



**HELP US FIGHT FOR**  
**EQUITABLE**  
**INTERNATIONAL**  
**TUITION!**

INTERNATIONAL TUITION  
BACKGROUND



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## THE INTERNATIONAL STUDENT EXPERIENCE

International students have a unique educational experience, distinct from their domestic counterparts. While students across Ontario have experienced the issues endemic to our current political system, including expensive housing, low wages, rising prices and more, international students are forced, through no fault of their own, to navigate this environment in the extremes. International students have almost no experience navigating the Canadian housing market<sup>1</sup>, are more likely to take on low-wage employment<sup>2</sup>, and experience higher levels of labour exploitation<sup>3</sup> than their domestic peers. At the centre of this discrepancy in student experience is the drastic difference in tuition fees paid by international and domestic students.

Across Ontario, international students can expect to pay far higher tuition than their domestic peers, who themselves pay high tuition fees relative to the rest of the country.<sup>4</sup> According to Ontario's Auditor General, international students enrolled in Ontario colleges could expect to pay \$14,306 on average, compared to \$3,228 per domestic student.<sup>5</sup>

The higher fees that international students pay are predicated on an almost 50-year history of privatization, austerity<sup>6</sup>, xenophobia<sup>7</sup> and exploitation. Though a long and complicated process, the privatization of postsecondary education costs in Ontario has produced a material reality wherein postsecondary institutions have come to rely on international tuition to make up for the decreased funding stemming from privatization.<sup>8</sup>

To simplify this reliance, its largely due to the differentials in tuition regulation by the Ontario government. Unlike domestic students, for whom tuition increases are limited to a max of 3% per year based on their program<sup>9</sup>, **the Ontario government permits an increase to international student tuition of up to 20%**.<sup>10</sup> This differential creates a

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1 Anonymous, Housing Focus Group: Conestoga Students Attending All Campuses, Zoom Meeting, October 13, 2021.

2 Hina Imam, "The Second Year Trap: How Foreign Students Fall into Financial Hell," The Tyee (The Tyee, November 27, 2019), <https://thetyee.ca/News/2019/11/27/Foreign-Students-Financial-Hell/>.

3 "'Employers Make You Work like a Slave' — This International Student Who Fought for Wages Urges Others to Raise Their Voice," The Toronto Star, April 3, 2022, sec. Canada, <https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2022/04/03/employers-make-you-work-like-a-slave-this-international-student-who-fought-for-wages-urges-others-to-raise-their-voice.html>.

4 Statistics Canada Government of Canada, "The Daily — Tuition Fees for Degree Programs, 2021/2022," September 8, 2021, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/210908/dq210908a-eng.htm>.

5 Office of the Auditor General of Ontario, "Value for Money Audit: Public Colleges Oversight" (Office of The Auditor General of Ontario, December 2021), 13, [https://www.auditor.on.ca/en/content/annualreports/arreports/en21/AR\\_PublicColleges\\_en21.pdf](https://www.auditor.on.ca/en/content/annualreports/arreports/en21/AR_PublicColleges_en21.pdf).

6 Austerity defined as "a set of political-economic policies that aim to reduce government budget deficits through spending cuts, tax increases, or a combination of both."

7 Xenophobia defined as "dislike of or prejudice against people from other countries."

8 Charles M. Beach and Frank Milne, "Ontario Post-Secondary Education Funding Policies: Perverse Incentives and Unintended Consequences," Working Paper (Queen's Economics Department Working Paper, 2019), <https://www.econstor.eu/handle/10419/230577>.

9 Some programs, including high demand programs and professional degrees, are permitted increases of up to 5% annually.

10 "Tuition and Ancillary Fees Reporting Operating Procedure," 2003, 24.



distorted incentive for Ontario postsecondary institutions to exploit international students, both when they arrive here and are charged for their education, but in the very manner of enticing international students to come to Ontario.

### Before They Arrive: False Promises

A story SA's have heard time and time again, repeated in several news stories that have popped up in the last year, are that education agents often entice international students to come to Canada for their education through false promises regarding tuition, housing costs, program eligibility and more.<sup>11</sup>

These education agents, who have little oversight from the Ontario postsecondary institutions which employ them<sup>12</sup>, can expect to earn thousands of dollars per student recruited.<sup>13</sup> This creates a perverse and very profitable system, wherein educational agents' purpose is less to match suitable prospective students to the best program for their interests and passion, **but to get as many students as possible to commit to enrolling** in the institution that employs the agent. A 2021 report in the Walrus described the education recruitment agent dynamic:

*“... a student who walks into an agent's shop is not the client—they're the product...”*

*If an agent is getting commissions from an unremarkable community college in rural Ontario, then their only motivation is to get every teenager who walks through their door, no matter how brilliant or hopeless, to enroll in that one college. “That's how the business works,” says Broitman. “You just direct people to where your bread is buttered.”<sup>14</sup>*

Even the Auditor General, in their review of Ontario college recruitment practices, found reason for alarm, “we found instances of misleading advertisements by some recruitment agencies that could create a reputational risk for the public college system as a whole.”<sup>15</sup>

### Getting Here: Bad Homes, Worse Jobs

Many international students are no better off when they arrive in Ontario to begin their studies. Confronted by costs in housing and necessities far above what has been advertised to them, they are often forced into exploitative and dangerous housing and working conditions. To afford housing in a crowded and expensive market, international students resort to accommodations that are often unsafe, crowded, and illegal.<sup>16</sup> International students have reported living in housing with up to 14 roommates in 5 separate rooms or finding lodging through illegitimate room rentals posted on social media groups.<sup>17</sup>

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11 “The Shadowy Business of International Education | The Walrus,” August 18, 2021, <https://thewalrus.ca/the-shadowy-business-of-international-education/>.

12 Office of the Auditor General of Ontario, “Value for Money Audit: Public Colleges Oversight.”

13 “The Shadowy Business of International Education | The Walrus.”

14 “The Shadowy Business of International Education | The Walrus.”

15 Office of the Auditor General of Ontario, “Value for Money Audit: Public Colleges Oversight,” 7.

16 Anonymous, Housing Focus Group: Conestoga Students Attending Waterloo Campuses, Zoom Meeting, October 5, 2021.

17 Anonymous, Housing Focus Group: Conestoga Students Attending Brantford Campuses, Zoom Meeting, October 12, 2021.



This lack of affordability in the bare necessities, and the strict study permit work limits of 20 hours a week maximum for international students, pushes students to seek unsanctioned, under-the-table labour to make ends meet.<sup>18</sup> Knowing international students are vulnerable and desperate, some employers use this leverage to exploit, overwork, and undermine their international student employees.<sup>19</sup> Employers have withheld wages,<sup>20</sup> threatened to report students to immigration, and more to coerce and silence an already vulnerable population.

It's no wonder many prospective international students are beginning to become skeptical of the promises of Canadian education recruiters.<sup>21</sup> Absent a change in practices of recruitment, support, and costs, the sustainability of the international student recruitment model of postsecondary growth<sup>22</sup> is suspect.<sup>23</sup> When considering the experience of international students, it becomes clear that incoming students are thought of not as ready learners, but as sources of income to be exploited by postsecondary institutions, landlords, and businesses. To those empowered in the international student experience, these learners are not students, but means for greed.

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18 "Wage Theft and Labour Exploitation- a Rising Concern among International Students," OMNI Ontario English, accessed June 22, 2022, <https://www.omnitv.ca/on/en/wage-theft-and-labour-exploitation-a-rising-concern-among-international-students/>.

19 "'Employers Make You Work like a Slave' — This International Student Who Fought for Wages Urges Others to Raise Their Voice."

20 "'Employers Make You Work like a Slave' — This International Student Who Fought for Wages Urges Others to Raise Their Voice."

21 "5X Fest | The Exploitation of International Students Is an Open Secret. It's Time to Stop Looking Away.," accessed June 27, 2022, <https://www.5xfest.com/5xpress/the-exploitation-of-international-students-is-an-open-secret-its-time-to-stop-looking-away>.

22 "Looking Abroad to Boost Enrolment at Conestoga College," therecord.com, February 24, 2020, <https://www.therecord.com/news/waterloo-region/2020/02/24/looking-abroad-to-boost-enrolment-at-conestoga-college.html>; Global Affairs Canada, "ARCHIVED - International Education: A Key Driver of Canada's Future Prosperity," GAC, August 16, 2012, <https://www.international.gc.ca/education/report-rapport/strategy-strategie/toc-tdm.aspx?lang=eng>.

23 Office of the Auditor General of Ontario, "Value for Money Audit: Public Colleges Oversight."



## The History of Differential Tuition Fees for International Students

In Ontario and across Canada, there is a two-tiered postsecondary education system in terms of cost. One for domestic students, and another for international students. These tiers are separated by cost: expensive for domestic students, absolutely unaffordable for international students.

According to Ontario's Auditor General, international students enrolled in Ontario colleges could expect to pay \$14,306 on average, compared to \$3,228 per domestic student.<sup>24</sup> International students are also susceptible to larger year-over-year increases in tuition costs. International students can see an increase of up to 20% annually vs. 3% annually for domestic students.

Why is there such a discrepancy in the costs for international students versus their domestic counterparts? It has nothing to do with the common claims regarding deservedness and paying for the privilege to gain an education in Canada, and everything to do with underfunded postsecondary institutions, and structural, embedded xenophobia in the origins of differential tuition policies.

Until 1976, domestic and international students paid nearly the exact same tuition fees across Canada,<sup>25</sup> and international students accounted for just under 5% of the total postsecondary student population;<sup>26</sup> half of these students were enrolled in postsecondary institutions in Ontario.<sup>27</sup> Prior to 1976, international students in Canada and the world over were considered part of an essential global educational exchange,<sup>28</sup> "built on a philosophy of international aid and co-operation... international students were travellers... benefiting from generous countries and bringing the insights gleaned from their education back with them to their homelands."<sup>29</sup>

However, the 1970s saw a new wave of austerity economics and policies begin to sweep the globe, Canada included. These policies prioritized cutting back on social spending, implementing budget-cutting measures on social programs, and moving publicly held goods and services to the hands of the private market.<sup>30</sup> To shift blame from decision-makers for cutting

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24 Office of the Auditor General of Ontario, 13.

25 Statistics Canada Government of Canada, "Canadian and International Tuition Fees by Level of Study, 1972/1973 to 2006/2007, Inactive," June 25, 2020, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=3710016001>.

26 Laura J. Selleck, T. Symons, and J. E. Page, "Some Questions of Balance: Human Resources, Higher Education and Canadian Studies," 1984, 222, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3550393>.

27 Selleck, Symons, and Page, 233.

28 Dale M. McCartney, "Inventing International Students: Exploring Discourses in International Student Policy Talk, 1945–75," *Historical Studies in Education / Revue d'histoire de l'éducation*, October 20, 2016, 2, <https://doi.org/10.32316/hse/rhe.v28i2.4457>.

29 McCartney, 2. McCartney highlights the neocolonial valence of this philosophy of educational exchange, making note that for many Canadian MP's, the practice of permitting students from the global periphery to study in Canada was explicitly to, "continue the historic mission of colonialism, but now with an eye towards developing world peace and preventing the spread of communism." We should not ignore the chauvinistic paternalism embedded in this system, even in the face of the new extractive, exploitative model of international education.

30 "Neoliberalism: The Idea That Swallowed the World," *the Guardian*, August 18, 2017, <http://www.theguardian.com/news/2017/aug/18/neoliberalism-the-idea-that-changed-the-world>.



popular government programs, and to disguise the reasons why cuts were being made,<sup>31</sup> policymakers began to search for alternative reasons.

Some of the anger surrounding these cuts and changes were directed at racialized international students in Canada. While the experience of racialized international students in Canada to that point was hardly blissful,<sup>32</sup> they were previously viewed as,

*“welcome sojourners, visitors who came to Canada, enhanced life on campuses, learned the lessons of a “developed” nation, and then returned to their home countries to improve the lives of their compatriots and build trade relationships with Canada.”<sup>33</sup>*

However, by the end of the 1970s, coinciding with the introduction of differential fees, international students were viewed as,

*“foreigners... competitors for scarcer postsecondary positions (especially in professional programs). Their status as foreigners meant they were undeserving recipients of Canada’s largesse, possible drains on limited educational resources, and dangers to the stability of Canadian society. Asserting citizenship was asserting a right to higher education, if otherwise qualified; without that citizenship, such access was in doubt.”<sup>34</sup>*

Several factors contributed to this “othering” of international students, and the manifestation of this othering in differential fees. Primarily, the economic downturn of the 1970s and the end of an era of social consensus around public spending lead to an artificial scarcity<sup>35</sup> in government funding. This artificial scarcity and new politics of austerity led to governments, like the Canadian federal government and Ontario, spending less on postsecondary education,<sup>36</sup> and a radical reimagining of postsecondary education as a social good, to a public investment with an expected ROI.<sup>37</sup>

International students became easy targets for stakeholders who wanted to reduce government expenditures on education, and were skeptical of the political activism of foreign students from the global periphery<sup>38</sup> who could threaten “Canadian Values.” Politicians worried aloud that racialized international students from the global south presented a dual-threat of “danger” both:

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31 Patricia Marie Evans and Gerda R. Wekerle, *Women and the Canadian Welfare State: Challenges and Change* (University of Toronto Press, 1997), 34/35.

32 Dale M. McCartney, “‘A Question of Self-Interest’: A Brief History of 50 Years of International Student Policy in Canada,” *Canadian Journal of Higher Education/Revue Canadienne d’enseignement Supérieur* 51, no. 3 (2021): 91.

33 McCartney, 110.

34 Dale M. McCartney, “From ‘Friendly Relations’ to Differential Fees : A History of International Student Policy in Canada since World War II” (University of British Columbia, 2020), 110, <https://doi.org/10.14288/1.0392792>.

35 Public Services and Procurement Canada Government of Canada, “Women and the Equality Deficit : The Impact of Restructuring Canada’s Social Programs / by Shelagh Day and Gwen Brodsky. : SW21-32/1998E - Government of Canada Publications - Canada.Ca,” July 1, 2002, 11–13, <https://publications.gc.ca/site/eng/9.646930/publication.html>.

36 Hugh Mackenzie, “Funding Postsecondary Education in Ontario: Beyond the Path of Least Resistance.,” A study commissioned by The Ontario Coalition for Postsecondary Education (Ontario Coalition for Postsecondary Education, December 2004), 8.

37 McCartney, “From ‘Friendly Relations’ to Differential Fees,” 116.

38 McCartney, “Inventing International Students,” 12.



- Economically - in using resources that should be devoted to “real citizens” and taking jobs away from hard-working Canadian students.
- Politically – by introducing radical political ideologies, like anti-colonialism and communism, to an innocent Canadian public.

New conceptions of citizenship, emerging from changes to Canada’s immigration policy, also radically changed who counted as a Canadian citizen. Before 1967, international students who studied in Canada did not have a direct pathway to citizenship and were considered visitors only. With the introduction of the immigration points system in 1967, international students now had a clear pathway to citizenship. With a pathway to citizenship embedded in international studies, racialized foreign students presented a supposed “threat” to the, “ethnocultural composition” of Canada.<sup>39</sup> This led to a backlash.

Further changes to immigration in the 1970s sought to limit the available pathways to citizenship for international students in response to the white anxieties stemming from the previous changes.<sup>40</sup> In a span of a few years, the pathways to citizenship opened and closed for international students, and with it, a new status as transitory migrants, who could not fit any category of immigrant under the new legislation, and were seen “fundamentally similar to that of migrant workers... making them non-citizens, <so> they could be treated differently.”<sup>41</sup>

Subsequently, in the immigration act of 1976, international students were made “temporary visitors,” required to leave the country after studies and apply to become citizens again from abroad. In practice, they had become a perfect vessel to extract revenue without any long-term commitment in the form of social spending.

In response to this anxiety regarding public spending on education and fears of a foreign student invasion, Ontario became the first province to introduce differential tuition for international students in 1976. The rationale for the fee, as stated by the then Minister of Colleges and Universities, was,

*“mounting public concern regarding the cost to the Ontario taxpayers of educating foreign students in our postsecondary institutions... government’s concern to restrain the growth of government expenditures...re-examined the costs to society of educating foreign students in Ontario...the proportion of these costs borne by the Ontario taxpayer should be reduced.”*

While the new status of international students as temporary labourers was fresh, the Ontario government, “used it to both justify and enforce differential tuition fees, and in the process drew institutions into the policy framework as well.”<sup>42</sup>

In the span of 15 years, international students went from welcomed visitors essential to the cultural and academic atmosphere on Canadian campuses, to outsiders to be exploited for funding in place of government expenditures. This new policy of differential tuition fees introduced in Ontario would become the new reality for international students across Canada, as the decline of postsecondary funding continued, and tuition costs would become increasingly essential to the operation of postsecondary institutions. No longer students, international learners were now a means for greed.

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39 McCartney, “From ‘Friendly Relations’ to Differential Fees,” 122.

40 McCartney, 132.

41 McCartney, 132.

42 McCartney, 140.



## The History of Government Funding for Postsecondary Education In Ontario

The funding of Ontario's postsecondary institutions has undergone a notable shift in the last forty (40) years from being majority public-funded, to an overwhelming reliance on tuition. This change is a marked shift from where institutions have historically received their funding highlighting a notable shift in government stakeholders' conception of education.

Historically, Ontario colleges were funded primarily through public funding, with the Ontario government being the primary financier, in addition to federal educational transfers assisting this public expenditure.<sup>43</sup> Beginning in the 1970s, federal education transfers to the province began to decline as a percentage of the gross domestic product or spending power of the federal government. Measured as a proportion of the country's GDP, federal transfers to the province totaled 0.49% of GDP in 1983-84, declining to 0.41% by 1992-93, and remaining stagnant at roughly .2% to the present.<sup>44</sup>

At the same time that federal funding to the provinces has declined and then stagnated, tuition prices have soared.<sup>45</sup> The federal government isn't the only government which has declined to adequately fund postsecondary education in Canada, as provincial governments have radically reduced their funding. Ontario is a case in point.

Ontario per student funding as a percentage of GDP has barely increased (.2%) since 2002. Operating grants from the province to colleges have stayed approximately the same since 2007, meaning that in real dollars,<sup>46</sup> colleges in Ontario have withstood a substantial decrease in funding in the past 15 years. Government funding for Ontario colleges has been far below inflation for nearly 30 years at least; in the last 20 years, provincial funding per student increased by only 1.8% from 2002 in real dollars, representing an increase in funding far below inflation.<sup>47</sup> To elaborate further, full-time equivalent funding for Ontario colleges was \$6,515 in 1992, versus \$9,600 in 2019;<sup>48</sup> in real dollars this represents a nearly 20% reduction in funding per student.

However, this operating grant decrease from the province can and has been offset several times by the overwhelming increase in college revenue from tuition. For example, as of the 2021 financial year, Conestoga College received

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43 Canadian Association of University Teachers, "Federal Cash Transfers for Post-Secondary Education (% of GDP)," November 2020, <https://www.caut.ca/resources/almanac/2-canada-provinces>; Canadian Association of University Teachers, "Provincial Government Funding Per FTE Student (\$2017)" (Canadian Association of University Teachers), accessed December 8, 2021, <https://www.caut.ca/resources/almanac/2-canada-provinces>.

44 "2. Canada and the Provinces | CAUT," accessed January 19, 2022, <https://www.caut.ca/resources/almanac/2-canada-provinces>.

45 Canadian Federation of Students - Ontario, "The Impact of Government Underfunding on Students," July 2015, <https://cfsontario.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Factsheet-Underfunding.pdf>.

46 Dollars in keeping with inflation.

47 Canadian Association of University Teachers, "Provincial Government Funding Per FTE Student (\$2017)."

48 Martin Devitt and Kevin Mackay, "2021 Update on Education in Ontario Colleges" (Ontario Public Service Employees Union, September 2021), <https://www.collegefaculty.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/2021-09-Report-on-Ed-FINAL-eng-formatted-a.pdf>.



only 23.86% of its operating revenue through provincial and other government grants.<sup>49</sup> On the other hand, tuition and fees supplied 67.57% of Conestoga's operating revenue, representing approximately \$313,000,000 million dollars.<sup>50</sup> The total revenue for Conestoga College in 2021 was \$463,461,828, including an over \$50-million-dollar surplus.<sup>51</sup>

The shift to the tuition funding model represents a generational ideological change in how government operates. Broadly speaking, a general shift in common thinking surrounding what a postsecondary education is for and who it benefits has occurred. The Ontario government, since the 1990s has believed it is the responsibility of the student/individual to own the costs of their education, as

*“The provision of postsecondary education meets society’s need for a trained workforce; it also increases students’ potential earning power and provides them with additional opportunities for personal fulfilment. The question of whether society or the individual benefits most is considered by some to have a bearing on fee policy. If individuals are seen to reap most of the benefits, it is argued, they should pay a greater share of the cost than they do at present.”<sup>52 53</sup>*

As a result, colleges have moved to more profit-centric funding model. This negatively impacts students, who will be driven to pay more out of their own pockets to make up for this startling lack in government expenditures on the upfront cost of their education, and the downstream effects of a for-profit model being imposed on a public good. The reliance on for-profit education models has driven institutions to rely on international student tuition to make up for the absence of government funding.<sup>54</sup>

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49 Conestoga College Institute of Technology and Advanced Learning, “Consolidated Financial Statements: March 31, 2022,” INDEX OF CONSOLIDATED FINANCIAL STATEMENTS Year Ended March 31, 2022 (Conestoga College Institute of Technology and Advanced Learning, March 31, 2022), <https://www-assets.conestogac.on.ca/documents/www/about/college-reports/2021-22-financial-statements.pdf>.

50 Conestoga College Institute of Technology and Advanced Learning.

51 Conestoga College Institute of Technology and Advanced Learning.

52 Ministry of Education and Training, “Future Goals for Ontario Colleges and Universities: Discussion Paper” (Ministry of Education and Training, July 1996),

<https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.26.3723&rep=rep1&type=pdf>.

53 It is noted that there have been momentary changes in the government’s stated intentions toward postsecondary education in the province. The policy changes of the McGuinty and Wynne governments, respectively, attempted to redefine postsecondary education as an investment in Ontario’s economy, with the Wynne government framing the Ontario Student Grant program as “Breaking down barriers to postsecondary education is part of the government's economic plan to build Ontario up and deliver on its number-one priority to grow the economy and create jobs.” The shift from education as a public good, to private investment, to public economic investment is notable, and while the ideological difference between private investment and public economics is minimal, the effects are certainly more equitable in the latter.

54 Beach and Milne, “Ontario Post-Secondary Education Funding Policies.”



International student tuition continues to make up an ever-greater portion of Ontario college revenue. This is partly because, unlike domestic students, for whom tuition increases are limited to a max of 3% per year based on their program, the Ontario government permits an increase to international student tuition of up to 20%.

In a 2021 report of the Ontario Auditor General, it was found that: “International students, who make up about 30 per cent of the student body at Ontario’s 24 colleges, provide 68 per cent of all tuition revenue. Their fees alone were worth \$1.7-billion last year, more than the colleges received in provincial grants.”<sup>55</sup> As government funding for postsecondary education continues to decrease and the tuition funding model remains primary, postsecondary institutions, politicians, and governments will continue to see international students as their bank accounts.

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<sup>55</sup> Joe Friesen, “Bulk of College Tuition in Ontario Comes from International Students, Auditor-General Says,” *The Globe and Mail*, December 1, 2021, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/article-bulk-of-college-tuition-in-ontario-comes-from-international-students/>.



## International Tuition Revenue: Overreliance and Underfunding

Ontario college enrollment has grown rapidly over the previous decade. However, the primary driver of enrollment increases has been international students enrolling in Ontario colleges. According to StatsCan, “Over the last five years, the number of international college students more than doubled, rising from 60,318 enrolments in 2015/2016 to 153,360 in 2019/2020.”<sup>56</sup>

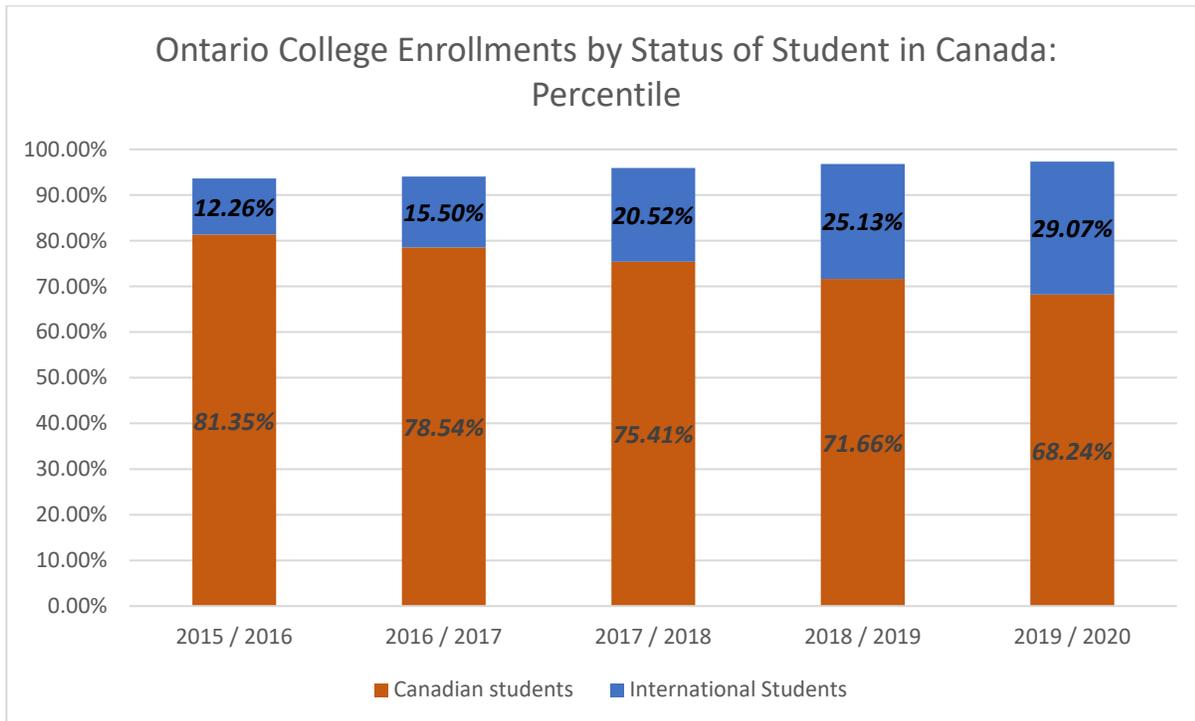


Figure 1 - Ontario College Enrollment Comparison of Domestic vs. International Students

International students accounted for 29.07% of those enrolled in Ontario colleges in 2020,<sup>57</sup> an increase of 154% from 2015.<sup>58</sup>

International students are almost entirely responsible for enrolment growth across Canada, not just Ontario.<sup>59</sup> For some Ontario colleges, international students comprise a supermajority of their student populations, including Cambrian, Canadore, Lambton and Sault colleges.<sup>60</sup> For other colleges, international students may not represent the majority of students, but represent the majority of college revenue, including Seneca, Centennial, and Conestoga colleges.<sup>61</sup>

56 Statistics Canada Government of Canada, “The Daily — Prior to COVID-19, International Students Accounted for the Growth in Postsecondary Enrolments and Graduates,” November 24, 2021, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/211124/dq211124d-eng.htm>.

57 Government of Canada.

58 Government of Canada.

59 Government of Canada, “The Daily — Prior to COVID-19, International Students Accounted for the Growth in Postsecondary Enrolments and Graduates.”

60 Office of the Auditor General of Ontario, “Value for Money Audit: Public Colleges Oversight,” 9.

61 Office of the Auditor General of Ontario, “Value for Money Audit: Public Colleges Oversight.”



Why has there been such a focus on increasing international student enrolment in Canada, and more specifically, Ontario? Put simply, it's all about the money.<sup>6263</sup>

Postsecondary funding in Ontario has declined and idled for nearly three decades now. Ontario per student funding as a percentage of GDP has barely increased (.2%) since 2002. Operating grants from the province to colleges have stayed approximately the same since 2007, meaning that in real dollars,<sup>64</sup> colleges in Ontario have withstood a substantial decrease in funding in the past 15 years. Government funding for Ontario colleges has been far below inflation for nearly 30 years at least: in the last 20 years, provincial funding per student increased by only 1.8% from 2002 in real dollars, representing an increase in funding far below inflation.<sup>65</sup> To elaborate further, full-time equivalent funding for Ontario colleges was \$6,515 in 1992, versus \$9,600 in 2019; in real dollars this represents a nearly 20% reduction in funding per student.

However, international student tuition revenue offers a ready-made way for postsecondary institutions in the province to recover the operating funds lost from government funding decreases. International students are charged higher tuition and service rates by Ontario postsecondary institutions. According to Ontario's Auditor General, international students enrolled in Ontario colleges could expect to pay \$14,306 on average, compared to \$3,228 per domestic student.<sup>66</sup>

As a strategy, it makes sense why postsecondary institutions would turn to international students to drive revenues. International students are politically and socially alienated and disempowered in Canada, with almost no material means of increasing their political power. However, this does not excuse the exploitation of international students for profit. Canadian politicians and institutional decision-makers must instead focus on returning postsecondary education to a public good for all and stop using international students as revenue generators.

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62 "Ontario Colleges Need International Tuition. It Could Cost Them," TVO.org, accessed May 18, 2021, <https://www.tvo.org/article/ontario-colleges-need-international-tuition-it-could-cost-them>.

63 "Looking Abroad to Boost Enrolment at Conestoga College."

64 Dollars in keeping with inflation.

65 Canadian Association of University Teachers, "Provincial Government Funding Per FTE Student (\$2017)."

66 Office of the Auditor General of Ontario, "Value for Money Audit: Public Colleges Oversight," 13.



## Cost Increases for International Students: The Last Decade

As Ontario colleges have grown in multiple ways in the past decade, they have relied on an astronomical increase in international students to provide the revenue to do so.<sup>67</sup> Between the 2016-17 academic year and 2019-20, international tuition revenue increased 152 per cent in Ontario, while domestic tuition revenue dropped three per cent.<sup>68</sup>

International undergraduate tuition has increased by over 30% between the 2016/2017 and 2021/2022 academic year.<sup>69</sup> Between 2006 and 2022, **international undergraduate tuition in Ontario has increased by 190%**<sup>70</sup> Comparatively, domestic undergraduate tuition has increased 54% since 2006, and actually gone down 7% since 2017.<sup>71</sup> According to the Auditor General of Ontario:

*“In 2020/21, public colleges received a total of \$1.7 billion in tuition fees from international students, enrolled at both their home and public-private college partnership campuses, which represented 68% of colleges’ total tuition fee revenue. Meanwhile, international student enrolment represented 30% of the total student enrolment.”<sup>72</sup>*

As domestic enrollment in Ontario colleges has either plateaued or begun to decline, many Ontario colleges almost entirely rely on international student revenue to fund their operations.<sup>73</sup> Tuition freezes have only exasperated this reliance on international tuition for domestic students without subsequent increases in government funding. Ultimately, this has left postsecondary institutions subsidizing their growth entirely through international student tuition increases.

The reliance on international tuition by Ontario colleges is largely due to the decreasing amount of funding from the Ontario government.<sup>74</sup> In fact, the Ontario government deliberately sought to encourage international student tuition revenue to compensate for the loss of public funding for postsecondary education.<sup>75</sup>

In 2012, to further reduce public spending on postsecondary education, the government of Ontario cut per student funding to postsecondary institutions for non-PhD international students. Institutions then privatized these costs, many of them

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67 “Looking Abroad to Boost Enrolment at Conestoga College.”

68 “College and University Tuition Frozen in Ontario Again for the 3rd Time | Globalnews.ca,” Global News, accessed June 21, 2022, <https://globalnews.ca/news/8703521/college-university-tuition-frozen-ontario/>.

69 Government of Canada, “The Daily — Prior to COVID-19, International Students Accounted for the Growth in Postsecondary Enrolments and Graduates.”

70 Statistics Canada Government of Canada, “The Daily — International Students Accounted for All of the Growth in Postsecondary Enrolments in 2018/2019,” November 25, 2020, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/201125/dq201125e-eng.htm>.

71 Government of Canada.

72 Office of the Auditor General of Ontario, “Value for Money Audit: Public Colleges Oversight,” 2.

73 Office of the Auditor General of Ontario, “Value for Money Audit: Public Colleges Oversight”; “Ontario Colleges Need International Tuition. It Could Cost Them.”

74 Beach and Milne, “Ontario Post-Secondary Education Funding Policies.”

75 Ministry of Education and Training, “Future Goals for Ontario Colleges and Universities: Discussion Paper,” 11.



requiring international students attending their respective postsecondary institution to pay a \$750 International Recovery fee annually.<sup>76</sup> International students have since had to subsidize a previously public cost.

While a Canadian education has continued to cost more and more, year-over-year, for international students, the cost of living itself has exploded. The cost of housing, the largest expense for a student outside the cost of tuition, has exploded, with the market rate for a bachelor apartment in Ontario rising 46% since 2012, higher than the inflationary standard of 21%.<sup>77</sup> The cost of groceries has risen 31.76%, while the cost of transportation<sup>78</sup> has risen 30%.<sup>79</sup>

At the same time, wages have remained stagnated in Ontario, with the minimum wage only increasing to \$15 from \$10.25, still far below the Ontario living and renting wage of 18.16<sup>80</sup> and \$27.34<sup>81</sup>, respectively. Overall, wages have risen only 25%<sup>82</sup> in the past decade, matching inflation and notably lower than the inflationary increases of major expenses. International students have not only taken on greater costs in education in the past decade, but they have also done so while earning less and paying more for all of life's necessities.

The cost of being an international student in Ontario has risen dramatically over the last decade, with no end in sight. International students, lacking political power, are seen as perfectly exploitable by politicians, stakeholders, landlords and more.<sup>83</sup> For those in positions of power, international students are their means for greed.

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76 Sara Custor, "International Funding Cut for HE Sector in Ontario," The PIE News, July 8, 2012, <https://thepienews.com/news/international-funding-cut-for-he-sector-in-ontario/>.

77 "Housing Market Information Portal," CMHC, accessed February 24, 2022, <https://www03.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/hmip-pimh/en/TableMapChart/Table?TableId=2.1.31.2&GeographyId=35&GeographyTypeId=2&DisplayAs=Table&GeographyName=Ontario>.

78 Transportation being inclusive of all forms of transit, not only personal vehicle ownership.

79 Statistics Canada Government of Canada, "Consumer Price Index, Monthly, Not Seasonally Adjusted," June 19, 2007, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1810000401>.

<sup>80</sup> Sean Davidson, CTVNewsToronto.ca Managing Digital Producer, and Follow | Contact, "Living Wages Required for Basic Lifestyle in 23 Ontario Regions Revealed," Toronto, November 1, 2021, <https://toronto.ctvnews.ca/living-wages-required-for-basic-lifestyle-in-23-ontario-regions-revealed-1.5647258>.

Living wage is a calculation of "how much you need to make in order to cover the costs of living in your community, including food, clothes, shelter, transportation, child care, medical care, recreation and a modest vacation." It explicitly does not include the cost of housing.

<sup>81</sup> "Rental Wages in Canada," Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, accessed July 4, 2022, <https://policyalternatives.ca/rentalwages>.

The rental wage is a calculation of the hourly wage needed to rent an average two-bedroom apartment (the most common type) without spending more than 30% of one's earnings – 30% of income on housing being the CMHC line of housing affordability. For an international student who earns the minimum wage and can only work 20 hours a week, affording a rental would be impossible without substantial sacrifice to personal autonomy, privacy, and safety.

<sup>82</sup> Statistics Canada Government of Canada, "Employee Wages by Industry, Annual," January 7, 2022, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1410006401>.

<sup>83</sup> CFS-Ontario, "Fairness for International Students: International Students in Ontario Fact Sheet | May 2017" (CFS-Ontario, May 2017), <https://cfsontario.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Factsheet-InternationalStudents.pdf>.



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