



**UPEI
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Progress.

**UPEI STUDENT UNION
POLICY PRIORITIES
2017-2018**

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 3,900 full-time students. Policy consultations are held by the UPEISU annually, at which time 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 participation and engagement from our members.

UPEISU 2017-2018 EXECUTIVE TEAM

President & CEO: Hammad Ahmed

VP Academic & External: Taya Nabuurs

Executive Summary

The UPEI Student Union represents approximately 3,900 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 students' 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 improve accessibility to higher education in Prince Edward Island. For example, students face a number of significant challenges in regards to mental health and wellness. If students are going to succeed in their education and future careers, they must have the tools and resources necessary to manage their mental health when faced with particular mental health challenges. Secondly, Canadian data demonstrates that Indigenous youth are still struggling to attain post-secondary education at the same rate as Non-Indigenous youth. As the fastest-growing youth demographic in the country, Government should be taking every necessary step to ensure that university environments take into account the needs of Indigenous

students. Looking to the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Canada is a good place to start. Lastly, the Province of PEI can ensure that students are safe and supported while obtaining their education by holding its post-secondary institutions accountable to their promises to prevent sexual violence on campus and support survivors. If students are to succeed, they must have the space and support they need to thrive in their post-secondary education and beyond.

A number of initiatives of the Government of Prince Edward Island in recent years prove the Province's commitment to the support and prosperity of its students, but continued progress in the area of post-secondary education will require a more in-depth examination of the diversity of issues facing students, including non-financial barriers to education.

VP Student Life: Megan Rix

VP Finance & Administration: William McGuigan

Accessibility

Providing Sustainable Supports for Mental Health & Well-Being

There are a number of reasons why university students are a key demographic when looking to improve mental health and well-being in communities. University students face a number of unique challenges which put them at a greater risk of suffering from mental health issues. The majority of mental health disorders tend to surface between the ages of 18 to 24, meaning that students will most often experience their first symptoms of mental illness while at university.

What's more is that mental health issues amongst students seem to be increasing at an alarming rate. Research demonstrates that the suicide rate amongst university-aged youth has tripled since the 1950's, with men tending to be disproportionately affected by thoughts of suicide, with two times as many young men (ages 20 - 24) committing suicide as compared to young women¹.

Combined with the additional difficulties many students face when they find themselves distanced from their established support networks as they are living away from home for the first time, as well as the stresses of the tremendous academic and financial demands that come

along with higher education, the necessity of funding well-rounded and substantial mental health supports for students becomes evidently clear².

Supporting mental health services is not only a social obligation of our provinces, but has proven benefits for the community at large. A report done by the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance describes the positive impacts of supporting the mental well-being of students:

“There is increasing evidence to suggest that mental wellness is closely linked with academic success, student persistence, and student retention, all of which are of tremendous benefit to the institutions and government from a financial and reputational perspective.”³

A number of provinces across Canada have recognized and acted upon the need to support mental well-being on campus. The province of Alberta recently saw funding

¹ Crisis on Campus: the Untold Story of Student Suicides,” College Degree Search. Accessed: <http://www.collegedegree.com/student-suicides/>.

² Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance, “Student Health: Bringing Healthy Change to Ontario’s Universities,” Campus Mental Health, May 2012, P. 10. Accessed: <https://campusmentalhealth.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/Student-Health-2012.pdf>.

³ Ibid.

announcements of \$25.8 million over three years to support mental health services for post-secondary students across the province⁴. Ontario also announced in its 2017 provincial budget that it would be increasing its yearly investments in mental health services and supports for its post-secondary students by \$15 million per year⁵.

Should the province of Prince Edward Island move in the same positive direction as other provinces across Canada, a per-student funding model would provide the most sustainable and equitable option. Such a model would ensure that funding is sustainable in that it fluctuates at the same rate as enrolment.

The UPEISU recommends

That the Government of Prince Edward Island invest in a per-student funding model dedicated to supporting the enhancement of mental health and wellness supports and initiatives for post-secondary students in Prince Edward Island.

That the Government of Prince Edward Island engage in active consultation and collaboration with students as it examines mental health services on its post-secondary campuses.

⁴ “Improving post-secondary students’ mental health,” Alberta Government, 20 June 2017. Accessed: <https://www.alberta.ca/release.cfm?xID=47143BE408224-AAB2-7176-D584AF992BD423D8>.

⁵ “Ontario Boosts Mental Health Supports for People Across Province,” Ontario, 3 May 2017. Accessed: <https://news.ontario.ca/maesd/en/2017/05/ontario-boosts-mental-health-supports-for-people-across-the-province.html>.

Indigenizing the University of Prince Edward Island and Moving Towards Reconciliation

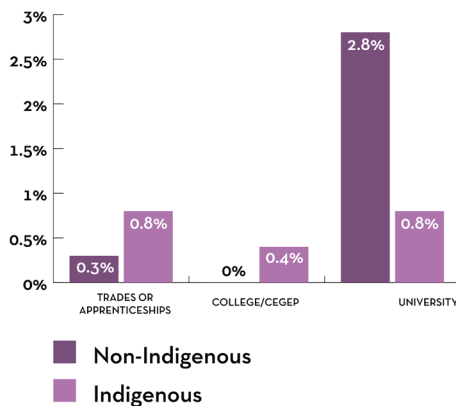
While the number of Indigenous youth attaining post-secondary education has risen in recent years, these levels have not risen at the same rate as Non-Indigenous youth⁶. Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada recognized in its research that:

Proportion of Population (15-29 Yrs Old) With Post Secondary Certification



“While 9% of Métis youth and 7% of Other First Nations (non-status) youth held university certification, only 3% of Registered Indian youth and 2% of Inuk youth had the same level of certification. In comparison, 19% of Non-Indigenous youth had university certification. ”

Change in Proportion of Population (15-29 Yrs Old) With Post Secondary Certification (2006-2011)



Discrepancies in university attainment levels between Indigenous and Non-Indigenous youth are most pronounced when compared to trades or apprenticeship and college or CEGEP attainment levels. While Non-Indigenous youth saw an increase of 2.8% in their university level certification and only a 0.3% increase in trades or apprenticeship certification, Indigenous youth saw equal increases in attainment levels at only 0.8% between both trades and apprenticeship and university level certification.⁷

⁶ “Indigenous Youth - Post-Secondary Education and the Labour Market,” Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, 4 July 2016. Accessed: <https://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/14519312366>

⁷ Ibid.

This data begins to demonstrate the tangible reality of post-secondary education in Canada and the barriers faced by the Indigenous peoples of this country therein. Every effort must be made to make university environments more welcoming for Indigenous students if we hope to see any change in these numbers.

In recent years, the University of Prince Edward Island has begun to show a greater commitment to Indigenizing the institution. There are a number of references to the Indigenization of UPEI in its 2013-2018 Strategic Plan, which provides a long-term vision for the institution.

“Emphasis will be placed on the development of student support strategies and increasingly effective pathways for various student groups, including Aboriginal students, to aid in better connecting, engaging, and retaining our student populations.”⁸

- UPEI Strategic Plan 2013-2018

Through initiatives such as creating a permanent “Elder-in-Residence” program and the creation of an Indigenous advisory group for the University, steps in the right direction are being made. However, there is much more work to be done to better support UPEI’s Indigenous students and the Indigenization of campus.. This will require buy-in from all levels of government in order to support these initiatives.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada undertook a six-year endeavour to travel across the country hearing the stories of Aboriginal people who had survived the residential school system. After hearing from more than 6,000 witnesses, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission released a list of 94 “Calls to Action” outlining necessary actions in order to lead Canada on the path towards reconciliation.

⁸ “UPEI Strategic Plan,” University of Prince Edward Island, January 2014. Accessed: http://files.upei.ca/president/Future_Directions_Strategic_Planning_Framework_A.

⁹ “Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future: Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada,” Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015. Accessed: http://www.myrobust.com/websites/trcinstitution/File/Reports/Executive_Summary_En

Equity (cont.)

A number of these Calls to Action were directed at post-secondary, calling on the need to Indigenize these institutions and their approaches to education:

16. We call upon post-secondary institutions to create university and college degree and diploma programs in Aboriginal languages.

24. We call upon medical and nursing schools in Canada to require all students to take a course dealing with Aboriginal health issues, including the history and legacy of residential schools, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Treaties and Aboriginal rights, and Indigenous teachings and practices. It will require skills-based training in intercultural competency, conflict resolution, human rights, and anti-racism.

62. We call upon the federal, provincial, and territorial governments, in consultation and collaboration with Survivors, Aboriginal peoples, and educators, to:

ii. Provide the necessary funding to post-secondary institutions to educate teachers on how to integrate Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods into classrooms.

iv. Establish senior-level positions in government at the assistant deputy minister level or higher dedicated to Aboriginal content in education.

86. We call upon Canadian journalism programs and media schools to require education for all students on the history of Aboriginal peoples, including the history and legacy of residential schools, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Treaties and Aboriginal rights, Indigenous law, and Aboriginal-Crown relations.¹⁰

¹⁰ “Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action,” Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015. Accessed: http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/File/2015/Findings/Calls_to_Action_English2.pdf

Canada has a moral and legal obligation to address these Calls to Action and address the systemic barriers imposed on its Indigenous peoples by colonialism. The federal government has begun to take action on these obligations, with Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada investing \$341 million in 2014 to post-secondary education for \$22,000 First Nations and Inuit students¹¹. Additionally, the federal government announced in Budget 2017 that it would be investing \$90 million over two years in post-secondary education for First Nation and Inuit students through the Post-Secondary Student Support Program¹². The province of Prince Edward Island must also play its part in addressing these obligations and demonstrate an active and thoughtful dedication to the movement towards reconciliation.

The UPEISU recommends

That the Government of Prince Edward Island establish a Reconciliation Fund dedicated to assisting the University of Prince Edward Island in implementing the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission as they relate to post-secondary, particularly Calls to Action 16, 24, 62 (ii, iv), 86.

That in any and all efforts to support Indigenous students in Prince Edward Island, all decision-making must be generated from within the First Nations communities of Prince Edward Island.

¹¹ “Post-secondary Education,” Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, 3 March 2017. Accessed: <https://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100033679>

¹² “Canada Commits to Increased Post-Secondary Funding for First Nations and Inuit Students,” Government of Canada, 28 April 2017

Accountability

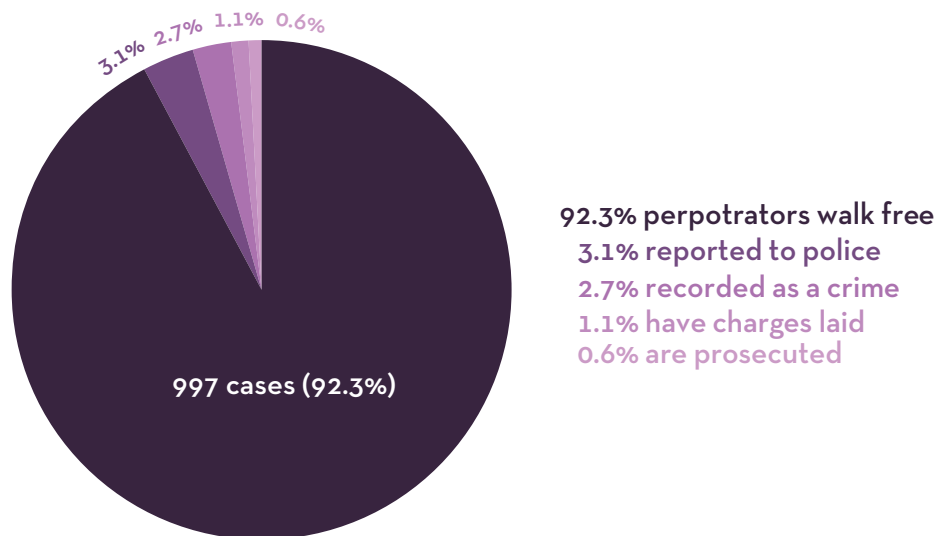
Oversight and Accountability in Addressing Sexual Violence on Campus

While sexual violence continues to be one of the most pervasive issues faced by Canadian society, this issue is particularly prevalent on post-secondary campuses. While the number of sexual assaults that are actually reported may diminish perceptions of the significance of this issue, the University of Prince Edward Island is certainly not immune to sexual violence.

Even without being specifically prompted for feedback on issues of sexual violence on campus, a survey done by the UPEI Student Union as part of annual consultations on advocacy priorities saw a significant number of students commenting that sexual violence and support for survivors was a concern of theirs and something they hoped to see government and the university address.

This only goes to show that while cases of sexual assault may fly under the radar due to lack of data being reported by post-secondary institutions, sexual violence remains a great cause for concern. Sexual assault continues to be the most underreported crime in Canada, and post-secondary campuses are particularly affected. A CBC investigation examining sexual violence on campus indicated that “overall, experts say the number of students reporting sexual assault to universities and colleges is well below the national average.”¹³

Out of every 1000 sexual assault cases....



¹³ Sexual assault reporting on Canadian campuses worryingly low, says experts,” 2015. Accessed: <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/sex-assault-reporting-on-canadian-campuses-worryingly-low>

Not only is the crime underreported, but post-secondary students are also particularly vulnerable to sexual violence, as 47% of all sexual assaults are seen in women aged 15 to 24¹⁴. Given that the vast majority of university students are within this age range, it may come as no surprise that some surveys indicate that 1 in 5 women will experience some form of sexual assault while attending an institution of higher education¹⁵.

Prince Edward Island is one of only a few provinces in Canada with no legislation or other government authority mandating sexual violence policies on its post-secondary campuses. British Columbia, Manitoba, and Ontario have all recently enacted legislation providing guidance and oversight for post-secondary sexual violence policies, while Nova Scotia has signed a four-year Memorandum of Understanding with its colleges and universities.

Quebec also recently announced a framework for legislation to pass through the Quebec National Assembly by fall 2017, supplemented by a \$23 million dollar investment over the next five years to support its zero-tolerance stance on campus sexual violence¹⁶. While the Government of Alberta does not currently have any formal

agreements in place, it has directed its post-secondary institutions to create stand-alone sexual assault policies.

These government initiatives do not just touch on the need for clear and equitable reporting frameworks for dealing with cases of sexual assault on post-secondary campuses, but also provide guidance and set standards for education and prevention programming in an effort to better educate students, provide more well-rounded supports for survivors, and stop sexual assaults before they occur.

Not only is this type of government initiative important from a social perspective for setting a zero-tolerance stance on sexual violence, but it makes sense from an economic perspective as well. Given that it is one of the most pervasive crimes in all Canadian provinces, sexual violence is one of the most costly crimes weighing in at \$4.8 billion annually, even more costly than gun violence at \$3.1 billion¹⁷.

14 “Self-reported sexual assault in Canada, 2014,” Statistics Canada, 11 July 2017. Accessed: <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-002-x/2017001/article/14842-eng.htm>

15 “Why don’t Canadian universities want to talk about sexual assault?” MacLean’s, 30 October 2014. Accessed: <http://www.macleans.ca/education/unirankings/why-dont-canadian-universities-want-to-talk>

16 “Quebec to invest \$23M for new ‘zero-tolerance’ campus sexual assault policy,” CBC News, August 21, 2017. Accessed: <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/montreal/quebec-provincial-sexual-assault-policy-campus-1.4255310> .

17 “Statistics,” Sexaul Assault Centre Hamilton and Area. Accessed: <http://sacha.ca/resources/statistics> .

Accountability (cont.)



Source: Department of Justice Canada, 2009

Beyond even these considerations, government initiative on the issue of sexual violence on post-secondary campuses sends a strong and clear message. Enacting legislation would demonstrate that the Province of Prince Edward Island does not tolerate sexual violence on its campuses and that it is willing to support survivors and the community at large with the full support of government and the law.

Regardless of stand-alone sexual assault policies which may currently exist in the province, legislation provides a necessary level of accountability for post-secondary institutions. External oversight must exist in order to ensure that these policies are thorough, robust, and survivor-centric.

The cohesion of policies across different institutions is also a crucial consideration. It is essential that students across the province have access to the same support, treatment, and educational initiatives, regardless of which post-secondary institution in the province they choose to attend.

Should the Province of Prince Edward Island decide to move in the direction of other Canadian provinces in enacting legislation on sexual violence at its post-secondary institutions, Islanders could remain assured that the Province is prepared to take every step to protect the safety and well-being of students throughout their post-secondary careers in Prince Edward Island.

The UPEISU recommends

That the Government of Prince Edward Island enact provincial legislation to ensure external oversight of sexual violence policies at its post-secondary institutions.

Conclusion

The UPEI Student Union policy priorities for the 2017-2018 academic year demonstrate the diversity of needs of post-secondary students and the desire of our membership to break down barriers to higher education in whatever form those barriers may take.

Government can lessen potential future burdens on the Prince Edward Island healthcare system by investing in mental health and wellness supports for post-secondary students now, reduce barriers to education for Indigenous students through support for the Calls to Action of the TRC, and make campuses safer through the enactment of sexual violence prevention legislation. We strongly believe that these issues should have the full attention of the government.



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...your union*