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UBC Budget

Student Priorities for 2020-21

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Introduction

Dear Board of Governors,

We write to you on behalf of the Alma Mater Society (AMS) which represents all 56,000+ UBC Vancouver Students, regarding proposed allocations and sustained funding of UBC's Operating Budget and Academic Excellence Fund.

In the University's Budget for 2020-2021, the budget emphasized supporting the long term health and wellbeing of all students, faculty, and staff, and incorporated student initiatives, sustainability and climate action, strategic priority initiatives, President's Academic Excellence Initiative, and contingency funding for the COVID-19 pandemic. These continue to be important areas, and we additionally want to advocate for continued contingency funding for COVID-19, in light of the ever changing nature of the public health situation.

Over the past few years, students continue to encounter an affordability and student mental health crisis that has only been further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Students have encountered a disparity in teaching quality in the remote teaching environment, as well as an extreme degradation in quality of life with limited social connections and opportunities for extracurricular involvement. Given the impact the pandemic has on student wellbeing, we believe that it is critical to continue to prioritize funding towards student services and support mechanisms.

You will find 5 key themes embedded within this budget submission:

- 1. Affordability and Alleviating Student Poverty**
- 2. Access to Online Learning and Hybrid learning**
- 3. Anti-Racism and Equity**
- 4. Accessibility, Student Services and Career Development**
- 5. Addressing the Climate Emergency Implementation.**

For a list of recommendations included within these themes, and additional research regarding the justification of these recommendations, please read the enclosed report. A summary of the recommendations and a table of proposed allocations can be found at the end of the report.

In light of COVID-19's impacts on the UBC budget and how central units have been asked to find savings, and the prompt to look at areas of cost mitigation/reduction, we will also be addressing cost mitigation and cost reduction that could be turned into funding opportunities in other priority areas. These budget priorities are based on student consultation, the results of the AMS/GSS/UBC PAIR COVID-19 survey (also attached), and consultation with the relevant units.

The AMS deeply appreciates the willingness of the University Executive, Board of Governors, Senate, and other stakeholders to engage in meaningful conversation with students at UBC.

Sincerely,



Georgia Yee
VP Academic and University Affairs

Priority #1: Affordability and Alleviating Student Poverty

COVID-19 Related Financial Relief

During the COVID-19 pandemic, a worldwide recession has disproportionately left students financially vulnerable, compounding a pre-existing student affordability crisis. According to the AMS Academic Experience Survey 2020, 52% of graduates and 45% of undergraduate students experience financial hardship related to the costs of tuition.

On UBC campus, significant amounts of students, particularly international graduate students - were left food insecure for months on end during the COVID-19 pandemic. Students going starving is not limited to emergency situations - it is indicative of systemic student poverty.

We also urge that UBC must take a proactive approach towards affordability; solutions such as emergency Food Banks and financial aid are band-aid solutions that do not address issues rooted in poverty and the systemic barriers to accessing postsecondary education.¹ UBC administration has committed to the creation of an affordability plan before bringing tuition increases, but we have not seen this affordability plan come to light. UBC needs to take swift and concrete action.

- **Recommendation: Create a holistic affordability plan that analyzes the impact of tuition increases and comprehensively addresses actions taken to mitigate the cost of attending UBC.**
- **Recommendation: Continued funding towards \$3,200,000 in emergency bursary funding, including the technology bursary.**
- **Recommendation: Continue to waive tuition collected as continuing fees for cohorts of students in extenuating circumstances as per the July request.²**

Graduate Student Aid and Support:

Many graduate students have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic, due to the research curtailment combined with additional child care responsibilities. We additionally echo the recommendation included in GSS' Budget Submission to allocate 20% of any new sources of revenue towards graduate student financial aid.

¹ https://bog3.sites.olt.ubc.ca/files/2020/11/5_2020.11_Food-Insecurity-Update.pdf

² https://bog3.sites.olt.ubc.ca/files/2020/07/3.2020.07_Request-to-Waive-Continuing-Fees.pdf

- **Recommendation: COVID-19 Related Relief in the form of tuition awards to compensate time graduate students were not able to make significant progress towards their degree due to the research curtailment.**
- **Recommendation: Increased allocation to the on-going funding made available to faculties to support graduate students, with aims to eliminate graduate student poverty, increase graduate student wellbeing, and increase the competitiveness of offers.**

Cohort Tuition Model

UBC currently uses an incremental tuition model to generate tuition as part of the budget. Many other institutions have adopted this model for a “cohort tuition freeze”/”guaranteed tuition model” that guarantees. This is particularly impactful for continuing international students, where their tuition increases disproportionately higher than. This allows for better financial planning for both the institution and the student, as well as improving retention rates of students.

It also seeks to address concerns within the tuition consultation report that students have every year around the amount of debt incurred.

- **Recommendation: Investigate the feasibility of a cohort tuition model in collaboration with student advocates to lobby the provincial government for operational funding.**

Priority #2: Access to Online Learning and Hybrid Learning

The transition to online learning, and it is vital as we plan for the next academic year, that these online supports are continued. It is essential that faculty are supported with the adequate resources to be able to teach and reduce workload, with the priority of supporting students, staff, and faculty wellbeing within the academic sphere.

Technology Bursary

The UBC Technology Bursary has been key in helping students obtain equitable access to education in this online environment. However, as it is a one-time bursary, some students have been left with continuing access needs. It is really essential to technology bursary.

- **Recommendation: Continue funding the UBC Vancouver Technology Bursary (\$42,000).**

Maintaining Academic Integrity Online

Many students, faculty, and staff are concerned with prevalent cases of academic integrity in the classroom. However, we urge that solely resorting to technological solutions and remote invigilation (addressed later in the report as an area of cost mitigation).

Academic misconduct can be addressed through a proactive approach to a culture, and creating resources that prevent academic misconduct, as well as supporting instructors in handling potential cases of academic misconduct.

- **Recommendation: Continue funding for the Senior Manager of Academic Integrity throughout the academic year (\$120,000).**

Hybrid Learning

As we look towards a gradual transition to face-to-face delivery, many institutions have started to look at HyFlex learning systems. Students have resoundingly enjoyed the increased accessibility of online classes, whether they are students with disabilities, commuter students, or just students needing to catch up on lectures. For many students, being able to watch lectures again or attend lectures from home has helped students with their learning and choose how they would like to participate. It is also essential that instructors are not faced with expectations to teach “two courses” - both online and in-person. This allows students to have equitable access to their learning, both during the pandemic and post-pandemic. Therefore, it’s important to make this transition seamless as possible by investing in hybrid learning infrastructure.

Courses on UBC campus have already explored options and tested successfully integrating hybrid learning, according to the CTLT’s paper on hybrid teaching and learning options. This expansion

Recent learning space infrastructure upgrades have included the Henry Angus building, Forestry Centre, and Peter A. Allard School of Law. We believe that it will be beneficial to students and faculty alike, to plan for the future. To upgrade 10 rooms with lecture recording infrastructure, it would cost \$200,000. With Enterprise software costs, it would cost \$500,000. For the future of UBC

- **Recommendation: Funding supports like grants for instructors to implement Hybrid Learning in their courses.**
- **Recommendation: Continue to invest in Lecture Recording infrastructure on UBC campus based on space requirements (\$500,000).**

Priority #3: Anti-Racism and Equity

University institutions are marked by systemic and historical injustice that continue today. 59% of students have experienced a form of discrimination at UBC, and it is most commonly related to the student’s ethnicity (39%). With widespread reports of racial profiling, as well as social media accounts such as @sauderunspoken and @blackatubc speaking to the rampant discrimination that takes place within our classrooms, communities, and institutions, it is urgent to address and adequately resource anti-racism work.

It is absolutely vital that this work is adequately compensated, and the burden of equity work is not disproportionately passed down to BIPOC students, staff, and faculty - but rather addressed as a holistic community effort. We must uplift racialized scholars and student organizers by supporting them and amplifying their work. Anti-racism work, as well as decolonization work is difficult but necessary work. Part of anti-racist work is capacity building, which is why we believe the University should begin to expand the training and community building in the onboarding/orientations process.

- **Recommendation: Provide the funding to carry out the implementation of the Indigenous Strategic Plan.**

- **Recommendation: Provide funding and resources to carry out anti-racism commitments and the Inclusion Action Plan, including continual funding of the \$200,000 Anti-Racism Initiatives Fund.**
- **Recommendation: Mandate training to build equity and anti-racist competencies for faculty and staff, to be built into the onboarding process. Build anti-racism and inclusive community building training into New-to-UBC/First Year orientations.**

Priority #4: Accessibility, Student Services, and Career Development

Due to COVID-19, we anticipate how certain student services may be facing potential budget cuts. We believe the sustained funding of key student services is essential to providing continuity in a sustained crisis situation.

International Students Advising

“International students were not considered by the government for the CESB, and students who were hired for the summer and let go prior to receiving their first salary/payment are not eligible to apply for the CERB (since we're international citizens). It doesn't matter about our citizenship. We're stranded in a country we CHOSE to call home, and when the government is helping peers but ignoring you it really puts into perspective of what's important. International students provide a backbone to the UBC society and without recognizing that, the government and school is doing wrong by the hundreds of students left stranded without any financial assistance.” - An international student from COVID-19 Survey.

International students have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic, in all areas, surrounding financial repercussions, timezones, internet access and many more issues. International students have reported having longer wait times to access service. It is important to ensure that this unit continues to receive funding, as more questions crop up around the return to in-person instruction, international student affordability.

Mental Health

The COVID-19 pandemic, on top of all new transitions to online learning, has resulted in skyrocketing rates of anxiety, depression, and PTSD. In the AMS/GSS COVID-19 Survey in July, 68% of students reported the pandemic impacting their mental health negatively. It is imperative to sustain funding for mental health services in order to proactively support students.

- **Recommendation: Continue funding student services such as international student advising, mental health services, and career development services.**

Centre for Accessibility

According to the 2020 Academic Experience Survey, there has been a significant increase of students with disabilities (25%). When inquiring about barriers to access about registering with the Centre for Accessibility, 26% of students reported that it was “too inconvenient”. As a result, the Centre for Accessibility will be hiring more staff to better support students with disabilities. This funding will go towards hiring more invigilators, accessibility advisors, as well as an intake coordinator. This will help align UBC’s Accessibility Advisor:Student ratio with peer institutions across the country to reduce wait times and provide in-depth support for students with access needs.

- **Recommendation: Fund \$340,000 for Centre for Accessibility staff.**

Off Campus Work Learn Program

The Work Learn program has been hugely successful in helping students obtain valuable work experience. In response to the statement, “I feel prepared to enter the workforce upon graduation,” 42% of students stated that they “don’t know/disagreed”. In previous years, the Work Learn program has been limited to on-campus work opportunities. With an off-campus WorkLearn program, it results in increased accessibility of obtaining relevant work experience to student’s degrees. This funding was previously allocated, in this past year, but was put on hold due to COVID-19. The Off Campus Work Learn program was also specifically tailored to meet the needs of Indigenous students and students with disabilities, and help students gain work experience. This program will cost \$600,000 to fund WorkLearn student positions.

- **Recommendation: Fund \$600,000 for the Off Campus WorkLearn program.**

Priority #5: Addressing the Climate Emergency Implementation

In December 2019, UBC declared a climate emergency in response to the community, including a letter that got over 1,600 responses and . The community engagement process yielded 24 recommendations, found in the Climate Emergency Task Force report. It is imperative that UBC allocate funding for the climate emergency implementation.

As the AMS, we are prepared to dedicate \$1,500,000 from the tuition surplus for the implementation of the climate emergency recommendations for student facing priorities. However, there are many aspects of the report that address faculty-and-staff facing priorities, as well as partnerships with external organizations that will still require funding. In order to address the climate emergency as the crisis, we must mobilize quickly.

- **Recommendation: UBC must allocate funding for the climate emergency implementation process appropriate to the nature of an emergency, including staff capacity and resources.**

Areas for Cost Mitigation

1. Remote Invigilation

Due to the pandemic, many instructors have turned to using algorithmic remote invigilation software. According to the Washington Post, some post-secondary institutions spend up to \$500,000 on remote proctoring software. The cost of Proctorio per student in a course is \$20. In 2020WT1, roughly 200 classes used Proctorio. That indicates that UBC spends an estimated \$200,000-800,000 on remote invigilation software such as Proctorio, based on course enrolment.

Proctorio has demonstrated itself to be a highly unethical company, utilizing ableist software that discriminates against students with darker skin tones, disabilities, anxiety, and medical conditions. Further reading regarding student concerns can be found [here](#), and a wide body of literature and speaks to the problems. This is not solely limited to Proctorio, and a variety of issues have erupted regarding other remote invigilation tools such as Respondus Lockdown Browser.

Recommendation: Discontinue funding for Proctorio and develop a framework for ethical technology and learning tool procurement before investing in further remote invigilation tools. (-\$800,000)

2. Travel Restrictions

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, travel has been significantly restricted which should reduce the amount allocated for travel and conference costs. It is not only more financially feasible, but also environmentally sustainable. We also hope to see in a post-COVID world, there will be direction to discontinue.

Recommendation: In line with the Climate Action Plan 2030, create a long term plan to reduce and mitigate travel costs at UBC. (-\$12,700,000)

3. Administrative Expenses

According to Statistics Canada's Financial Information of Universities and Colleges (FIUC) Survey, post-secondary institutions in Canada spend 23.5% of their operating budgets on administrative salaries, compared to 11.1% on student services-related salaries. During a year where it is key to preserve funding for online teaching and learning as well as research, it is important to reduce additional expensive costs related to administration.

Recommendation: Continue hiring chill on administrative expenses.

Summary of Recommendations

- **Recommendation: Create a holistic affordability plan that analyzes the impact of tuition increases and comprehensively addresses actions taken to mitigate the cost of attending UBC.**
- **Recommendation: Continued funding towards \$3,200,000 in emergency bursary funding, including the technology bursary.**
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- **Recommendation: Continue funding for the Senior Manager of Academic Integrity throughout the academic year (\$120,000).**
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- **Recommendation: Mandate training to build equity and anti-racist competencies for faculty and staff, to be built into the onboarding process. Build anti-racism and inclusive community building training into New-to-UBC/First Year orientations.**
- **Recommendation: Continue funding student services such as international student advising, mental health services, and career development services.**
- **Recommendation: Fund \$340,000 for Centre for Accessibility staff.**
- **Recommendation: Fund \$600,000 for the Off Campus WorkLearn program.**
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- **Recommendation: Continue hiring chill on administrative expenses.**

| Initiative | Proposed Allocation (in the 000's) |
|--|---|
| Emergency Bursary Funding | \$3,200,000 |
| Graduate Student Tuition Awards | \$3,600,000 |
| Faculty Funding for Graduate Student Support | |
| Academic Integrity Manager | \$120,000 |
| Lecture Recording Infrastructure | \$500,000 |
| Vancouver Technology Bursary | \$42,000 |
| Indigenous Strategic Plan | - |
| Inclusion Action Plan | - |
| Anti-Racism Initiatives Funding | \$200,000 |
| Centre for Accessibility | \$340,000 |

| | |
|--|----------------|
| Off Campus Work Learn Program | \$600,000 |
| Climate Emergency Implementation Funding | - |
| Remote Invigilation | (\$800,000) |
| Travel Costs | (\$12,7000,00) |