



**STUDENTS' ASSOCIATION
OF MACEWAN UNIVERSITY**

NEWSRELEASE

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For immediate release

EDMONTON, ALBERTA – MacEwan students are concerned to see yet another year of underfunding for post-secondary students and institutions in the province, which will undoubtedly amplify the significant financial pressure students have been facing even prior to the pandemic.

The Government of Alberta has indicated that upskilling, reskilling, and targeted training for areas experiencing labour shortages are some of its priorities with Budget 2022. However, without adequate funding for the post-secondary system, Alberta will continue to experience the loss of skilled labour to provinces and jurisdictions that can guarantee future economic prosperity for students and recent graduates.

Budget 2022 came with \$5 million in grants for Indigenous learners, \$8 million for re-skilling and upskilling programs, and \$15 million earmarked for grants and bursaries targeting low-income students in high demand programs, among other partial funding. While the Students' Association of MacEwan University (SAMU) is pleased to see these and a handful of other standalone investments in student success, we remain concerned about the lack of systemic support and funding being offered.

This year's provincial budget follows consecutive cuts to post-secondary funding that began in 2019, forcing some institutions to cut spending by up to 30%, not taking into account high inflation during the pandemic. Though we are not seeing the same cuts in this year's budget, we are seeing a stark absence of the funding required to bridge the gap caused by back to back cuts to the system. This is made worse by the fact that non-repayable student financial aid funding in the province continues to lag far behind student needs.

"We've seen a nominal increase to the funding for student aid in Alberta in the form of targeted grants, but using a piecemeal strategy with student financial aid is not setting students up for success," said SAMU President Myles Dykes. "The majority of the financial aid currently available to students is in the form of loans, meaning our most vulnerable learners are being asked to take on significant debt in order to access an education."

As more and more Albertans turn to post-secondary institutions for an economic and social path out of the pandemic, it will be crucial to ensure that an accessible system is there to meet and welcome them. Without system-wide, sustainable funding, students are left to take on the dual brunt of COVID-induced unemployment and the rising costs of living and education.

In order to succeed when entering the workforce, either as students or graduates, Albertan learners need to be able to rely on the tools they receive through their training and education. Work-integrated learning opportunities go a long way in giving students and graduates the tools to succeed, and the approach taken in this budget to fund one-off programs leaves students without solid footing when making career plans. Budget 2022 comes with a \$6 million investment in work-integrated learning, an investment that is welcome but ultimately inadequate for meeting ever-increasing demands for these opportunities from students.

“The provincial government keeps reiterating the value of work-integrated learning and a meaningful labour training system, but we’re just not seeing that come through in how much funding is allocated or where it’s being spent within the post-secondary system,” said Matt Yanish, Vice President External at SAMU. Yanish added that many Albertan universities have been expected to satisfy provincial standards for work-integrated learning quotas in order to receive their operating funding, and this lack of follow up in funding from the province is counter-intuitive to objectives set out for the post-secondary system by this same government.

The success of Albertan students goes hand in hand with Alberta’s economic future, and during a time of a public health crisis coupled with financial distress, it is crucial for the Government of Alberta and the Advanced Education ministry to recognize and fund student success adequately.

SAMU will continue to work hard on behalf of MacEwan students, through advocating to the provincial government and the Advanced Education ministry to meet the gaps students have identified. We know that as the social and economic innovators of today and tomorrow, students are eager to use their education to improve themselves and their communities, but this is only possible with a predictable, accessible, and affordable post-secondary and student support system

About SAMU: The Students’ Association of MacEwan University (SAMU) is a student-centred organization governed by students, for students. SAMU provides many programs and services that serve the student body, including but not limited to: The Pantry, Peer Support, Breakfast Club, awards, bursaries, events and more. Acting within MacEwan, while maintaining independence from the University, it is an organization serving students, inspired by students.

For more information, visit <https://samu.ca>.

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