and other workforce development programs.

Companies that do not pay 1% on training pay a 1% tax that goes into a Workforce Skills Development and Recognition Fund. This program currently does not apply to small business and the UPEISU believes it should remain this way. The UPEI Student Union feels that a Prince Edward Island Training Tax would ensure the private sector is contributing to ensuring our students are labour market ready.

The UPEI Student Union recommends:

That the Government of Prince Edward Island create an Experiential Learning Fund to create co-op and internship opportunities for post-secondary students.

That the Government of Prince Edward Island take steps to build protections for unpaid interns in PEI. Unpaid interns should be protected under a six-point system like they are in Ontario.

That the Government of Prince Edward Island introduce a Prince Edward Island Training Tax to incentivize the private sector to contribute in the training of our workforce.

Conclusion

The UPEI Student Union policy priorities for the 2016-2017 academic year are a variety of asks that stay true to the roots of Student Union advocacy, but also provide innovative solutions to a number of issues affecting students right now in Prince Edward Island.

The Government can better target its non-repayable aid programs to ensure that students who are the most in need actually receive aid, textbook costs can be reduced by looking to open educational resources in this open data world, and youth employment issues can be addressed by ensuring young people have work experience prior to graduation. We strongly believe that these issues should be on the radar for government.

