



FSAA

Federal Student Advocacy Alliance

Advocacy Priorities

FSAA Advocacy Priorities for 2020-2021

The Federal Student Advocacy Alliance (FSAA) is an organization comprised of 33 student associations from across Western Canada, representing 281,000 individual student voices.

In November of 2020, the FSAA was created to advocate on behalf of Western Canadian students on issues concerning post-secondary education, on a federal scale.

The FSAA is a partnership between the British Columbia Federation of Students, The Saskatchewan Polytechnic Students' Association, and the Alberta Students' Executive Council.

At our inaugural conference in November of 2020, our organization identified a series of priorities, seen below.

Executive Summary:

- 1. The Federal Student Advocacy Alliance Calls for the Government of Canada to Create an Expedited Pathway to Permanent Residency for International Student Graduates.**
- 2. The Federal Student Advocacy Alliance Calls for the Government of Canada to Increase Support for Indigenous Students and Increase Post-Secondary Student Support Program Funding.**
- 3. The Federal Student Advocacy Alliance Calls for The Government of Canada to Increase Investment in Rural Broadband Internet Infrastructure Across Canada.**
- 4. The Federal Student Advocacy Alliance Calls on the Government of Canada to Create a New Paid Canadian Student Internship Program.**
- 5. The Federal Student Advocacy Alliance Calls on the Government of Canada to Remove Interest Payments on Canadian Federal Student Loans.**

The Federal Student Advocacy Alliance Calls for the Government of Canada to Create an Expedited Pathway to Permanent Residency for International Student Graduates.

The Government of Canada has recently relaxed rules for international students seeking work permits in Canada after they graduate. The changes would empower as many as 52,000 recent graduates attain work permits. While these are welcome changes, they do not go far enough.¹ International students bring as much as \$21 billion into the Canadian economy annually, but the process for applying for Canadian Permanent Residency Status is complicated and made even more difficult due to COVID-19.²

Creating a streamlined pathway to permanent residency for international student graduates of Canadian post-secondary institutions would help heal our economy: "In 1971, there were 6.6 people of working age for each senior. There are currently 3 Canadian workers for every retired Canadian, but by 2035, there will be only 2 workers for every retiree. Without immigrants to help support the needs of an aging population, younger Canadians will end up paying more per person to provide the same benefits."³

In the meantime, international students still need our help. According to research developed out of the University of Guelph, international students are making up a larger percentage of students enrolled in university than ever before, but their access to services is limited.⁴ So how can institutions better serve international students trying to stay and contribute to Canada after they graduate? According to the same research, students and recent graduates need:

- **Clear website with instructions/tips to follow**, including a clear resource that provides a one-stop-shop for students seeking to learn about the PR process.
- **Someone to help explain the process and different options**, give guidance regarding their specific situations (e.g., finances, qualifications) provide help with the application procedure, specifically in addressing the many questions that international students have before they begin applying.
- **More comprehensive IRCC workshops**, including holding more advanced workshops, or workshop series, for those who have already attended the introductory sessions.
- **Advice from other students who successfully received their PR and those currently undergoing the process**, including informal settings to share their experiences and understandings of the process.⁵

We are calling on the Government of Canada to create a streamlined pathway to permanent residency for international graduates of Canadian post-secondary institutions.

¹ (Sevunts, Levon, 2021)

² (Government of Canada announces new policy to help former international students live in, work in and continue contributing to Canada, 2021)

³ (Government of Canada announces new policy to help former international students live in, work in and continue contributing to Canada, 2021)

⁴ (Goh, 2020)

⁵ (Goh, 2020)

The Federal Student Advocacy Alliance Calls for the Government of Canada to Increase Support for Indigenous Students and Increase Post-Secondary Student Support Program Funding.

In accordance with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada call to action number 11, the FSAA calls on the Federal Government of Canada to increase support for Indigenous students and to increase funding to the Post-secondary Student Support Program (PSSSP).

“We call upon the federal government to provide adequate funding to end the backlog of First Nations students seeking a post-secondary education.”⁶

It is imperative that Indigenous students are supported in their pursuit of post-secondary education in Canada.

While in recent years the Government of Canada has invested in the PSSSP, these one-time increases do not go far enough to support indigenous students currently experiencing shortfalls in the federal funding. In 2020, Prime Minister Trudeau announced a “one year \$75 million investment in Indigenous post-secondary education, with \$65 million going to support First Nations post-secondary education students.”⁷ This investment is welcome, but a single-year contribution to a long-term program is short-sighted.

According to Statistics Canada 2011 National Household Survey, 9.8% of Indigenous people in Canada aged 25-64 hold a university degree. That number is 26.5% among non-indigenous people.⁸

This disparity is too important to ignore. Programs such as the PSSSP are intended to counteract the statistics shown above, but do not go far enough.

Indigenous learners have a right to access post-secondary at the same rate as non-indigenous learners.

We call on the Federal Government of Canada to address this disparity by honouring the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada Call to Action number eleven, and by creating a web portal containing information on all available funding for indigenous students.

⁶ (Truth and Reconciliation of Canada: Calls to Action, 2015)

⁷ (Assembly of First Nations National Chief says Federal Announcement on First Nations Education Funding is an Important Step Towards Investing in First Nations Students and Canada's Future, 2020)

⁸ (Vianne Timmons, 2017)

The Federal Student Advocacy Alliance Calls for The Government of Canada to Increase Investment in Rural Broadband Internet Infrastructure Across Canada.

Rural Broadband infrastructure is an essential aspect of today's commercial and educational landscape. Without internet capable of connecting Canadian based learners to their home-institutions, the Canadian post-secondary response to the COVID-19 pandemic is meaningless.

The Federal Government of Canada Committed to bringing access to high-speed internet from 40.8 per cent of the population to 95% by 2026, but that timeline falls short in addressing the needs of Canadians in our current environment.⁹

The numbers shown above refer to all households, but by demographic, the facts are even worse. While 40.8% of Canadians have access to high-speed, only 31.3% on Indigenous reserves do.¹⁰ These numbers corroborate what we know to be true: that indigenous learners among other rural Canadians, have reduced access to post-secondary.

In some cases, even with the use of Wi-Fi boosting equipment such as Rocket Hub, the bandwidth demand of online learning limits the household to one internet user at a time, or else the connection fails¹¹.

For post-secondary students dealing with stress as well as schoolwork, it has become clear that the internet is no longer a luxury, it is a necessity. "it also allows people to maintain a support network during trying times when they're discouraged from seeing each other in-person."¹²

Open Media petitions [like this one](#) show us that particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, calls for affordable high-speed internet are coming from all corners of Canada. Rural broadband internet access is important and must be supported- especially because of COVID-19.

We call on the Federal Government of Canada to act now and invest in rural broadband infrastructure to support rural post-secondary students.

⁹ (Henderson, 2020)

¹⁰ (Flannagan, 2020)

¹¹ (Garel, 2020)

¹² (Pearce, 2021)

The Federal Student Advocacy Alliance Calls on the Government of Canada to Create a Paid Canadian Student Internship Program.

Lack of employment opportunities in the West are causing some students to look to other provinces for work, as education costs are increasing. One solution is paid internships, in part to ease the financial strain of the pandemic, and to give students valuable work experience before they graduate. The Government of Alberta is investing \$15 million over three years to create 1,400 internship opportunities, but it does not go far enough.¹³

The recently cancelled Canada Student Service Grant was poised to cover the gap for underemployed Canadian post-secondary students, offering thousands of opportunities for students to access up to \$5000.00 in recognition of volunteer work. With the grant now gone, students are left with far fewer options.¹⁴

Without the grant, Canadian students are desperate for work placements and internships. To make matters worse, the COVID-19 pandemic has cancelled or postponed more than a third of all the left-over work experience opportunities.¹⁵

The framework of the Canada Student Service Grant was promising. There are also many opportunities existing within the [Canada Federal Student Work Experience Program](#), among other services and local opportunities. Combining information on these services on a specific “work experience web portal”, or by centralizing all federally available work experience programs, we can make this framework serve students and taxpayers alike.

Internship opportunities aside, seven in ten respondents to a survey of students releases by the Canadian Association of University Teachers said that their summer employment plans were negatively affected by COVID-19.¹⁶ Statistics Canada survey of students showed similar results, with 58% of students concerned about their job security, and 67% concerned that their employment prospects were dwindling.¹⁷ Something must be done now to address these overwhelming concerns.

It is time to create a new paid internship program for Canadian-based post-secondary students. Either by collecting and utilizing all information on existing programs, or by developing an entirely new program based on the Canada Student Service Grant, students need support now.

¹³ (Ferguson, 2021)

¹⁴ (Prime Minister announces support for students serving their communities and opportunities to gain paid work experience, 2020)

¹⁵ (How the pandemic impacted post-secondary students' work placements, 2020)

¹⁶ (Taylor, 2020)

¹⁷ (Taylor, 2020)

The Federal Student Advocacy Alliance Calls on the Government of Canada to Remove Interest Payments on Canadian Federal Student Loans.

Student debt in Canada has increased 78% since 1999. The total outstanding federal student loan debt is now \$18.5 billion—and that number does not even include debt from provincial student loans!

Because of ever-increasing tuition fees, students are graduating with debt loads that are higher than ever. Average student debt for an undergraduate degree in Canada is now over \$30,000.

For students and families who must borrow money to access post-secondary education, interest charged by the government adds thousands of dollars to the cost of their education.

For the average Canadian Student Loan, interest generates an additional \$4,000 in costs!

This is for the same education as people who do not need student loans. In effect, this interest is a tax on low- and middle-income students and families. The system unfairly punishes those who cannot afford to pay education costs up-front.

Charging interest on student loans is not just bad for individuals, it is bad for the economy. A recent RBC study shows that student debt is holding recent graduates back in many important ways. Amongst recent graduates:

- 50% report not saving enough for emergencies.
- 45% report delaying a home purchase.
- 25% report that they are delaying having children.
- 20% report that they are delaying marriage.

Eliminating interest on student loans will help to grow the economy by putting money back in the pockets of recent graduates as they join the workforce, which can then be spent on goods and services. It will also allow students and their families to focus less on their debt, and more on their careers and their lives.¹⁸

The solution is clear: we need to eliminate interest charged on student loans. We are calling on the government of Canada to remove interest payments on Canadian federal student loans.

¹⁸ (British Columbia Federation of Students, 2021)

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