

# Douglas College 2021-22 Budget Submission

DOUGLAS STUDENTS' UNION  
DECEMBER 2020



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# INTRODUCTION

We are pleased to present this submission on behalf of the students of Douglas College. This year has been different from any other and has brought forward unprecedented new challenges for students. While navigating the transition to online learning has brought forward its own long list of obstacles, it has highlighted a list of variety of issues that students face and a list of services that need to be improved to meet the needs of all students at Douglas College. The items herein are reflective of those matters raised by students gathered from the various year-round engagements over the past year. Thank you for your consideration of the ideas and comments in this written submission.

## INPUT GATHERED BY DOUGLAS STUDENTS UNION

The Douglas Students' Union engages in dialogue and solicits feedback from students on many topics including their experience at Douglas College throughout the year. In a normal year with the help of over 100 volunteers, the Students' Union engages with thousands of students and with many diverse groups on campus including clubs, international students and various programs.

This year, new approaches and planning were required to ensure that consultations were thorough and accurately reflected the voice of students at Douglas College. Feedback has been gathered through multiple avenues: direct correspondence with members expressing concerns and calls to action, an online survey and feedback form, digital live consultation sessions, and in-person interactions. These measures were necessary to ensure that the students at Douglas College have a voice to express their concerns and recommendations towards the Budget at Douglas College. Included in this report are actual quotes taken from the budget consultations.

In November, Douglas Students' Union representatives met with Vice-President Academic and Provost Thor Borgford, Associate Vice-President Academic and Student Affairs Sarah Dench and Director of Student Affairs & Services Patty Hamblar to share and discuss learning challenges faced by Douglas students in the summer and fall semester. While there were many issues and possible solutions identified, we acknowledge that not all concerns can be addressed immediately. Many of the recommendations in this document were informed by the report that was prepared for the Senior Management Team and the Vice-President's Academic Council (Appendix A).

This document presents a series of investments that the College could make to improve the quality of and access to education at Douglas, and to improve the services on which students depend, which have been highlighted throughout the challenges faced with the transition to online learning and the pandemic. We believe that these ideas are measured, affordable and have come directly from students.

The recommendations, comments and ideas are presented in the spirit of supporting continual improvement. The Students' Union appreciates the work of Douglas College's administrators, and are grateful to the collaboration with the Senior Management Team that saw them to be open, approachable and responsive to suggestions, comments and critique in dealing with a long list of issues this past year.



# DOUGLAS COLLEGE BUDGET PROCESS

Douglas College continues to do a lot more than other institutions in gathering feedback and input from students in the annual budget process; and this year, consulted students once again to generate feedback for consideration in the creation of the budget. We continue to appreciate the resources and effort that has resulted in engaging more students and gathering more information for budget priorities.

The Douglas Students' Union sees opportunities to provide students with more ways for legitimate and meaningful feedback on short- and long-term budget priorities and this year held digital live events to encourage diverse feedback on a wide range of topics. Improving the process of information gathering and the way that questions and inquiries are put to students creates better feedback and dives deeper beyond surface level conversations. This will help to inform long term strategic planning for Douglas College.

## METHODS OF INFORMATION GATHERING

This year's engagement conducted by Douglas College was an online survey that included 5 topics for short-answer feedback with the opportunity to add extra general comments. While the survey garnered more than 180 responses, it is a small portion of the student population at Douglas College and more work can be done to reach a broader audience and garner more extensive feedback. The method of short answer responses also highlights a lack of meaningful dialogue where students have the opportunity to engage in thoughtful discussion of issues they are facing and the elevated services they require to be successful in their education.

Furthermore, while planned for earlier release in the semester, the survey was issued in November at a time when students are heavily focused on mid-term exams and finals, creating a barrier for inclusive engagement with the general student body.

## DISCUSSION TOPICS

Similar to years' past, the engagement process continues to focus on receiving short answer feedback and suggestions from students, whether in the form of a survey or sticky notes, on specific topics. While this process allows students to highlight concerns on a number of those specific topics, open discussions through live consultations – in-person and digitally – allow for more thoughtful and contextualized discussions with students about their specific needs and recommendations in conversations about the quality of their education.

“The Douglas College budget should be made with Douglas College students in mind; Douglas College students should be prioritized.”

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## RECOMMENDATION ONE

Work in collaboration with the Douglas Students' Union to continue to improve the budget process to increase timing, participation, and meaningful feedback from students on the annual budget.

## RECOMMENDATION TWO

Host live student discussion consultations with administrators that focus on the quality of education.

## RECOMMENDATION THREE

Provide students with multiple avenues to provide feedback and recommendations to ensure that all students are provided the opportunity to express their feedback in thoughtful and meaningful ways.



## TUITION AND AFFORDABILITY

This year, the pandemic brought financial hardships to people around the world with governments scrambling to introduce financial benefits to those that saw decreases in their income or total job losses as the result of declining economies. While many benefits were introduced, students in BC saw some of the lowest amounts of supports and the highest amount of lost employment.

From the start of the pandemic, the precarious financial situations of students was apparent as lost employment was jeopardizing their ability to continue with their studies. The Students' Union applauded the quick action of the Douglas College Foundation to set up the Emergent and Emergency Aid Fund and happily contributed \$100,000 to support students in need. The fund continues to benefit students facing financial hardships and the Foundation continues to lobby donors for donations to ensure the longevity of the fund.

While the assistance that has been provided is applauded, it does show the precarious situation in which students live. Students live month to month with disruptions threatening their ability to continue their studies and be successful at Douglas College. As vaccines roll out world wide, the timelines for economic recovery and return to normal are long and arduous. Providing stability for students now by fixing their tuition and giving the security of being able to plan long term is an achievable goal that would benefit all students.

Like other post secondary institutions, Douglas College plans to increase the domestic tuition fees by the provincially regulated 2% along with a 2.5% increase to international tuition fees. While the increase in percentage may seem minimal, lack of and decreased employment, has led to financial instability for many current and future students with dreams of pursuing post-secondary education at Douglas College. Recognizing the hardships faced by low income residents across the province and country, governments have imposed measures to maintain financial stability, such as a moratorium on rent and student loans payments.

Furthermore, there is a direct connection between financial stability and mental health. Throughout the pandemic, there have been clear correlations everywhere between the loss of jobs and financial stability and the increase in depression and the decrease in mental wellness. By freezing tuition and improving financial stability, the College can make a significant impact on the positive mental health of students and move towards the strategic goal of creating a healthy and effective learning environment for all students.

Each year the underfunding of post-secondary education by the British Columbia government moves the public system of education into a private system funded by user fees and, in particular, international students. The result of this change is a system that is less equal, less affordable, and not accessible to all British Columbians, regardless of income or wealth. With the recent provincial election and the shift to a majority government, the Students' Union will be lobbying the provincial government for a full funding review of the Post-Secondary system.

“ Education must be affordable. Tuition cost is a burden for many. Trying to work and earn money to cover tuition cost takes a toll on academic performance. ”

## RECOMMENDATION FOUR

Freeze tuition, domestic and international, for the 2021-22 academic year.

## RECOMMENDATION FIVE

Increase financial aid for international students.

“ I am not complaining about my fees... I am upset about the advantage you're taking of me as an international student. By not putting a cap on my fee, that reduces my predictability and that reduces my planning putting pressure to my parents back home ” ”



## AFFORDABLE ACADEMIC MATERIALS

Students are facing hardships accessing post-secondary education with skyrocketing textbook and academic material costs adding additional barriers over the last decade. In the fall 2020 semester, the Douglas Students' Union surveyed over 450 students on the impact of expensive textbooks and academic materials. 76% of students were surprised by the cost of their required textbooks with 60% who had to borrow additional money or work more to afford the academic materials. Of the students who did not purchase the required materials, 69% reported that it was because they could not afford them and worried about the impact on their academic success.

The inability to purchase required academic materials should not be a barrier for students to do well in their studies. Affordable academic materials needs to be a priority in order to support overall student success at Douglas College. We are pleased to see that Open Educational Resources (OERs) are a strategic initiative for supporting students success in the 2020-25 Douglas College Strategic Plan. We are happy to see Douglas College continue to be a leader in open education in British Columbia and across the country.

There has been significant progress on the implementation of OERs and the creation of the OER Grant in the winter of 2018 has supported 47 Douglas faculty members to adapt (as of summer 2020). In the 2019-20 academic year, 159 sections used OERs which saved students \$518,195 and in fall 2020, 91 sections used OERs in 31 subjects. 45 instructors replaced a commercial textbook with an OER, which saved approximately 2,325 students a total of \$293,203 (which is double the amount from the fall 2019 semester). (source Open Douglas Working Group)

While some subjects are easier to adapt to, there remains challenges for faculty members to implement OERs. First and second year courses in more generalized subject areas have many resources both at Douglas College and through BC Campus. For upper level and specialized programs, there are not as many developed open resources available. Other challenges to implementation include instructors not having the time or technical knowledge to develop materials, there is only 1 librarian and a handful of instructors experienced with developing OERs to support faculty members.

OERs are one way to achieve affordability. There are many faculty members who are using other alternatives to traditional and commercialized textbooks and that should also be encouraged. The goal is affordability and there are many open and available resources that instructors can utilize to deliver the same high quality education to students.



The Students' Union is excited to see Zero Textbook Cost Programs in development. These programs will save future students a lot of money and we found through the DSU Survey that the funds students would have spent on textbooks would be saved for future tuition fees and supplies (38%) and paying for living expenses (46%). Zero Textbook Costs programs are also a great way to promote Douglas College to the community and demonstrate the commitment to excellence and accessible education.

The pandemic has brought a number of challenges to the Douglas community, everyone has had to shift to online delivery and digital platforms and this brings a considerable opportunity to transition away from traditional textbook to alternatives that are high quality and cost effective.

“It would be phenomenal for instructors to implement and use OERs, especially during this unprecedented time that we are in right now. Not only does it help domestic students and international students save on the cost of textbooks, but it helps them have more money to pay rent and buy groceries as well. I am looking forward to seeing this keep growing and more professors and schools using it.”

## RECOMMENDATION SIX

Develop infrastructure to support faculty members with the implementation of OERs at Douglas College, including technology and skilled support staff.

## RECOMMENDATION SEVEN

Create student assistant positions and co-operative opportunities dedicated to support faculty members with the implementation of OERs.

## RECOMMENDATION EIGHT

Creation of a new incentive grant to recognize faculty members who transition away from traditional and commercialized textbooks.

## RECOMMENDATION NINE

Investment into developing more Zero Textbook Cost programs.

## INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

While tuition increases, cost of education, and financial instability were key elements of the feedback from international students, many focused on services and access issues they have faced during their time at Douglas College.

International students faced distinct challenges this year with the transition to online learning or learning from their home countries. International students come to Canada and to Douglas College for the education levels offered, the experience of studying abroad, and for the services afforded to students in Canada while attending post-secondary institutions. With the difficult transitions to online learning, international students were left feeling a lack of support in their education and looking for accommodations to ensure their success.

While finances and tuition were key throughout the budget consultation process and through direct correspondence throughout the past year, international students provided feedback on the need for increased resources while studying abroad, increased access to counselling services, reduced requirements of participation marks in classes during the pandemic, and increased check-ins by the international department.

New international students encounter cultural shock when they begin their studies at Douglas College, both at a social and academic level. Socially, they experience disorientation adjusting to a new way of life away from their social safety network. Academically, adjustment to a new educational environment is challenging as standards and expectations can be very different from their home and years of educational experiences. This presents challenges to academic success through inadvertent infractions of academic integrity, ineffective communication with faculty members and potential mental health impacts. International students reported that they would like to have more peer supports and understanding of what to expect in Canadian culture, both socially and academically, before they arrive in Canada.

“My first few months here in Canada I entered into a depressive episode and was quite withdrawn. It was a matter of time before I got myself all the more involved with events and activities in the college that really encouraged students, especially new students. Since then, I've been keeping my engagement and found my new sense of stability and identity in Douglas College.”



“ Once an international student starts to come to Douglas their tuition should not increase more than the increase to domestic fees while they are here. ”

## RECOMMENDATION TEN

Implement restrictions to international tuition fee increases from exceeding the rate of domestic fee increases moving forward.

## RECOMMENDATION ELEVEN

Creation of onboarding modules for international students before their arrival that helps them familiarize with Canadian teaching and learning culture and introduce Academic Integrity - explaining what is it, why it is important and specific examples.

## RECOMMENDATION TWELVE

Creation of a peer support network that international students can access and network with before arrival and during their first year at Douglas College.

“ I wish I knew about academic integrity before coming here or at orientation - I am lucky I never got in trouble but I didn't learn about plagiarism until 1.5 year after I started at Douglas - I thought it was only cheating on tests. ”



## ON CAMPUS SPACES

While currently, and for the foreseeable future, the majority of classes are online with very few students required to be on campus for classes, labs, and practicums, students provided feedback that safe spaces on campus would remove significant barriers to their education. As students at Douglas College have a variety of different situations at home, not all students have access to safe, quiet, and productive work spaces. At home, whether it is with family, shared accommodation, or alone, students also struggle with adequate internet access, a key requirement of their classes to complete their assignments, complete tests and exams, and attend virtual lectures.

In many classes students are required to do group work which brings its own set of challenges as students attempt to coordinate their projects with other students they do not know or have any direct contact with. Opening library services in a safe, clean manner would provide a safe on-campus space for students to work together with the resources to accomplish their work.

Furthermore, many students have other obligations outside of their set class times. Ensuring that longer hours of access to spaces on campus for students to study, complete assignments, and do group work are available would provide more students the opportunity to be successful in the completion of their studies.

“ The ability to take classes, or at least exams, in person with the ability to set up barriers or distancing protocols. This could be spread over in large areas after getting screened such as larger classrooms, lecture theaters, or in multiple smaller rooms with a instructor in each room with a webcam set up to monitor the entirety of the classes.



“ More study space for students, and longer hours for study spaces (24/7). Library should also have longer hours (24/7) and provide more online sources that students can access from home without having to go in to pick books up. ”

## RECOMMENDATION THIRTEEN

Re-open the library for students to utilize resources and study spaces, and to safely complete group work.

## RECOMMENDATION FOURTEEN

Provide more on-campus spaces for students to work with increased hours and adequate internet access and increased safety barriers to comply with COVID protocols.

## TECHNOLOGY

The quick pivot to online delivery of courses this spring has revealed the unequal access students have to required technology to support their studies - including the ability to use software, obtain the hardware to support it and access to stable internet connection. It has brought attention to how much students rely on on-campus technology and resources to support their academic success. Students are facing significant barriers to access technology requirements.

Blackboard utilization is varied depending on the instructor and area of study, some students have experienced a smooth transition while others have struggled to adapt to the online environment. Students report inconsistencies between courses they are taking, ranging from very organized course materials and full usage of Blackboard tools to very disorganized, unclear expectations and low utilization of Blackboard.

Teaching and learning online is very different from the traditional in-person classes that students and instructors are accustomed to. The ability to process the online lectures and to engage in a digital platform brings along challenges that were not encountered before. During lectures where instructors speak quickly, particularly in technical courses that use a lot specialized languages combined with technical glitches, make it very difficult for students to understand and process what is being taught - often what is being said is misheard or misunderstood.

Stable internet access is a requirement of students, without the acknowledgement of the difficulties they may have to access. Students are told that troubleshooting technology issues are their responsibility without any support from their instructors or Douglas College. There currently isn't a place where students can get support. For many courses, video streaming during lectures and other software is required by instructors and students that have poor internet connectivity are facing difficulties and are penalized due to the inability to fully participate.



*"Profs need to know how to use blackboard properly so they can teach lectures properly. The program "lockdown browser" messes up the grades and is very glitchy.*



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*I have felt very overwhelmed with course loads that some teachers feel we should do. This could be the amount of work, the amount of readings, the projects/assignments, and disorganization. Clear instructions with clear guidelines are always the best. Learning environments are meant to grow student knowledge, not make us feel we can't do it. Help should be available when we run into problems.*

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## RECOMMENDATION FIFTEEN

Develop and invest in a system of hardware rentals for students.

## RECOMMENDATION SIXTEEN

Develop templates to support instructions to fully utilize all functionality of online platforms.

## RECOMMENDATION SEVENTEEN

Develop best practices and protocols for online teaching as well as increase support staff to assist instructors to fully transition to online delivery model.

## RECOMMENDATION EIGHTEEN

Develop and roll out expectations for online learning for students, including a support team to assist students with technology issues.

## COUNSELLING SERVICES

One of the main things that is evident throughout this report is that students have struggled over the past year in different ways, from their academics, to their financial stability, to their mental health. The recommendations and feedback they provided were reflections of their lived experiences this past year through the pandemic and a major shift in their academic life. The feedback put forward by students during the budget consultations was in relation to their access to counselling services, specifically to deal with crisis intervention and mental health issues.

Students recommendations included increased availability of counselling services through an increase of hours, increased staffing, increased access outside of business hours, and reduced wait times to see a counsellor. Students not only focused on the access to counselling services, but the quality of service they are receiving. Many students pointed out that when accessing services for mental health reasons, the focus of the counsellors centered more on their academic issues than the mental health concerns they were bringing forward.

“ I was having a really hard time and urgently needed to see a counsellor but the wait was 2 weeks so I didn't bother ever trying or going back. I am still dealing with my depression and anxiety my grades are really suffering.

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*The school [counsellors], as much as they're called 'counsellors,' I feel like they're more 'academic advisors'; they focus more on the academic rather than your actual mental health.*

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## RECOMMENDATION NINETEEN

Increase access to counselling services by increasing staff positions, increasing drop-in sessions, and increasing access outside of regular business hours.

## RECOMMENDATION TWENTY

Increase counselling services that focus specifically on mental health concerns and crisis intervention.

## RECOMMENDATION TWENTY ONE

Address gap of support for students not in the province and country with accessing help by implementing a system of referrals.

A hand is shown using a calculator on a desk. The calculator is blue and black, and the hand is positioned over the keypad. The background is a light blue gradient.

## ANCILLARY FEES

As institutions across the province were shut down as a result of the pandemic and education moved to an online format, calls for reductions in fees and tuition came from students across the country. Students brought forward concerns of quality of education with classes and labs being taught online to reduce tuition and lack of available in-person services as a call to reduce ancillary fees. Douglas College, institutions across the country, and, of course, student associations moved quickly to adjust services for students to access online so that students would not face disruptions in their education. While the pandemic is constantly bringing changes to the levels of access for students, whether it be in-person or online classes, labs, and services, it is beneficial for all organizations to consistently review their service levels and associated fees.

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*We should not have to pay fees for services/activities/resources that we do not have access to. For example, we pay gym/weight room fees when we are unable to use it or have very minimal access to it.*

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*Nothing on campus is open so I don't understand why I am paying for the same fees, it is really unfair especially tuition went up again this year.*

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## RECOMMENDATION TWENTY TWO

Regular review of ancillary fees during extended campus closures as a result of the pandemic or unavoidable closures out of the control of the institution.

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*I am doing my lab on Blackboard but I am still paying for lab fees. I don't even come to campus. I feel taken advantage of.*

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## **CLOSING**

The Douglas Students' Union thanks Douglas College Board members and Senior Management Team for your time and consideration of our recommendations. We recognize that it has been a difficult year and that everyone has been working hard to ensure that students have been supported and continue to be supported. The well being of students at Douglas College continue to be our number 1 priority. We look forward to working with administrators over the next year to implement improvements that will have a positive impact on the lives of all students during their time at Douglas College.

**Douglas Students' Union Board of Directors**

