



## **Student Advocacy Week**

November 7th-10th, 2016

StudentsNS

# About StudentsNS

StudentsNS is an alliance of Nova Scotia post-secondary student associations. We give 20,000 students a united voice in Nova Scotia, helping set the direction of post-secondary education by researching challenges, identifying solutions, and creating the political space needed for these solutions to happen.

Student Advocacy Week is an annual conference where student leaders from all member schools join together to meet with MLAs and other decision makers. We propose recommendations for change that will positively impact the lives of students.

## Summary of Recommendations



### Strengthening the Student Assistance Program

Recommendation #1: Re-Purpose Domestic Student Grant for Low-Income Students

Recommendation #2: Improve the Grant to Loan Ratio from 40:60 to 50:50

Recommendation #3: Increase Weekly Loan Limit from \$180/week to \$210/week

Recommendation #4: Improve Delays in Student Assistance Distribution



### Supporting International Students

Recommendation #5: Provide MSI coverage to International Students Immediately Upon their Arrival



### Ensuring Access to Post-Secondary Education

Recommendation #6: Creation of Minister's Advisory Panel on Colonization

Recommendation #7: Develop a comprehensive dataset of characteristics and potential barriers to PSE for Nova Scotians



### Facilitating Civic Participation from Students

Recommendation #8: Amend the Municipal Elections Act



## STRENGTHENING THE STUDENT ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

One of the four core values of StudentsNS is affordability. The cost of post-secondary education in Nova Scotia should not cause undue hardship upon any student, restrict their ability to pursue the career path they choose, or make them financially unable to live in the community that they choose.

### **Recommendation #1: Re-Purpose Domestic Student Grant for Low-Income Students**

Currently, over \$25 million a year<sup>[1]</sup> is allocated to a tuition rebate for Nova Scotia residents through the Nova Scotia University Student Bursary (NSUSB) Program. StudentsNS advocates that this money be re-purposed as a bursary for low-income students in the province.

- The NSUSB<sup>[2]</sup> is currently distributed regardless of the financial position Nova Scotia students are in;
- Those individuals from low-income families are much less likely to pursue post-secondary education due to the upfront costs;
- A re-purpose would benefit those from traditionally marginalized demographics in Nova Scotia, specifically those of Indigenous and African descent;

*StudentsNS calls the government of Nova Scotia subsidize a greater proportion of tuition costs for students from low-income backgrounds. This should be done on a graduated system, much like has been done for tuition by the Ontario government<sup>[3]</sup>, re-purposing the current \$25 million a year to those Nova Scotia students who need it the most.*

Approximate cost: \$0

### **Recommendation #2: Improve the Grant to Loan Ratio from 40:60 to 50:50**

StudentsNS advocates that the government of Nova Scotia increase its grant to loan ratio from the current 40:60 ratio, respectively, to a 50:50 ratio by 2019.

- Grants are more beneficial to students in overcoming economic barriers to post-secondary education because they do not have to be repaid upon graduation as loans do;
- If the grant to loan ratio were to stay stagnant, and the cost of post-secondary education continued to rise, Nova Scotia will, in fact, be graduating students with increasingly higher debt levels;

*Recommendation: with the continued increased cost of post-secondary education for students in Nova Scotia, the grant to loan ratio be adjusted. The grant to loan ratio should be increased over the course of two years from 45:55 in 2017-2018, and 50:50 in 2018-2019.*

Approximate cost: \$2.7 million over two years

### **Recommendation #3: Increase Weekly Loan Limit from \$180/week to \$210/week**

StudentsNS advocates that the government of Nova Scotia increase its weekly loan limit from \$180 per week to match the federal governments at \$210 per week.

- The Canadian federal government weekly maximum assistance limit is \$210;
- Increasing the weekly loan limit would reduce the unmet need currently experienced by Nova Scotia students, even after they receive their allotment of student assistance;

- Increased provisions upfront for students could reduce the instances of students dropping out of programs, having to reduce course loads, and equal the playing field for students who are currently forced to take on overwhelming jobs to bolster their unmet need.

*StudentsNS call the government of Nova Scotia increase its weekly loan limit over the course of three years from \$180 per week to \$210 per week (\$190 in 2017, \$200 in 2018, and \$210 in 2019). The weekly loan limit must also be tied to inflation so as to prevent the need for drastic increases in the future.*

*Approximate cost: \$3 million over three years*

#### **Recommendation #4: Improve Delays in Student Assistance Distribution**

Post-secondary students in Nova Scotia, in particular those students at Nova Scotia Community Colleges (NSCC), experience delays in student assistance that prevent them from acquiring required materials for courses come the beginning of the semester. StudentsNS advocates that student assistance be released prior to the beginning of each academic year to mitigate such issues.

- The Canadian Student Loan Program policy mandates funds are disbursed on or after the first day of classes;
- Students are unable, because of the delays, to equip themselves in time with the materials needed by the start of their program, delaying their learning;
- Students require equipment, tools, or instruments, often at a high cost, before they can begin any instruction (this is of particular concern to NSCC students);

*StudentsNS calls the government of Nova Scotia establish a funding program that gives all NSCC students (and qualifying university students) access to their first month of Nova Scotia student*

*assistance funding prior to the start of classes, to be repaid when official student assistance funds are distributed.*

*Given that student assistance is not an integrated system between the federal and provincial government in Nova Scotia, Nova Scotia adopt this policy and then work with the Canada Student Loans Program to advocate they make the same change, in an effort to make post-secondary education increasingly accessible to all Canadians.*



## **SUPPORTING INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS**

#### **Recommendation #5: Provide MSI coverage to International Students Immediately Upon their Arrival**

One of the four core values of StudentsNS is quality. Policies, programs, and services in post-secondary education should meet student expectations to help prepare them for lifelong success, including in their citizenship, careers, and personal well being.

International students are critical assets to the province of Nova Scotia. StudentsNS advocates that it is fundamental that the government of Nova Scotia provide international students with MSI coverage immediately upon their arrival in Nova Scotia, given that healthcare is a staple of Canadian living.

- International students are not currently immediately covered for MSI coverage upon entry to Nova Scotia;
- The current provision for international student MSI coverage states that they are only eligible after studying in Nova Scotia for thirteen (13) consecutive months without thirty-one (31) days outside the province[4];
- International students are unable to go home for the entirety of summer if they wish to qualify for MSI coverage;

- International students are at risk of paying thousands of dollars out of their own pockets for simple medical visits – money which they cannot otherwise put toward their education, often attributing to greater debt;
- Private health plans do not cover the basic necessities of health coverage that Nova Scotian residents receive for free such as check-ups and hospital visits;

*StudentsNS calls the government of Nova Scotia to amend its current provision to allow international students immediate access to MSI coverage upon arrival to Nova Scotia. The government of Nova Scotia should allocate approximately \$99.85 per international student, or \$625,000 in total, to provide them with immediate MSI coverage.*

Approximate cost: \$625,000



## SOCIAL ACCESS TO POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

StudentsNS prioritizes the accessibility of post-secondary education (PSE) as one of its four foundational values because we believe that every qualified Nova Scotia resident who wishes to pursue post-secondary education should be able to do so, irrespective of their financial situation, socioeconomic or ethnic background, physical, psychological or mental disability, age, sexual orientation, geographic location, or any other factor exogenous to qualification.

### Recommendation #6: Creation of Minister’s Advisory Panel to Address Colonialism

StudentsNS advocates that the Nova Scotia government establish a Minister’s Advisory Panel in collaboration with members of the Indigenous community to begin to properly addressing reconciliation. StudentsNS has been working with Mi’kmaw Kina’matnewey (MK) and we have their support in advocating for the Minister’s Advisory Panel.

- Canada’s history with racism begins with the violence and exploitation of

Indigenous peoples during European colonialism, which has and continues to drastically alter the traditional ways of living for the Indigenous Peoples of Nova Scotia;

- The federal government has recognized the importance of the Truth and Reconciliation Report;
- The Indigenous Peoples of Nova Scotia should be a significant priority for the provincial government as the Premier, Stephen McNeil, is the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs;
- Indigenous Nova Scotians continue to face greater economic and social barriers to post-secondary education than their counterparts;
- Indigenous youth are the fastest growing population in Canada, it must be a priority of government to have a post-secondary system that supports these students;

*StudentsNS calls the government of Nova Scotia, under the Department of Labour and Advanced Education, create a Minister’s Advisory Panel to address the calls to action made by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and start on a path towards reconciliation.*

*This panel should be jointly chaired by the Minister of Labour and Advanced Education and members of the Indigenous community. This is to ensure that it is through adequate collaboration and consultation that colonialism in both the governance structures and classrooms of our post-secondary education institutions is removed.*

Approximate cost: \$0

### Recommendation #7: Develop a comprehensive dataset of characteristics and potential barriers to PSE for Nova Scotians

The lack of data on the post-secondary participation of different demographic groups hinders effective policy analysis on the accessibility and affordability of PSE for Nova Scotians. StudentsNS advocates that the government of Nova Scotia creates a comprehensive data collection program for all post-secondary institutions in the province.

- Data describing university and community college student populations are not comparable to one another, which complicates comparisons and system-wide analyses;
- Our understanding of possible barriers existing beneath the total Indigenous population level is limited because local Indigenous PSE access data currently does not differentiate between subgroups (e.g. Mi'kmaw/Metis/other affiliation; status/non-status; on/off reserve);
- Quantitative data on African Nova Scotian students is limited, which impacts efforts to understand their learning and achievement outcomes;
- The available data on Nova Scotia's PSE students adequately describes the binary sex characteristics (male/female) of the student body but the data is not sufficient to understand the representation of non-binary gender identities;
- The lack of data for various demographics in the province impacts effective policy analysis on the accessibility and affordability of PSE for Nova Scotians;

*StudentsNS calls the government of Nova Scotia creates a data collection system that is complete, comparable across institutions and time, and is compatible with existing data sets. The government of Nova Scotia and PSE institutions must use this data to better understand system-wide gaps and develop policy that reduces barriers to PSE.*



## FACILITATING STUDENT-CIVIC PARTICIPATION

### Recommendation #8: Amend the Municipal Elections Act

One of four core values of StudentsNS is the student voice. Nova Scotia students must be empowered to actively participate in setting their post-secondary system's direction via

engagement through their representative student bodies, within the post-secondary institutions themselves, and through the broader democratic process.

Due to the ambiguity of the definition of an 'ordinarily resident person' as defined in the Municipal Elections Act[5], StudentsNS advocates that the Act be amended to provide more clarity on the eligibility of voters so as to encourage more students to vote in municipal elections and to reduce the amount of discretion left to the returning officer on eligibility.

- Municipal Affairs, and subsequently the Municipal Elections Act, is a provincial affair in Nova Scotia;
- The Municipal Elections Act clearly outlines that students can vote in municipal elections[6];
- The Municipal Elections Act states that "a person is ordinarily resident in the place where the person lives and to which, whenever absent, the person intends to return"[7];
- 'Ordinarily resident' is subjective when many students spend the majority of time living in one municipality for school and may return to another residence for a minority of time, resulting in two places of residence. While at either residence, students have the intention of returning to the other while away;

*StudentsNS calls the government of Nova Scotia to review the Municipal Elections Act with student consultation, paying particular attention to Section 16 Article 8, in order to clearly and concisely indicate student eligibility to vote. The government of Nova Scotia must clearly differentiate between permanent residential standing (as a function relation to provincial benefit eligibility, taxation purposes, etc.) from ordinarily resident status.*

Approximate cost: \$0

[1] Based on MPHEC Enrollment Data

[2] <http://novascotia.ca/news/release/?id=20121009001>

[3] <https://www.ontario.ca/page/new-ontario-student-grant>

[4] [http://novascotia.ca/DHW/msi/moving\\_travel.asp](http://novascotia.ca/DHW/msi/moving_travel.asp)

[5-7] Section 18 (1) & (8a)

