Student Voices & Advocacy: OUSA and the MSU

After months of lobbying from the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance (OUSA) and other student advocacy groups, March 2013 marked the introduction of a new provincial tuition policy, as the Ontario government cut back the tuition growth rate of five percent to three percent for most programs. While tuition will continue to rise faster than inflation, the reduction of the growth rate was the first of many OUSA success over 2013/2014, including a more honest for payment processes and funding towards innovative ways to address mental health.

But the work is never done. Last week OUSA submitted its 2014 Ontario pre-budget submission, entitled Education Works: Envisioning a Fairer Society for Today’s Youth. If you are interested, the submission is found on OUSA’s website – ours.ca.

The MSU, as a member of OUSA, was highly involved in setting the three priorities that comprise the submission: reallocation of tax credits to upfront grants for low- and middle-income students, new money for work-integrated learning at Ontario universities, and funding for hiring new teaching-stream faculty members across all schools. We’re excited to be able to present these ideas in writing to those who control the province’s funding supply. Additionally, after extensively lobbying MPP’s on these three ideas, OUSA presented these recommendations to Ontario’s Standing Committee on Finance.

In particular, I want to tell you more about the reallocation of tax credits into upfront grants. As many of you know, both tuition tax credits and upfront grants are forms of non-repayable government assistance. However, there are some major differences between them in terms of how they actually limit student debt. Tuition tax credits help low and middle-income students very little. They are targeted at families based on income.

Tuition tax credits help low and middle-income students very little. Oregon must reallocate the $340M currently spent on tax credits into strengthening the upfront grant programs. Grants are proven to target students who need it most – for example, the 30%-off Oregon Tuition Grant could be expanded, both in terms of size and eligibility. Also, the Oregon Student Opportunity Grant caps student debt at $7300/year. This figure needs to be lowered immediately, to prevent students from continuing to graduate with crippling debt loads.

In addition to the work we have done with OUSA, the MSU submitted an Ontario pre-budget submission of our own. During our edYOUcation campaign last September, we gathered a wide variety of student concerns regarding the quality of education and the student experience. We took those voices and amplified them by adding arguments, facts and figures around the three most dominant themes. Students want more on the classroom experience and more faculty who care how students learn best. Check out our 2014 pre-budget submission at ours.ca.

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