

Tuition rates, enrolment continue to climb

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The Concordian

Published: Tuesday, October 27, 2009

As tuition costs for post-secondary education continue to rise across Canada, student groups have been calling for the federal government to return funding to pre-1990 levels.

The Canadian Alliance of Student Associations, a student lobby group, said they want the government to invest up to \$4 billion in post-secondary system.

“Four billion is the deficit that we see in the entire system,” said the CASA’s national director Arati Sharma. “And that would give relief to institutions so they don’t have to turn to raising tuition.”

A Statistics Canada report released last week found that, on average, full-time undergrads are paying 3.6 per cent more in tuition this year than last. The increase is on par with that from the previous academic year. The national average paid for tuition in 2009-2010 was \$4,917, this year saw an increase of \$170. Quebec undergraduate students continue to pay the lowest rates in the country, averaging \$2,272 before fees.

Ontario students experienced the biggest raise; tuition in Newfoundland and Labrador and New Brunswick remained unchanged; only Nova Scotia lowered its rates. Graduate tuition across Canada rose even more sharply, by 4.7 per cent. The tuition increases are “definitely a cause for concern,” said Sharma, pointing out that students are already graduating with an average debt load of \$25,000.

“That’s not good for when we want our skilled Canadians to actually go out into the workforce,” Sharma said. “We’re burdening them with debt before they can actually give back to our economy.”

CSU VP external Auob Muntasar said the CSU is working with the Fédération étudiante universitaire du Québec to lobby the provincial government regarding tuition. But student apathy is making the campaign difficult, he said.

“When we have these tuition rallies, 20 people show up. Five years ago, there were thousands of people in the street and they were able to change the government’s opinion on the subject. Right now there isn’t enough fuel fuelling the fire.”

Enrolment still on the rise

Higher tuition for the past two years has not stopped students from entering schools in increasing numbers. The Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada reported last week that an additional 38,000 full-time students have registered in universities across Canada, compared to last fall. That marks a 4.1 per cent growth in undergraduate programs and a 7.2 per cent increase in graduate programs.

When asked if this meant higher tuition costs are not deterring students, Sharma said most students were willing to go further into debt in order to compete in today’s tougher job market. “I think students are trying to pay as much as they can, taking responsibility for it, but increasing the cost drastically is not going to help.”