

DOUGLAS COLLEGE

# 2024-2025 BUDGET SUBMISSION



**PREPARED BY**

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# INTRODUCTION

The Douglas Students' Union Board of Directors is pleased to present the following recommendations to the Douglas College 2024 - 2025 Budget.

Every year, the Douglas Students' Union engages with students through a variety of ways to receive feedback on the student experience at Douglas College.

More so than ever, the post-secondary world is an ever-changing landscape with the needs of students evolving and changing with the world around them. For the past 3 years, the student experience has been constantly changing with new challenges, obstacles, and barriers being put in their way. From the 2020 lockdown that saw students forced into their homes and into a virtual world, to hybrid formats, to the collapse of economies in students home countries, to the return to campus over a year ago in a time when students were still recovering and struggling from the financial losses of the past few years. As a result of the challenges faced by students and expressed to us through our engagement, the Douglas Students' Union focused recommendations on online services, learning tools and Open Education Resources, College services, mental health supports, and increased options for financial assistance for all students through emergency aid and tuition freezes.

The issues and recommendations included in this years' submission are reflective of the continued issues facing students and the concerns raised over the past year. They are reflective of the changes experienced by students and the current conditions students are facing during their education at Douglas College. Thank you for your consideration of the feedback and recommendations in this written submission.



# INPUT GATHERED

Throughout the year, the Douglas Students' Union actively engages with students in many ways, receiving feedback, both solicited and unsolicited, concerning the student experience at Douglas College. This year, the Students' Union has increased their advocacy work to engage with members on a variety of topics and issues that have been brought forward through multiple surveys that focused on College services, amenities, and the College budget, through engagement at events and engagement while tabling at both campuses.

This year, we have seen a positive increase in direct in-person engagement by the Students' Union and by so many Douglas College departments. Through this engagement we have begun to see more smiling faces around campus. But not all of the interactions are positive. Students are stopping on a daily basis to discuss the challenges they are facing in and out of the classroom whether they be academic, personal, or financial.

Throughout the fall semester, the Students' Union surveyed students to provide feedback on their experience at Douglas College. The Students' Union engaged with students at both campuses and encouraged them to express their voices. The survey was also accessible through DSU social media platforms, the DS App, and the DSU website. Recognizing that the student experience varies dependent on the campus students attend, two versions of the survey were created so that the student experience at each campus could be better understood when it comes to services and amenities.

## THE SURVEY FOCUSED ON THREE MAIN TOPICS:

- Gathering an understanding of students' current financial, living, and work situations, and affordability challenges.
- Understanding students' knowledge and use of educational materials, such as OERs and traditional textbooks, and students' knowledge and use of technology and technological equipment at Douglas College.
- Students were asked what College services they used and their experiences using them, with the opportunity for open ended questions that allowed students to explain how services could be improved to better their experience and what new services they would like to see implemented in the future.

This report presents a summary of the feedback received through the Budget Consultation, through surveys on college services and amenities, and through direct engagement with members throughout the year. The key priorities and recommendations identified in this report are a direct outcome of the feedback received from students studying at Douglas College.



# STUDENT ISSUES - COQUITLAM CAMPUS

While our engagement in Coquitlam is noticeably lower than previous years, students who participated in the survey generally voiced the same concerns. Students are facing hardships surrounding affordability in general. With prices skyrocketing in every aspect of a student's life, it can feel as though access to a post-secondary education is no longer sustainable. When responding to questions about their current situations, students had quite a lot to say about the strain of their daily lives that impacts their education.

With over half of our respondents living at home, it shows that students found finding affordable housing and paying for tuition at the same time difficult and sometimes unattainable. For most students, they pay for their tuition through student loans and family support. We also saw 1/3 of students funding their education through employment. When asked what students' total monthly expenditures are including (rent, transportation, utilities, food and books) the answers ranged from \$2500 to as high as \$10,000 in total monthly costs. 50% of students surveyed said they must work a minimum 20 hours per week just to make ends meet, on top of relying on student loans, savings and family support.

More than half of the respondents commute from a different city, from where their home campus is located which adds additional stresses and financial strain. Some students live as far as Abbotsford making the commute over an hour during peak rush hour times.

Students at the Coquitlam campus had positive reviews about the technology, library, and equipment rentals available to them. Their IT experience on campus has been excellent, and students particularly appreciate the efforts of the library, the equipment available to them, the helpful staff, and resources accessible to them.

When asked if students preferred Open Educational Resources or traditional textbooks, over 90% of respondents preferred OERs. Not always offered in each individual syllabus, students were asked if they had a choice between registering for a class that had an OER versus a traditional textbook over 99% said they would pick having a class that offered an OER. Some students didn't have knowledge on what OERs are and asked the DSU directors to explain. After learning about OERs and the cost savings associated, these students said they would prefer to register in a class with an OER over a class with a higher-priced textbook.

*"There have been so many times where professors have made us purchase textbooks when their exams and test are based on their lecture slides. It is so difficult to be able to afford textbooks."*

Having students respond to what online and on-campus services they access gave us the knowledge of the services that are most popular and helpful. Students regularly access the library for study spaces, equipment rentals and over the weekend laptop rentals. The Learning Centre and Career Center in Coquitlam were among the most utilized services. Additionally, students use the parking, U PASS, and cafeteria facilities regularly. When asked if these services were meeting the needs of students, students offered the following feedback:

Students feel most strongly about the food services and parking facilities. Most notably, the parking is seen as too expensive, and students have a hard time finding an available space, making them anxious about coming to campus and being late for class.

*"In my opinion, parking is far too expensive for a pass. I pay almost \$200 per semester, and this feels like way too much. I already pay to enrol and register for classes, it's a lot to ask students to pay to physically be on campus too."*

While recognizing that the campus food service is struggling with the high prices and the inflated economy, students feel that the options available are limited. Many students stated that there are minimal healthy, vegetarian, or vegan options.

Additionally, students with religious dietary restrictions are very limited in what they can eat. The average cost of lunch at the cafeteria is \$15.00 this semester. This is a considerably high cost when students can go off campus and purchase a meal for \$10.00 or less. Providing more affordable options on campus will help students with their financial hardships while encouraging them to use on-campus food services.

*"So many of us can't afford much more than the textbook prices and the cost of tuition. It would be nice to feel like we could afford to eat while on campus."*

Due to financial challenges, students live further away from campus, in difficult and sometimes unsafe living conditions, and are often unable to afford their monthly expenses. It is hard to focus on assignments or due dates when students are dealing with the significant pressures today's society has presented them, such as being unhoused or evicted with few options on where to move. Students gave the feedback that the additional costs associated with achieving their education, such as textbooks, parking, and food, are having a negative impact on their education.





# STUDENT ISSUES - NEW WESTMINSTER CAMPUS

Survey responses at the New Westminster campus were significantly higher than at Coquitlam. However, the theme of students struggling with affordability is synonymously shared by both campuses. 25% of students pay for their education with their employment and credit cards, while only 5% are able to utilize student grants or bursaries to pay for their education. With the strain on families to support education costs, the strain is deepened by the notion that an increasing amount of students are living at home for the entirety of their education. More than half of students reported they can't afford to pay for tuition and rent, forcing them to live at home. The rest of the respondents reported living with multiple roommates to afford the rental costs of today's economy. Moreover, of the 25% of students who reported needing employment to pay for their education, 50% of those reported working full time (37.5 hours a week) while taking classes.

We asked students what their monthly expenses were, including rent, tuition, textbook costs, food, school supplies, and transportation. The average cost of student expenses is \$2,500 a month. On the low side, students who live at home have expenses from \$1000-1500 a month. On the higher end of the scale, students reported to having a total monthly expenditure of \$10,000.

What we wanted to see from the survey was that students who attend Douglas College at the New Westminster campus were renting and living in New Westminster. However, only 5% of the survey respondents reported living in New Westminster due to affordability. In contrast, the rest of the student respondents commute from a different city, with an average transportation time to campus is 45 minutes one way.

*"I have never heard of OERs, student enrollment services should mention to students when registering for classes."*

We surveyed students on whether their professors offer Open Educational Resources in their classes. We recognize that Douglas College is #1 in the province for integrating and adopting Open Ed into their classrooms; however, more than half of our students reported not having them in their classes or not knowing what they are. As we saw with students in Coquitlam, over 90% of student respondents in New Westminster said they would prefer OERs over traditional textbooks if given the choice.

*"Purchasing a \$100 textbook for 10% of your grade makes no sense."*

Additionally, students reported not purchasing the textbook required because of the cost and instead found free online textbooks and simulations to aid them in the course.

*"Professors need to keep using OERs! They should be the primary resource."*

Similar to the Coquitlam campus, students who frequent the New Westminster campus have positive feedback for the library, the library resources, the equipment rentals, and IT on campus. For students attending classes in New Westminster, the most notable services utilized are the following: parking, food services, library (study spaces, resources, and equipment), gym facility and fitness classes. We asked for student feedback on the services they use and if they could share some of that feedback with us. Overwhelmingly, students informed us that the parking was limited for students and too expensive, the quality of the food services was poor with expensive prices, and there was limited access to gender-inclusive washrooms.

*"The campus needs more affordable food options. Soup is really the only low-cost option."*



Students gave feedback that counselling waits are still high and that having to wait a few weeks to sit down with a counsellor isn't best for students struggling with mental health issues.

*"Counselling services have too long of a wait, and in the interim, I use the quiet room in a time of panic or anxiety... but it's very uncomfortable having to walk past the front desk just to access it."*

Students who use the gym facility said the space is not large enough or open long enough during the day. Students asked for a newer, bigger gym to accommodate more students, while the Chris Johnson facility could solely be for athletes to train in.

*"The gym should be open till 10pm, why does it close so early?"*

*"Wish there was women's only gym time because I feel uncomfortable using this gym."*

Students have said they either wait to use a gender-inclusive washroom off campus or they use the gender-inclusive washroom in the Student Union building. While the "Right to Choose" and "This is a Gender-Inclusive Washroom" signage is helpful, it doesn't fulfill the need on campus. Gender-inclusive washrooms relieve the stress, anxiety and mistreatment faced by many people who are forced to use gendered washrooms or compete for access to accessible washrooms. Providing gender-inclusive washrooms will enhance safety, access, and inclusion for all members of the Douglas College community.

*"There is a lack of available washrooms for genderqueer people, especially when they are so far away from our classes. Also, the door locks at a certain hour, the buttons on the AD accessible washroom don't always work and its super awkward waiting for the door to close while students walk by."*

# 808 ROYAL

We eagerly anticipate the opening of 808 Royal and are excited to see how the project builds community for students on campus. This housing project will help the New Westminster campus enhance the feeling of a college district, with students utilizing the spaces in both buildings throughout their day. We can see the food services, study spaces, and community spaces being used between classes. Because of this, it is equally important to make sure spaces fit the needs of students where the main campus building may have reached its capacity. Ensuring the building has affordable, healthy, and religiously inclusive food options will help support all students and encourage them to stay on campus.

Recognizing the Chris Johnson gym is at capacity in terms of space and schedule, dedicating a space in 808 Royal as an exercise room or movement studio with equipment offered to students will alleviate the strain of the main campus gym.



# RECOMMENDATIONS

**RECOMMENDATION #1** - Increase financial assistance for all domestic and international students through grants and bursaries.

**RECOMMENDATION #2** - Cap international fees to not exceed a 2% increase to match the rate of domestic increases, while adding this commitment to Douglas's Tuition and Fees Policy to cover all students.

**RECOMMENDATION #3** - Work with on-campus food service to lower food costs for students, and provide healthy and diverse options for all dietary needs.

**RECOMMENDATION #4** - Continue to assess and reassess all campus services and amenities to meet the needs of students during their education at Douglas College, including longer service hours, access to counselling, affordable course materials, and providing students with course material costs when registering for classes.

**RECOMMENDATION #5** - Invest in training and grants for faculty members to adopt and integrate OERs into their course materials. Invest in adopting full course packages for faculty members and students to access.

**RECOMMENDATION #6** - Designate flex space in 808 Royal to fulfill students' requirements of longer gym hours by creating an additional movement studio space with equipment for drop-in hours, which would be accessible to all Douglas College students.

**RECOMMENDATION #7** - Allocate funds to include additional Gender Inclusive washrooms in the budget.



# CONCLUSION

We believe these recommendations are reasonable and reflect the needs of students now and in the coming years. They will support the well-being and success of students while pursuing their education at Douglas College. Over the next few years, the College will undergo massive growth as we see the construction unfold at 808 Royal. Taking steps now to ensure students' continued success will help support and encourage this growth while focusing on the needs of students in a genuine student-centred approach to post-secondary education at Douglas College.

We appreciate the opportunity to present this report and recommendations to the Senior Management Team.

