



University Student Poll Points to Funding Clash with Administrators and Faculty

Toronto, March 18, 2011 - Faced with the prospect of reduced government funding to universities, a majority of Canadian students would be willing to accept tuition increases if universities would reduce their operating costs and take steps to preserve student aid, teaching standards and student services, a new Higher Education Strategy Associates report reveals.

"Canadian students appear willing to carry a share of the burden in the wake of budget cuts, which are likely on the horizon," said Joseph Berger, Higher Education Strategy Associates' director of business development and communications and co-author of the study, *President for a Day: Students' Preferences for Dealing with a Budget Crisis*. "Students, however, insist that universities must also demonstrate significant belt-tightening, in which case they would be willing to do their part to preserve financial aid, teaching and student services, areas that have not been top priority for universities in recent years."

While only 10% of students would prefer to keep tuition frozen in the face of operating budget cuts of 10%, one-third of students would rather off-set cuts by raising tuition 5%, while another third would off-set cuts by raising tuition 10%. Nearly half of all students surveyed would prefer universities to seek revenue by pursuing joint ventures with business, while only 36% were opposed (16% of students had no preference).

Students were split on how to implement potential cuts, with about half preferring across-the-board cuts and half preferring targeted cuts. That said, when faced with a series of specific binary choices about what to cut, students demonstrated a preference for preserving student aid budgets, teaching quality and student services, in that order. They were less concerned with protecting research and library/IT funds. In no instance did a majority of students demonstrate a preference for preserving infrastructure spending at the cost of any of the other options. Students also tend to underestimate both their professors' salaries and the amount of funding provided by government to their institutions.

"The survey results reveal that students can be brought around on tuition, but that institutions have to do their part by reducing costs, and ensuring that the priorities of undergraduates in terms of funding, teaching and services aren't sacrificed in favour of research and research infrastructure," said Alex Usher, president of Higher Education Strategy Associates and co-author of the report. "Without agreement on how to navigate a period of underfinancing, students, administrators and faculty may be headed for significant clashes in the coming years."

The data in this report were collected during an online survey conducted by Higher Education Strategy Associates among 2,301 students between November 18th and 28th, 2010. Higher Education Strategy Associates is a Toronto-based firm specializing in research, data and strategy. Through its public policy arm, the Canadian Education Project, it conducts policy and trend analyses on a variety of national and international educational issues that have been used by government at the federal and provincial levels.

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