

# ADVANCING ACCESS TO POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION AT U OF T: FACT SHEET

Access to university education has grown significantly over the past decade as governments and universities worked together to remove social and economic barriers. The pandemic has clearly shown the benefits of university education. From February to March 2020, 7.2% of Canadians with a university degree lost their jobs, compared to double that number for people without a degree. In a difficult economy, university education is supporting labour market resilience.

Drawing on national, provincial and University of Toronto statistics and programs, this fact sheet presents evidence on some of the key measures that advance access to university education in Ontario, while ensuring our universities remain sustainable in the long term.

## What are key barriers to university access?

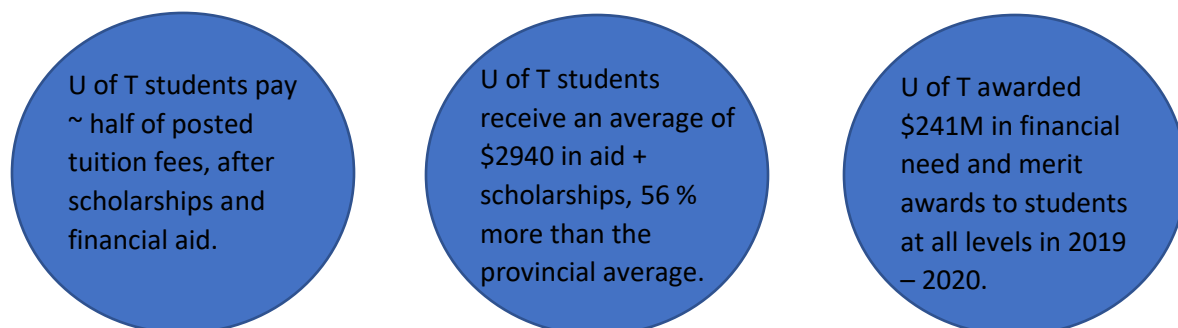
Multiple studies have shown that postsecondary attendance is affected by a variety of factors, including: [family economic background, parental education level](#), and [awareness of financial aid](#). The best time to raise students' awareness of the benefits of postsecondary education is high school or even before, [researchers say](#).

## How do tuition fees impact access?

The cost of university education is an important part of ensuring access. Ontario students benefit from assistance from two levels of government, as well as institutional aid available through the [Student Access Guarantee](#), which commits universities to meet any gaps not met by government financial programs.

In addition, Ontario universities set aside ~10 per cent of new tuition revenue from domestic students for financial aid. The "tuition fee set-aside policy" supports needed educational investments and continued access. U of T has established a similar program for international students.

The costs of education do not have to be an obstacle to higher education: U of T has a higher proportion of OSAP recipients from families whose income is under \$50,000 than the provincial average. [Data from U of T's financial aid reporting system](#) shows that the university consistently admits 10 per cent more students in this income bracket than other universities in the province, and assists them to succeed in their chosen programs.



(Sources: [2019 – 20 Annual Report on Student Financial Support](#), [U of T Institutional Research](#))

Over the past decade, [Statistics Canada figures show](#) that posted tuition rates across Canada have increased by 26 per cent. In Ontario, tuition rates had increased by 29 per cent before a tuition cut of 10 per cent in 2018.\* Is student debt rising?

- As shown above, students at U of T pay approximately half the posted tuition fees, leading to manageable debt loads and [debt default rates of under 2 per cent](#). Financial aid in other jurisdictions has also led to stable student debt over the past decade. [According to the 2018 National Graduates Survey](#), the median student debt for bachelor's degree graduates has decreased to \$20,004 in 2015 from \$21,232 in 2000. (\*Calculations based on Statistics Canada data.)

## ENHANCING ACCESS AND RETENTION PROGRAMS IN HIGH-SCHOOL

The Support, Engage, Experience U of T program (SEE U of T) brought high-school students to campus from schools in the Toronto District School Board for a semester-long course, experiential learning and other activities.

The program is an effort to provide a pathway for students who are under-represented on campus, allowing them to see U of T as a place where they belong and can thrive.



### Why should students graduate with any debt at all?

[Recent graduates have seen excellent returns to their education.](#)

- Two years after graduation, 95 % of (2016) B.A. grads were [employed in Ontario.](#)
- Two years after graduation, 85 % of working graduates were working full-time.
- [Median income of 2015 B.A. grads](#) was \$48,000 v. \$35,000 for college grads.
- Single graduates from university programs in Ontario were more likely to pay back their debt than those from other types of PSIs, evidence of labour market demand for their skills.

### What other types of support do students need to complete their programs once they gain admission?

For students who are underrepresented in university education, programs that increase their social capital are as important as financial assistance. Multiple programs at U of T support underrepresented students. They include:

- Black Engineering Student Mentorship and Ambassador Initiative (FASE)
- Enhancing Post-Secondary Access for Black, Indigenous and other Marginalized Youth through Embodied, Cultural and Community-Engaged Learning (KPE)
- Expanding and Creating Access Pathways for Black Educators in Teacher Education (OISE)
- Indigenous Access Program (Law)
- Access & Inclusion Peer Programs for First Generation students
- Community of Support program for MD students at every stage of their medical school journey
- Provost's Access Program – \$3M for over 30 projects across the university that provide students from traditionally underrepresented groups with supports, pathways, structured programs, and opportunities to continue learning at the post-secondary level.

### What has been the impact of the pandemic on student access?

The pandemic led to financial, professional and personal anxieties for many students. In these challenging times, U of T is helping students manage. Through the COVID-19 Emergency Grant Program, more than 7,800 students have received assistance. Now learners are looking to Ontario universities to build the skills they need to participate fully in economic recovery.

- Applications to Ontario university programs are up ~2 per cent in 2021 from high-school students and ~10 per cent from lifelong and other learners.
- In high demand fields, applications are increasing more. Applications to nursing programs in Ontario increased by ~17 % in 2021 versus 2020.