

Position Statements of the University of Manitoba Students' Union

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Position # 1: Accessibility and Quality of Post-Secondary Education

Preamble

Education at all levels is a fundamental right of every human being without distinction of race, gender, age, religion, sexual orientation, political belief, economic, and social condition. User fees, in the form of tuition fees and ancillary fees, constitute a barrier to accessing post-secondary education. Post-secondary education is a critical component of our society, and a robust, diverse, and egalitarian system of post-secondary education has numerous social, economic, cultural, and political benefits for all of us. These benefits are both individual and collective, yet the collective benefits far outweigh the individual. Ultimately, our society needs the people within those social, economic, cultural and political spheres to be highly educated. The history of the struggle for accessible primary and secondary education is instructive. Social movements had to fight for their children to be able to go to school, and faced many of the same arguments and objections today's opponents of accessible post-secondary education make today. Despite that, the idea of universal primary and secondary education has become a political reality that very few people are willing to change. With Canadian society increasingly recognizing the necessity of post-secondary education, the fight to broaden access to post-secondary is more important now than ever before. Governments in the past have recognized this need for access, yet commitments made remain unfulfilled. In 1948, the Government of Canada signed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that states, "everyone has the right to education". In 1976, Canada signed the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights that states, "Higher education shall be made equally accessible to all, on the basis of capacity, by every appropriate means, and in particular by the progressive introduction of free education". These obligations have yet to be fully realized in Canada. Accessibility is more than simply counting how many people attend post-secondary education. Tuition fees create debt, perpetuate inequalities between individuals and groups, and damage the ability of students and graduates to contribute fully to our studies and our communities. It impacts the choices we make, educational or otherwise, to our individual and collective detriment. Tuition fees impact students differently, depending on their background and context: students from low income backgrounds and students from traditionally marginalized communities (including women, aboriginal people, racialized people, and others) are more likely to be held back by tuition fees and other financial barriers. Additionally, international students are overtly discriminated against due to their national origin and citizenship status by having to pay higher fees than Canadian citizens do. Tuition fee increases are usually a symptom of inadequate government funding for post-secondary education. Providing adequate funding to education therefore helps to increase accessibility to post-secondary education, and is a key component of government's responsibility to create and improve the level of social and economic equality in our society. Our goal is to create an educational system that is universal and barrier-free, and our efforts to improve the immediate accessibility for our members will work as part of a broader program to achieve our vision of a democratizing and universal post-secondary system.

UMSU Supports:

- Progressively eliminating tuition fees through freezes and reductions;
- Enough government funding to make post-secondary education accessible and high-quality;
- Creating legislative controls on tuition fees that are applied equitably, fairly, transparently, and in accordance with our goals;
- Improving financial aid for students who have higher costs or are less able to pay because they are members of a marginalized community;
- Eliminating interest on existing and future student loans;
- Transforming our provincial and federal student loan systems into student grant systems; and,
- Redirecting government funding from education tax credits to up-front reductions in tuition fees.

UMSU Opposes:

- Government legislation or policy that allows for tuition-fee increases of any amount,
- Differentiating tuition fees because of academic program, citizenship status, nation of origin, or any other reason,
- Referenda on tuition fee increases either supported or initiated by university administrations,
- Justifications for increasing tuition fees that rely on increasing student financial aid.

Position # 2: Sustainability

Preamble

The University of Manitoba Students' Union is committed to protecting and enhancing the social, economic, and ecological environment, and to promoting socially accountable and sustainable practices. As an organization with tens of thousands of members and a very active and visible presence on campus and in the community, the impact of our actions goes beyond that of most other organizations. UMSU recognizes that narrowly focused sustainability strategies can ignore the complex realities of our local and global impacts. UMSU is committed to a vision of sustainability that incorporates social, economic, and environmental needs in a holistic manner, acknowledging both the local and global consequences of our policy and practice. Environmental sustainability promotes an overall impact on the environment that allows future generations to live at a quality of life equal or greater to that enjoyed now. UMSU is committed to minimizing its ecological footprint through its businesses, services, and programming/events. UMSU will engage in environmental stewardship by advocating environmental consciousness to UMSU members, the broader community, University Administration, and all levels of government. Social sustainability calls for meaningful democratic governance through methods such as: genuine engagement with community stakeholders, empowerment of marginalized groups, and improved equity. As a democratic organization, UMSU is obligated to ensure that decision-making at union and university levels acknowledges the will of the UMSU membership. UMSU is committed to achieving the highest possible level of transparent, participatory, and consultative decision-making in all aspects of the organization. Economic sustainability is inseparable from other forms of sustainability, addressing the need for purchasing and investment, resource allocation, and production/distribution/consumption that adequately strike a balance with their environmental and social effects. UMSU recognizes the collective purchasing power of its membership and is committed to promoting consumer sustainability consciousness. UMSU is also committed to striking a fair balance of environmental and social sustainability practices within the pursuit of its mandate. UMSU also regularly organizes the membership to use our collective political power within the University community, and we hold the University administration to a high standard. We act as a critical watchdog and advocate for alternative policies within the University of Manitoba system, particularly important since the University has an even larger social, economic, and ecological footprint than UMSU does.

UMSU Supports:

- Purchasing policies that favour products that are socially, economically, and ecologically sustainable;
- Education that encourages the UMSU membership and the University community to be aware and active on sustainability issues;
- Working with the University community, including faculty and staff, the central administration, physical plant, food services, and other groups to support and encourage University policies and external contracts that recognize and act on sustainability;
- Ensuring the University's actions meet the standard set out by their policies, and that the goals set by the University are fully integrated with their actual day-to-day operations;
- Regular sustainability audits of UMSU's internal operations to ensure we meet the standard set by our goals and principles; and,
- The active involvement of UMSU's membership in sustainability campaigns.

UMSU Opposes:

- Wasteful consumption of energy and other resources, and the production of waste products and harmful substances, on or off campus;
- Purchasing practices that exploit the labour of any individual or community;
- Initiatives that create illusions of a sustainability mandate without delivering on that vision; and
- Narrowly-focused sustainability strategies that ignore any social, economic, or environmental implications.

Position # 3: Transportation

Preamble

Transportation to and from the University of Manitoba campuses has a significant collective impact on the environment and quality of life. As the official representative of undergraduate students at the University of Manitoba, UMSU has the right and responsibility to speak out and act on ensuring that this collective impact is a positive one. Part of this is due to the collective political and economic power of our membership, which allows us to influence transportation policy and activity more than other groups, adding to our responsibility to speak out and act on transportation issues both on- and off-campus. Our policy and position on transportation is informed by three key concerns: Ecological Impact, Quality of Life, and Social & Economic Inequalities. Ecological Impact Transportation to and from campus generates significant negative environmental impact, in terms of resources utilized and vehicle emissions. Reducing this environment impact is critical to creating a sustainable society. Quality of Life The by-products of bringing tens of thousands of people to the various campuses every day—like parking and traffic congestion—damage our physical and mental health and increase stress, reduce leisure time, and make for unattractive public spaces. A more effective transportation system could reduce resources spent on parking and roads and allow a greater investment into liveability of public spaces.

Social and Economic Inequalities:

The current transportation system in the area serviced by the University (Winnipeg and the surrounding areas) has significant social and economic inequalities that rely on and contribute to broader inequalities in society, including access to post-secondary education. Making transportation universally accessible will help make post-secondary education and the community-at-large more equitable. For the purposes of this policy, the following definitions are used: Active Transportation – Transportation methods dependent on human power to operate, such as bicycles, walking, skateboards, et cetera. Rapid Transit – Transportation methods that carry a high volume of passengers faster than standard mass transit systems can. In Winnipeg rapid transit usually refers to either bus rapid transit (BRT) or light rail transit (LRT). Sustainable Transportation – Transportation methods that constructively add to the environmental and social sustainability of a community by reducing or eliminating the environmental and social costs of transportation.

UMSU Supports:

- Policies and procedures that support and encourage active transportation on campus and in our communities;
- Transportation options that are sensitive to the unique needs of students living with disabilities;
- Investment by all levels of government into publicly-owned-and-operated mass transit and rapid transit systems, particularly those that connect the University of Manitoba campuses to the rest of the city;
- Working with various stakeholders (including the City of Winnipeg, the Government of Manitoba, the University of Manitoba, other students' organizations, environmental groups, Winnipeg Transit, and community organizations) to improve and strengthen transportation options in Winnipeg;
- Membership involvement in campaigns to create a better transportation network that meets the needs of our members and the broader public while following the principles of ecological sustainability, improving quality of life and reducing social & economic inequalities; and,
- Public education in order to build support for socially-just, ecologically-positive and community oriented transportation options.

UMSU Opposes:

- Any barrier to access – financial or otherwise – for public transportation;
- University and governmental policies and procedures that discourage sustainable transportation behaviour and/or encourage unsustainable transportation behaviour; and,
- University and Governmental policies and procedures that either are unfairly punitive to students or ignore the influence of socioeconomic status on transportation choices.

Position # 4: Public Education and Anti-Privatization

Preamble

Many of the core goals of the student movement—access, quality, and accountability—are dependent on the university system remaining a public good. Likewise, the three core principles in the mandate of public universities—public education, academic research, and service to the community—also rely on the public nature of our universities. As such, privatization counteracts both the goals of the student movement and principles of the Canadian post-secondary education system. Privatization of education can take many forms. Some forms of privatization target the actual instruction (the teaching and related academic supports) in our public institutions, either directly or indirectly. Examples of this can include pressure from financial donors to alter research or teaching or even the contracting out of academic services on campus. Other forms of privatization target the environment of the institution. Examples here include contracting out of non-academic services, exclusivity contracts, and the sale of naming rights for programs and infrastructure. Many times, the push to corporatize campus comes (at least in part) because of growing need for funding and insufficient government investment in post-secondary education. Universities have never been immune from the influences of the broader economic system and never will be—they exist within a particular set of social conditions and relations. However, they do represent (along with other public services) a place where the objective and ambition are not based on the generation of profit, but the broader public benefit. In addition, they also provide an environment unlike other public services where the users and providers of that public good (university students and university workers) are relatively involved and have a voice in its operation. Privatization threatens these unique characteristics—increasing involvement of for-profit companies on our campuses blurs the lines between accountable public institutions and unaccountable private institutions. As such, UMSU endeavours to maintain the University of Manitoba and other public institutions of post-secondary education as places where the goals of the student movement and the corresponding core principles of public post-secondary education are maintained and strengthened. Finally, involvement of democratic students' organizations, such as students' unions, in the provision of services on campus does not necessarily represent privatization. The accountability and democratic control of a public service remain the same when services are student-owned-and-operated.

UMSU Supports:

- Healthy and stable public core funding for universities and colleges;
- Stronger public funding of research at the University to reduce reliance on private funding;
- Maintaining and improving the accountability and transparency of public institutions to students, university workers and the public at large;
- Having the government-appointed community representatives of the Board of Governors be representative of the socioeconomic status of the community;
- Having student input be meaningfully taken into consideration when making significant decisions involving any University action related to this policy; and,
- The provision of public sector jobs with fair compensation and good working conditions at public sector institutions.

UMSU Opposes:

- The introduction of private, for-profit organizations on campus that either compete with or take over existing public or student-run programs and services on campus;
- Signing of exclusivity contracts that undermine or unduly restrict the autonomy of the University or restrict what the University community can collectively choose to do;
- Efforts to attack the wages and working conditions of public sector workers at the University by way of privatization; and,
- Funding for research, teaching positions, or programs that jeopardize the academic freedom and autonomy of students and faculty at the University.

Position # 5: Relationship with First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Peoples and on Reconciliation

Preamble

After receiving the Final Report from the Truth and Reconciliation on December 15, 2015 Prime Minister Justin Trudeau had this to say: “We will, in partnership with Indigenous communities, the provinces, territories, and other vital partners, fully implement the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, starting with the implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.”^[1] Recently, the University of Manitoba developed the Take Your Place: Strategic Action Plan to be implemented from 2015-2020 with Creating Pathways to Indigenous Achievement as a component to the plan.^[2] Similarly, in 2015, the Manitoba Collaborative Indigenous Education Blueprint For Universities, Colleges and Public School Boards was signed at Migizii Agamik (Bald Eagle Lodge) at the University of Manitoba campus.^[3] In a time of reconciliation and great initiatives coming forth as the government, organizations, and education institutions accept their responsibility of reconciliation. It is time for the University of Manitoba Students' Union to stand up and accept our responsibility. To this end the following position statement is adopted.

UMSU Supports:

- Respecting and honouring the Spirit and Intent of Treaty #1 with acknowledgments before meetings, events, and a greater integration of Treaty education across the campus.
- Working with Indigenous students to continue identifying issues, solutions, and initiatives that promote reconciliation and equity at the University of Manitoba.
- Improving the awareness and understanding of First Nations, Metis, and Inuit peoples, issues, and culture at the University of Manitoba.
- Advocating for First Nations, Metis, and Inuit at the Administration and Faculty levels to increase awareness on the specific and unique issues First Nations, Metis, and Inuit face in their lives as students and before their entrance into the University of Manitoba.
- Representation of First Nations, Metis, and Inuit peoples by way of voting seats on the Governing Bodies and Student Councils of the University of Manitoba.
- Improved First Nation, Metis, and Inuit student specific Mental Health resources on campus.
- The proliferation of bursaries, scholarships, and awards for First Nations, Metis, and Inuit students.

References:

^[1] Prime Minister of Canada Justin Trudeau (2015). Statement by Prime Minister On Release of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Retrieved from <http://pm.gc.ca/eng/news/2015/12/15/statement-prime-minister-release-final-report-truthand-reconciliation-commission>

^[2] University of Manitoba, Administration, Office of the President (2015). III. Creating Pathways to Indigenous Achievement. Retrieved from <http://umanitoba.ca/admin/president/prioritiescreating-pathways.html>

^[3] University of Manitoba (2015). Manitoba Collaborative Indigenous Education Blueprint for Universities, Colleges and Public Schools Boards. Retrieved from http://umanitoba.ca/admin/indigenous_connect/media/agamik_PO151363.pdf

Position # 6: Consent Culture and Sexual Assault Prevention on Campus

Preamble

At the University of Manitoba (U of M) and post-secondary institutions across Canada, sexual violence is a serious and ongoing issue. According to Statistics Canada, it is estimated that 1 in 4 North American women will be sexually assaulted during their lifetime. ^[1] In addition, one national survey revealed that four out of five female undergraduate students reported having been a victim of violence in a dating relationship and 29 percent of those women also reported incidences of sexual assault.^[2] Acknowledging the need for preventative and educational programming on campus, the University of Manitoba Students' Union (UMSU) has worked closely with several UMSU recognized student groups to eliminate the presence of rape culture and foster a safe environment for all at the U of M Campus. UMSU has partnered with Justice for Women, a U of M student group and University of Manitoba Health and Wellness to run Consent Culture workshops, and Bystander Intervention Training, respectively. Consent Culture workshops are designed, led, and facilitated by trained student volunteers, and Bystander Intervention Training is run by the University of Manitoba's Health and Wellness Educator and trained staff. The purpose of Consent Culture workshops and Bystander Intervention Training is to educate students about sexual violence on university campuses and promote preventative measures and consent-based thinking. UMSU, with the extensive support from Justice for Women, has sought to implement a policy that will ensure all student associations and councils that have representation on UMSU Council receive consent culture training in a timely manner. This programming is a proactive way to educate student leaders about the importance of obtaining consent, how to combat and eliminate rape culture on campus, how to mitigate the risks of sexual violence in their events and programming, and how to connect students with support and resources in the community. This training will continue to be offered to students and community members by trained volunteers and staff in order to effectively foster a true consent culture at the University of Manitoba.

UMSU Supports:

- Consent culture programming that educates students on how to obtain consent, how to combat and eliminate rape culture on campus, how to lead programming that mitigates the risk of sexual violence, and how to connect students with support and resources.
- Consent culture programming that equips students with techniques for effective bystander intervention.
- Campus-wide advocacy campaigns that connect students to resources, educate students about consent, and raise awareness of the issue of sexual violence.
- Student groups that foster and promote consent culture within their own group, and on the University of Manitoba campus.
- Student groups who actively work to provide programming and educational materials to students, faculty, and staff at the University of Manitoba campus, which allows all members of the campus community to promote consensual environments within their own faculty councils/associations, student groups, classrooms, and university events.
- Any groups or member of the University of Manitoba community who proactively works to prevent sexual violence on campus.
- The promotion of safe spaces on campus, and at UMSU events.

UMSU Opposes:

- The perpetuation of rape culture (such as through denial of the need for consent culture education, the use of materials that promote the objectification of human beings, victim blaming and shaming, and any and all behaviour that falls under the scope of sexual violence) by any member of the University of Manitoba community. ^[3]
- The use of promotional materials that perpetuate rape culture at any UMSU events or events put on by UMSU recognized student groups and associations/councils, or in any UMSU owned spaces.

References:

^[1] Statistics Canada. (2014). Sexual Assault Statistics in Canada. Retrieved from <http://www.sexassault.ca/statistics.htm>

^[2] Canadian Federation of Students. (2015) Sexual Violence on Campus. Retrieved from <http://main.cfs-fcee.ca/wp-content/uploads/sites/71/2015/07/Sexual-Violence-on-Campus.pdf>

^[3] World Health Organization. 2002. World Report on Violence and Health, Chapter Six. Retrieved from http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/42495/1/9241545615_eng.pdf

Additional Sources:

University of Manitoba. (2015). Sexual Assault. Retrieved from <http://umanitoba.ca/student/sexual-assault/>

Position # 7: Equitable Campus

Preamble

The University of Manitoba, and post-secondary institutions across Canada encourage equity on their campuses. Equity is the guarantee of fair treatment, access, opportunity, and advancement for all students, faculty, and staff, while at the same time striving to identify and eliminate barriers that have prevented the full participation of certain groups. The principle of equity acknowledges that there are historically underserved and underrepresented populations, and that fairness regarding these unbalanced conditions is needed to assist equality in the provision of effective opportunities to all groups.^[1]

UMSU Supports:

- Challenging and opposing all forms of discrimination and oppression.
- Addressing the presence of violence and discrimination at the University of Manitoba, and working to create a safer campus that is free from all forms of discrimination, violence and oppression.
- School-wide advocacy campaigns that connect students to resources, educates students about types of discrimination and raises awareness on how to challenge barriers that face many students.
- Groups who advocate for a safe campus, who work to offer programming and materials to all students, staff, and faculty, which allows them to learn about the barriers that face many students.
- Policies and initiatives that aim to increase representation of groups typically underrepresented on campus.
- Policies and initiatives that are accessible to all students on campus regardless of race, sexuality, gender, ability, religion, etc.
- A woman's right to freedom of reproductive choice; and a woman's right to be free from coercion or attempted coercion with respect to reproductive choices.

UMSU Opposes:

- Racism, sexism, ableism, homophobia, biphobia, transphobia, Islamophobia, anti-Semitism and other forms of oppression that can affect how certain groups of people access post-secondary education and perpetuate inequities in society based on gender, race, socioeconomic status, (dis)ability, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, citizenship status and other factors. ^[2]
- The use of social media outlets to harass, bully or discriminate against students or any member of UMSU. Examples of said outlets include: Yik Yak, anonymous blogs, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Reddit, Tumblr, etc.
- Any University groups, organizations, policies, or initiatives that provide unfair access or treatment of certain groups and promote the perpetuation of any of the forms of oppression as listed in point 1.
- Any act of coercion or attempted coercion with respect to making reproductive choices.

References:

^[1] University of Manitoba. (2016). Diversity and Inclusion. Retrieved from http://umanitoba.ca/admin/human_resources/equity/5804.html

^[2] Canadian Federation of Students-Services. (2016) United for Equity. Retrieved from <http://cfsontario.ca/campaigns/united-for-equity/>

Position # 8: Mental Health and Wellness

Preamble

The University of Manitoba's Campus Mental Health Strategy, Success Through Wellness, is a call to action for everyone at the University of Manitoba to view the promotion and support of mental health as a collective responsibility. The strategy focuses equally on students, staff and faculty members, examining all aspects of the university and identifying ways in which the entire community is committed, caring, healthy, responsive, supportive and resourceful. Promoting and supporting mental health and well-being will earn tremendous rewards, including a more positive work and learning environment, improved performance and productivity, and an enhanced student experience.^[1]

UMSU Supports:

- Students, student groups, student councils/associations, and other organizations who advocate for mental health awareness and support mechanisms, and who work to offer information and resources to all students, staff, and faculty at the University of Manitoba.
- Advocacy campaigns geared towards mental health awareness, especially campaigns that aim to end the stigma on mental health and increase awareness on the prevalence of mental health, especially amongst University students.
- All action taken to increase the amount of resources and counselling services available to students at the University of Manitoba.
- University initiatives that aim to reduce student stress and anxiety, such as breaks throughout the semester and policies and programs that accommodate students with mental illness.

UMSU Opposes:

- Any groups or persons that do not recognize mental health as a significant and legitimate health issue.
- Any groups or persons whose work reaffirms the stigma against mental illness, or who aim to silence individuals who choose to speak about their illness.
- Any and all forms of discrimination due to mental illness, such as denying hire or membership due to mental illness, not granting accommodations equal to those offered to students with physical illness, etc.

References:

^[1] University of Manitoba. (2016). Mental Health on Campus. Retrieved from <http://umanitoba.ca/student/mentalhealth/mh-strategy.html>

Position # 9: Cannabis

Preamble:

The Federal Government has declared an intent regarding the legalization of cannabis, scheduled for the Summer of 2018. This is a progressive step towards a realistic national drug strategy that can be best utilized for education rather than criminalization. A policy of safe usage, and education is vital for student safety- and legalization is a vital step towards making such resources available to students, as well as destigmatizing the usage of said resources.

UMSU is eager to work with the University to ensure that the on campus rules and regulations best reflect a system that is focused on safety and education, much like the campus alcohol policies, rather than the current system that first advocates abstaining from usage. ^[1] This is especially true when considering the rules for students living in residence, as under the current system residence students can be punished for actions that are no longer illegal. ^[2] The ideal system is focused on the understanding that students are adults and can make decisions regarding their own actions, and that the university and UMSU have a social responsibility to ensure education materials are available, especially considering the many misconceptions Canadians and students presently have on cannabis usage and potential risks. ^[3]

The role of UMSU in the education and awareness initiatives will invariably change over time, with a continual focus on ensuring any proposed regulations and legislation have a focus on harm reduction. One of the most important aspects of this reductions is in proper education around impaired driving as it relates to Cannabis usage, as reports show even when criminalized, cannabis is the leading source of impaired driving in drivers 18-24. ^[4]

UMSU Supports:

- Meaningful Cannabis education and awareness campaigns
- Proper legalization and standardization of access and quality of cannabis
- The prospect of an on-campus dispensary, ensuring safe and legal access to legal cannabis
- Campus usage policies that are grounded in facts and safety

UMSU Opposes:

- Unsafe usage of legal cannabis products
- Usage of cannabis around children
- Substance impaired driving

References:

^[1] University of Manitoba- Student Affairs, Health and Wellness resources “Cannabis”. Retrieved from <http://umanitoba.ca/student/health-wellness/cannabis.html>

^[2] University of Manitoba Student Residences (2018) Student Residences Contract. Retrieved from http://umanitoba.ca/campus/housing/images/2018_summer_contract.pdf

^[3] Health Canada. (2017) Canadian Cannabis Survey. Retrieved from <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/publications/drugs-health-products/canadian-cannabis-survey-2017-summary.html>

^[4] Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction. (2017) Clearing the Smoke on Cannabis Cannabis Use and Driving. Retrieved from <http://www.ccsa.ca/Resource%20Library/CCSA-Cannabis-Use-Driving-Report-2017-en.pdf>