

How cuts to post-secondary education harm students

The provincial government has repeatedly said that its recent cuts to funding for post-secondary education will not harm students. The faculty of Mount Royal University have written this open letter to the citizens of Alberta to dispute these claims.

The government increased post-secondary operating grants by a total of only 2% during the three years from 2010-2011 to 2012-2013. This was far less than inflationary increases in costs, and resulted in cuts in each of those years.

Then, on March 7, the government announced deep cuts totalling \$147 million to Alberta's universities, colleges and technical institutes. The promised 2% increase in operating grants, without warning, became a harsh 7.3% reduction in funding, forcing cuts to be made hastily without adequate time to plan for downsizing.

These cuts will frustrate the educational aspirations of students, undermine Alberta's economic future, and erode our culture and society. We ask that the citizens of Alberta join us in urging the provincial government to restore funding. Albertans have made it clear that they want post-secondary education to be funded properly. These cuts are unnecessary and they are damaging.

Please consider the following facts:

- Jobs are being cut in both instructional and non-instructional areas, resulting in lower levels of service and a reduced quality of education. Tuition may not increase, but other costs will, and students will get less for their money.
- A story titled "Cuts at rural Alberta colleges result in job losses, program reductions" in the Edmonton Journal on April 17 reported that, "Shayne Saskiw, the Wildrose MLA whose riding includes Portage College, said the cuts to community colleges are particularly damaging when the northeast economy is in desperate need of skilled workers."
- Albertans' demand for access to post-secondary education exceeds the province's capacity. The number of qualified applicants not admitted to Mount Royal University has been climbing steadily and reached 29% of the number admitted for 2011-2012. A 2010 government report projected that, even at a constant participation rate (which is the lowest in Canada), demand in the province will grow by 14,445 full-time equivalent students within a decade.
- Reduced access increases competition for limited spaces, which raises already high admission standards. As a result, higher education becomes less accessible, particularly for under-represented groups. A greater number of graduating high school students will be forced to leave Alberta in order to continue their education, and many will not return.
- Because the government has not provided consistent and ongoing funding for Mount Royal University's nursing degree program, the intake quota has been cut by over a third to 210 students. The number of graduates is expected to drop from approximately 295 in 2012-2013 to about 185 in 2016-2017. During the 2011-2012 fiscal year, Alberta Health Services hired 98% of the Registered Nurses who graduated from Alberta post-secondary

institutions. Will Alberta again be recruiting for nurses world-wide, as it was forced to do after the cuts to government funding in the mid 1990s?

- The province has also cut services for people with disabilities, further marginalizing an already vulnerable population. Graduates of Mount Royal's Disability Studies diploma program, now cut as well, typically receive multiple job offers before they complete the program.

Like our post-secondary colleagues throughout the province, the faculty at Mount Royal University are dedicated to serving the interests and the aspirations of all Albertans. Please join us in calling on the Alberta government to keep the promises it made during the election campaign.

Gerry Cross,
President, Mount Royal Faculty Association