

Council of Ontario Universities

Pre-Budget Submission to the
House of Commons Standing
Committee on Finance

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COUNCIL OF
ONTARIO UNIVERSITIES

CONSEIL DES
UNIVERSITÉS DE L'ONTARIO

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The Council of Ontario Universities (COU) is pleased to provide the following submission to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance as it prepares its recommendations to the Minister of Finance regarding Budget 2011.

INTRODUCTION

By working with our 19 member and 2 associate member institutions, COU advances higher education through research, policy development and advocacy. Our institutions are unified by a shared commitment to student success, research excellence, and community engagement, along with the belief that education and research matter.

Innovation, productivity and technological savvy are key predictors to success in the new economy, but these things cannot be achieved without a solid investment in education and research. Ontario's universities are well positioned as educators and researchers to help ensure that Canada remains a leading player in the global economy, and we look forward to continuing to work with the Government of Canada on achieving this goal.

ONTARIO UNIVERSITIES – KEY FACTS

Ontario universities educate 40% of the total Canadian university population, and account for 43% of the research that is undertaken on university campuses in Canada. We are also major magnets for talent – over the last 10 years, international enrolment in Ontario's universities has risen by 59%. In addition, we are key partners in invention and innovation. As Canadians we are often humble about our achievements but the reality is that our labs, our classrooms, and our campuses play host to some of the best research talent in the world. Ontario universities are proud to lead the way in research excellence – we are home to over 700 Canada Research Chairs (CRC), or approximately 38% of all CRCs. A major contributor to our success is the government funding that allows our institutions to offer robust programs and access to leading-edge technologies.

Ontario's universities are community partners – not only do universities provide a source of employment, our campuses are major purchasers, buying millions of dollars in local goods and services. We attract significant revenues to local communities through the influx of students and their families. Through our research and its spin-offs, we help to shape the economic development strategies of our local regions and our strengths are leveraged to attract business, investment and talent. Ontario's universities also provide Olympic-size pools, hockey rinks and playing fields for use by our local teams and recreational athletes, our hospitals bring the latest developments in care, and our theatres and performance spaces add creativity and cultural spice to our local communities.

CELEBRATING SUCCESS

Ontario universities would like to thank the Government of Canada for its continued commitment to higher education and excellence in research.

The Government of Canada's commitment to provide \$1.9 billion in postsecondary infrastructure, research, technology innovation and environmental protection in its 2010 budget is a critical element in helping achieve the goals outlined in Canada's Economic Action Plan. This investment also provides important support for Ontario universities to continue with the important task of teaching the next generation of Canada's public sector, industry, and community leaders, and undertaking the critical research that will help to drive our collective well-being in the future.

Canada needs to leverage its talent to remain competitive in the global economy and this often means that Canada must compete internationally for the best and brightest talent. Universities are appreciative of the Government of Canada's investment of \$45 million over five years in the Granting Councils to establish prestigious post-doctoral fellowships to attract top-level talent to Canada. As a result of this commitment, Ontario universities proudly welcome 40% of the 2010 Vanier Canada Graduate Scholars, in addition to the 48% of Vanier Scholars we welcomed in 2009. Universities also appreciate the government's commitment in Budget 2010 to invest an additional \$16 million in the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, \$13 million in the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council and \$3 million in the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, which will help to ensure that Canada continues to be a destination of choice for education and research.

Finally, COU applauds the Government of Canada's decision to create the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario (FedDev Ontario) which will create a critical federal partner to support economic and community development, as well as innovation and economic diversification in southern Ontario. COU supports FedDev Ontario's goal of creating greater collaboration between universities with applied research development expertise and enterprises with pre-commercialization through its Applied Research and Commercialization Initiative. COU is pleased to see that 40 university applications were submitted to this new initiative.

MOVING FORWARD

Investment in Foundational Architecture: High Performance Computing

A key element of the global economy is digital technology and as such the Government of Canada's consultation paper, *Improving Canada's Digital Advantage: Strategies for a Sustainable Prosperity*, is a positive step forward. Ontario universities appreciated the opportunity to offer their views as part of the government's recent consultation process. As suggested in our response, in order to ensure the ongoing sustainability of a fundamental building block to success in the area of ICT and digital media, Ontario universities would draw the government's attention to the need to continue its investments in both the operating and capital cost of high performance computing (HPC) networks across the country. HPC is a "supercomputing" system that provides researchers with the processing, storage, networking and visualization power required to undertake complex research and analysis that exceed the capacities of a normal desktop. It provides a critical platform that underpins all of Canada's 'big science' initiatives and facilitates work on many important scientific projects. Without HPC advanced work in a variety of areas including the environment, health, media/social sciences communication and digital media would suffer.

Moving Inventive and Innovative Ideas to Market

Moving forward on our collective commitment to support innovation and commercialization, COU would like to propose the creation of a new Ontario Innovation Fund (OIF), which would expand on FedDev Ontario's Applied Research and Commercialization Initiative. The objectives of the OIF (based on the successful Atlantic Innovation Fund) would be to grow and support southern Ontario's innovation system by:

- increasing southern Ontario's ability to move discoveries to market;
- creating and strengthening partnerships and alliances amongst private sector enterprises, universities, research institutions, and other organizations;
- developing the skills and "innovation know-how" of the next generation of southern Ontario's business and research leaders;
- nurturing innovation in areas of southern Ontario where innovation know-how and results are still emerging; and
- encouraging greater access to university expertise for small and medium-sized enterprises.

The proposed OIF closely aligns with the recommendations of the Mowat Centre for Policy Innovation's paper, *Toward a Transformation Agenda for FedDev Ontario*, June 2010, which called for the need for a strategic vision to ensure that programs and policies work effectively with existing strategies and that future policies and programs are better aligned among all levels of government.

Sparking Innovation and Inspiring Researchers

The advancement of excellence in research is one of the primary missions of Ontario universities. This research can take many forms. Some of our research is driven by a passion for invention or fundamental research that ultimately pushes the boundaries of our thinking and experience far beyond our world of today. Other research is driven by a desire to enable innovation that results in the more immediate development of new products, policies and services. No matter where research falls along the discovery continuum, it has the potential to contribute significantly to Canada's economic and social prosperity. For instance, our university researchers are actively engaged in pushing the limits of our thinking and finding solutions to problems in the area of ICT and digital media. Many institutions have researchers and students who are seeking new and innovative ways to apply digital technologies to some of the most complex questions facing Canadians today. The national granting councils have played a critical role in supporting a broad range of research in Ontario, and our universities would urge the Government of Canada to continue its important investments in the granting councils and the institutional costs of research.

Enriching the University Experience

Ontario's universities hosted over 27,000 international students in 2009-10. These students not only add to our economy while they are studying here, but they are also candidates for future citizenship, bringing with them the ability to contribute to our society permanently. The impact of international students also positively contributes to the global economy by allowing our own students to learn, to work, and to interact with other cultures, as well as to build relationships that may lead to future economic prosperity. We encourage the Government of Canada to continue marketing our universities as state of the art institutions that the best and brightest throughout the world would want to call home.

Expanding Access to University

To succeed in the global economy, Canada not only needs to attract the best and brightest, it also needs to ensure that all of our citizens have the opportunity to pursue higher education. Canada's Aboriginal youth population is growing at three times the national average, yet their level of university degree attainment is just one-third of their non-Aboriginal peers. In 2006, 50% of Ontario's self-identified Aboriginal population was under the age of 30, compared with about 38% of Ontario's total population (Statistics Canada, 2006 Census of Population, Aboriginal Population Profile). This young population is three times less likely than non-Aboriginal people to complete a university degree (7% compared to 21%). In 2006, only 9% of Ontario's Aboriginal population held a university degree. Enabling more Aboriginal students to graduate from university is critical to helping these students reach their goals, and to ensuring that Canada is able to address its anticipated skill shortages. Ontario's universities, working with Aboriginal communities, are proud of the program they have developed to attract Aboriginal students and support them through to graduation. However, these programs are resource-intensive and, in many cases, lack the long-term funding required to make them sustainable. COU encourages the federal government to continue working with Aboriginal students, their communities, and universities to ensure that all Canadians have equal access to postsecondary education.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As leaders in advanced research and skill development and home to 40% of the Canadian university population, Ontario's universities are important contributors to student success and research excellence in Canada. This would not be possible without federal investment in both our students and our research.

Ontario universities urge the Government of Canada to:

Invest in Foundational Architecture

- *by continuing its investments, in partnership with the Government of Ontario, in both the operating and capital costs of high performance computing networks across the country;*

Invest in Moving Inventive and Innovative Ideas to Market

- *by expanding on FedDev Ontario's Applied Research and Commercialization Initiative to create the Ontario Innovation Fund (OIF), which would support economic growth and job creation in Ontario by strategically investing in innovation.*

COU also strongly endorses and supports the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada's (AUCC) submission to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance and asks that the Standing Committee recommend that the federal government invest in the following in Budget 2011:

Sparking Innovation and Inspiring Researchers

- Continue investments in university research through the core budgets and programs of the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council to maximize the potential of the resources that have recently been introduced.
- Increase the Indirect Costs Program's funding by providing 40 cents for each new direct cost dollar. This will ensure that research investments are competitive and sustainable such that new direct research investments will not draw away from university teaching budgets.
- Continue to invest in new master's and PhD scholarships (domestic and international). This would complement recent capacity-building investments and help keep growing numbers of talented graduate students here in Canada.
- Seek measures to promote collaborative R&D partnerships that bring researchers, students and the private sector together, promoting knowledge transfer. Additional resources for international research collaboration would enhance Canadian universities' ability to engage in major research projects with target countries (including India and China), strengthening Canada's ability to succeed on the world stage.

Enriching the University Experience

- Invest in an international recruitment strategy that puts Canada on par with other countries. This would build on the Imagine Education in Canada brand and recent immigration reforms, leverage the promotional activities of institutions and their national associations, and include targeted marketing activities, in key countries, that promote the excellence of Canada's universities to potential students.
- Increase support for international learning experiences that encourage Canadian students to go abroad for short-term study or work experiences through co-ops and internships.
- Advance Canada's India strategy and higher education cooperation with other countries by supporting two-way student, intern and researcher mobility and enhanced education marketing activities to promote Canada's brand of excellence.

Expanding Access to University

- Work with the university community, Aboriginal groups and other stakeholders to invest in programs and services that will help more Aboriginal students graduate from university. The investment strategy should build on the government of Canada's review of funding for Aboriginal education (to which the university community offers its expertise and counsel) and should support the demonstrated success universities have had in increasing Aboriginal enrolment and completion.

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