

# OUSA

Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance

## ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

POLICY PAPER

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## ABOUT OUSA

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OUSA represents the interests of 150,000 professional and undergraduate, full-time and part-time university students at eight student associations across Ontario. Our vision is for an accessible, affordable, accountable, and high quality post-secondary education in Ontario. To achieve this vision we've come together to develop solutions to challenges facing higher education, build broad consensus for our policy options, and lobby government to implement them.

The member institutions and home office of the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance operate on the ancestral and traditional territories of the Attawandaron (Neutral), Haudenosaunee, Huron-Wendat, Leni-Lunaape, Anishnawbek, and Mississauga peoples.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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OUSA policy papers are written by students to articulate student concerns and offer student-driven solutions for accessible, affordable, accountable, and high quality post-secondary education in the province.

To support our policies and ensure that we are effectively representing undergraduate and professional students at Ontario's universities, students and student groups from each of our eight member institutions were consulted to provide guidance and feedback on the principles, concerns, and recommendations contained herein.

OUSA would like to thank students and student groups from Brock University, Laurentian University, McMaster University, Queen's University, Trent University Durham GTA, University of Waterloo, Western University, and Wilfrid Laurier University for their valuable contributions to this policy paper.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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### THE PROBLEM

#### ***Reliance on Unsustainable Energy Sources***

Post-secondary institutions have a social responsibility to divest from fossil fuels and carbon-heavy endowment portfolios. However, institutions continue to heavily invest in the fossil fuel industry and corporations that engage in a range of harmful environmental practices. In some cases, this is because institutions lack the incentives, expertise, or resources to transition to fossil fuel-free and carbon-neutral investment portfolios. Further, the lack of legislation defining the role of environmental concerns within Ontario's fiduciary duty framework creates an obstacle to institutions looking to make their investments more environmentally responsible. This allows investment managers to invest in unsustainable businesses and practices to support student endowment funds, which fails to represent the interests of students.

Post-secondary institutions may also not have strong enough incentives to operate their campuses in more sustainable ways. They may not allocate sufficient financial, policy, and planning resources to build the infrastructure necessary to build more sustainable campuses, and they are not required to adhere to a common standard for environmental sustainability when constructing campus buildings.

#### ***Lack of Biodiversity on Campuses***

Post-secondary institutions should cultivate accessible, biodiverse green spaces that do not conflict with local ecosystems. Instead, institutions often engage in overdevelopment or monoculture cultivation techniques, which means that students often do not have access to optimal naturalized, green, or biodiverse ecosystems on campus. Further, post-secondary students should have access to local, healthy, and affordable food items on campus, as well as resources that allow them to incorporate healthy and environmentally conscious habits into their daily lives. Unfortunately, institutions may not have the space or the financial resources to grow their own food through community gardens or greenhouses, or to purchase food from local food providers. This also limits educational opportunities, which can lead to students being unaware of the environmental and economic impacts of post-secondary institutions purchasing food from outside of the province and country.

#### ***Inaccessible Eco-Friendly Transportation***

University campuses often lack the infrastructure required to offer sustainable transportation methods, such as sidewalks, pathways, bike routes, and bike storage. Institutions may also lack the framework and funding to establish or expand upon sustainable inter-campus transit shuttles for students, forcing them to rely on less sustainable methods. Further, for most students traveling to and from campus, electric vehicles, charging stations, and other clean modes of transportation are not a viable option due to price and lack of accessibility. Students who struggle to access municipal transportation will often use less eco-friendly transportation instead, and the lack of virtual or nearby opportunities for employment, education, and experiential learning often leads to excess vehicular travel.

### ***Ineffective Waste Management***

On many post-secondary campuses, there is an excess of paper, plastic, and other waste (including water waste). Waste management audits are not readily accessible and clear for potential readers, including concerned citizens. Further, many institutions are not on track to meet and follow the provincial government's zero waste targets, while others do not have frameworks in place to ensure that recyclable and non-recyclable waste is processed responsibly. This points to a lack of accountability and transparency regarding waste management practices at post-secondary institutions. Institutions also produce a significant amount of unspoiled food waste, most of which is not used for composting or donated to those in need. The improper management of compostable foods on post-secondary campuses often leads to excess emissions, and students may not have access to compost bins.

### ***Unsustainable Resource Procurement***

Increasing access to e-books, online educational resources, and digital learning platforms can reduce paper waste on campus, and excessive use of paper for educational purposes increases the amount of waste on campus. Unfortunately, many post-secondary institutions are heavily reliant on paper resources for learning and testing purposes.

Post-secondary institutions often purchase food and beverage products that use excessive food packaging, including single-use plastics, and which are not locally sourced. This results in a higher carbon footprint due to the extensive travel required to transport these products to campus. The local, organic products that students do have access to are often significantly more expensive than non-local, non-organic alternatives.

Finally, institutions often fail to properly dispose of electronic equipment, including computers, batteries, printer cartridges, and similar items, which can result in toxic chemicals leaking into landfills. Students often do not have access to proper disposal bins and systems to ensure their used electronic equipment is processed properly without harm to the environment. Institutions are also not required to purchase sustainably made furniture, which increases their carbon footprint.

### ***Inconsistent Institutional Sustainability Policies***

Often, post-secondary institutions do not prioritize the creation or implementation of campus-wide environmental sustainability policies, and many institutions do not publish reports on their sustainability efforts and initiatives. Where institutions have set emission reduction deadlines, they are often not well-equipped to meet those deadlines. Further, in most cases, institutions do not consult with and follow Indigenous practices when developing environmental sustainability policies.

### ***Limited Research Initiatives and Educational Campaigns***

Environmental sustainability is a multi-faceted concern affecting everyone and should involve the engagement of as many educational disciplines as possible. Importantly, there should be as much Indigenous engagement and representation as possible, and as desired, by Indigenous communities and nations in all environmental science and sustainability research. However, there is currently a lack of opportunities for Indigenous contribution and perspectives in research on environmental science and

sustainability. More broadly, there is the potential for more research than currently exists on economic, social, and other non-scientific aspects of environmental issues. And while environmental sustainability research currently engages the public to some extent, this research would be more effective if it engaged the public further.

All post-secondary students should learn about environmental sustainability and climate change. Waste management practices between municipalities differ, and students who have moved to a new location for education are likely unfamiliar with the practices of the municipality they have moved to. Educational resources on environmental sustainability, climate change, and the importance of living sustainably are lacking, and as a result, students are not well informed on the climate crisis and how they can create positive change in their own lives and their communities.

### ***Absence of Broad Action on Climate Change***

Climate change is an urgent crisis which requires immediate and extensive action. The provincial government is not adequately prioritizing action to fight climate change, and government initiatives may not adequately prioritize Indigenous knowledge, understanding, and worldviews with regard to climate change.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### ***Promote Sustainable Energy Sources***

Through Strategic Mandate Agreements (SMAs), the provincial government should incentivize post-secondary institutions to: (1) begin the process of divestment immediately and fully divest by no later than 2026; (2) produce publicly available, annual reports on the status of their divestment initiatives; and (3) only partner with managers that have sustainable fund alternatives or do not have fossil fuel investments. Further, the government should pass legislation in the style of the *South African Trust Investments Act* to redefine fiduciary responsibility to enable post-secondary institutions to choose to make investment decisions based on environmental impact. In order to inform how investment managers can best uphold their fiduciary duty to students as managers of student endowment funds, the government should create regular opportunities—namely, annual surveys, focus groups, and other feedback campaigns—for students to provide feedback on and identify concerns with their post-secondary institutions' fund management and sustainability practices.

The provincial government should also use SMAs to incentivize post-secondary institutions to: (1) switch to clean energy sources; (2) meet LEED certification standards when constructing campus buildings; (3) retrofit all existing campus buildings to meet LEED certification standards by 2030; and (4) establish Green Revolving Funds for the purpose of developing sustainable campus energy sources, implementing carbon-capturing mechanisms, and retrofitting buildings. Further, the government should update the Greenhouse Gas Campus Retrofit program to ensure that post-secondary institutions can receive funding to meet LEED standards. The government should also subsidize post-secondary institutions' procurement of LED, sensor-operated lights, and other sustainable technologies, as well as mandate that institutions conduct and publicly release the results of annual internal and operational energy and emissions audits. Finally, the provincial government should mandate that all post-secondary institutions implement net-zero-carbon emission standards by 2026.

### ***Increase Campus Biodiversity***

The provincial government should create a green space fund that post-secondary institutions can use to protect existing biodiversity and support new forms of biodiversity on their campuses. To support this, the government should create a working group of post-secondary institutions and relevant stakeholders to develop a framework to assist institutions with implementing green spaces. Further, to ensure that students have access to local, organic food products, the government should provide post-secondary institutions with funding to create their own community gardens and greenhouses, and/or to partner with local farmers. The government should also facilitate work-integrated learning opportunities between post-secondary institutions, interested students, and local agricultural operations.

### ***Increase Access to Eco-Friendly Transportation***

To promote sustainable transportation methods, the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing and the Ministry of Colleges and Universities should create and audit policies regarding accessible pedestrian infrastructure, including the creation and maintenance of sidewalks, pathways, bike racks, and pedestrian drop-offs. The Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing should provide ad hoc financial and informational support to municipalities in which universities are located in order to establish alternative active transit programs. Further the provincial government should use Strategic Mandate Agreements (SMAs) to incentivize post-secondary institutions to: (1) make accessibility-oriented improvements to their pedestrian infrastructure aimed at connecting campus buildings to students and transportation hubs; (2) implement campus-specific initiatives to reduce visitors' desire or need to operate cars on campus; (3) implement campus-specific initiatives to improve the safety and viability of biking on campus, including more secure bike storage and safer roads; and (4) facilitate virtual or nearby employment, education, and experiential learning opportunities. The government should also encourage post-secondary institutions to cluster their academic, research, administrative, residential, and recreational operations within walking distance, where possible, to reduce the need for on-campus vehicular traffic. Further, the government should provide post-secondary institutions with the framework and funding to establish, improve, and/or expand inter-campus shuttle systems and other clean transportation infrastructure on campus. The government should also provide municipalities with funding to expand and increase the frequency of public transit routes, and to make advancements in green transportation, such as electric busses and rapid transit.

### ***Improve Waste Management Practices***

To improve the effectiveness of waste management programs, the provincial government should work with municipalities to ensure that effective waste systems are in place to sort and manage compost, recycling, and litter. The government should also use Strategic Mandate Agreements (SMAs) to incentivize post-secondary institutions to: (1) meet a 50% waste diversion rate by 2030; and (2) invest in effective waste reduction programs. Similarly, the government should implement a minimum environmental framework for post-secondary institutions to ensure that they are on track to achieve the government's long-term goal of a waste-free Ontario. The government should also mandate that post-secondary institutions publish comprehensive waste management reports on an annual basis. Further, the government should allocate funding to incentivize institutions to implement low-flow facilities and modernize their water infrastructure.

### ***Promote Sustainable Resource Procurement***

In order to promote sustainable resource procurement, the provincial government should incentivize online educational resources in post-secondary institutions to eliminate paper resources for learning, except as required for students' accessibility needs. The government should also incentivize institutions to offer locally sourced, organic food products that are cautious of single-use plastics to students for a price not more than 25% higher than the price of non-local, non-organic food products on campus. Further, the government should provide institutions with funding to cover at least some of the cost of purchasing sustainable furniture and other learning materials. It should also partner with existing electronic waste reduction programs and organizations to allow institutions to repurpose electronic materials on campus by donating them to departments using them for class studies or projects.

### ***Regulate Institutional Sustainability Policies***

The provincial government should create regulations under the *Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities Act* to mandate that each university produce an environmental sustainability strategy or policy by 2023. The government should also establish short- and long-term emissions standards for post-secondary institutions to follow and include in their sustainability policies. Further, it should mandate that institutions publish annual environmental sustainability reports indicating targets, accomplishments, and shortcomings. In order to promote consultation with Indigenous peoples, the government should create an Indigenous lands and environment working group, open on a voluntary basis to all interested Indigenous communities and nations, that post-secondary institutions can consult when creating environmental sustainability policies.

### ***Expand Research Initiatives and Educational Campaigns***

The provincial government should expand the "Priority Topics" for the Ontario Research Grants to ensure that there are environmental sustainability research opportunities for each discipline of study. The government should also create grants for Indigenous scholars in environmental studies and advertise opportunities for Indigenous researchers to apply for grants related to environment and energy. Further, to increase Indigenous participation in sustainability research, the government should mandate that researchers provide Indigenous communities and nations with an opportunity to consult and provide feedback prior to and/or during research on relevant environmental science and sustainability matters. This should be supported by government-sponsored research grants that favour integrative research and community engagement.

To increase awareness of sustainable practices among students, the Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance should create standards requiring post-secondary institutions to implement campus-specific learning modules for municipal waste management systems, climate science, and environmental sustainability that will equip students and post-secondary institutions with the tools they need to live and act more sustainably.

### ***Take Broad Action on Climate Change***

To demonstrate its commitment to the fight against climate change, the provincial government should work with external groups to develop comprehensive and immediate measures to address the climate crisis. The government should also prioritize transitioning the province to sustainable energy sourcing and use, in addition to supporting Indigenous-led climate action initiatives.

## INTRODUCTION

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On 15 March 2019, over one million young people across 128 countries participated in over 2,200 school strikes for climate action.<sup>1</sup> Students are concerned about the threats posed by climate change and are committed to more sustainable ways of living. Per the United Nations' Agenda 21, children and youth are among the nine major groups likely to play a pivotal role in achieving the world's sustainable development goals.<sup>2</sup>

The addition of this paper to OUSA's policy library is important and timely, and will allow OUSA to conduct environmental and sustainability advocacy concerning post-secondary students in Ontario. Importantly, because OUSA is not predominantly an environmental advocacy body, our recommendations have been built with flexibility to allow for science to inform their application. Stakeholders, such as specialized advocacy groups and scientists, play an important role in the application of this paper and OUSA is excited at the possibility of collaborating with these authorities.

Through consultations at OUSA's member institutions, we learned that not only are students deeply concerned about the state of the environment, they are committed to developing solutions that increase sustainability and combat the climate emergency. To reflect this commitment, this policy paper addresses how our provincial government can support post-secondary institutions in mitigating their contributions to our climate emergency, as well as how our institutions can be supported to better champion the principles of environmental sustainability.

Post-secondary institutions wield great power as potential champions of sustainability. In particular, post-secondary institutions have the ability to amend approaches to governance, education, campus operations, research, and community outreach to better reflect students' prioritization of environmental sustainability.<sup>3</sup> They also have a unique ability to catalyze further climate action and sustainable energy usage across the province as well as increase awareness of the importance of sustainability and climate action. In addition, per our consultations, sustainable actions arising from post-secondary institutions have positive impacts on students' health and wellness.

It is important to acknowledge, however, that the post-secondary sector cannot solve the broad, evolving issue of climate change by itself, and that student concerns extend beyond how environmental issues affect their post-secondary experience. Climate change is set to affect students' livelihoods beyond graduation and for decades to come. For this reason, we have included recommendations in the final section of this paper which, while not specifically related to post-secondary education, reflect our belief that students have a vested interest in ensuring that the provincial government takes broad, decisive action in the fight against climate change.

Finally, while this paper includes large-scale recommendations for slowing and reversing the effects of climate change, it also addresses other matters of environmental sustainability—even those which, on their own, play a smaller role in improving our environment. We believe that all initiatives which make our campuses more sustainable are beneficial and worthy of the provincial government's attention. If implemented widely, even initiatives that appear small in scale can lead to positive environmental change.

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<sup>1</sup> Carrington, Damien. "School climate strikes: 1.4 million people took part, say campaigners," *The Guardian*. March 19, 2019. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/mar/19/school-climate-strikes-more-than-1-million-took-part-say-campaigners-greta-thunberg>

<sup>2</sup> United Nations. "About Major Groups and other stakeholders," *Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform*. <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/aboutmajorgroups.html>

<sup>3</sup> Henderson, Joseph, Andrew Bieler and Marcia McKenzie. "Climate Change and the Canadian Higher Education System: An Institutional Policy Analysis," *Canadian Journal of Higher Education*. Vol. 47(1), 1-26. 2.

## ENERGY USE & SOURCING

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### *Divestment*

**Principle:** Post-secondary institutions have a social responsibility to divest from fossil fuels and carbon-heavy endowment portfolios.

**Principle:** Sustainable business practices are integral to the long-term viability and financial prosperity of our post-secondary institutions.

**Principle:** As student endowment funds are held in trust by post-secondary institutions for students, investment managers have a fiduciary duty to invest in the interests of their respective institution and its students.

**Principle:** Public investment funds should be able to responsibly balance the financial, social, ethical, and environmental effects of investments when making investment choices.

**Concern:** Post-secondary institutions across Canada heavily invest in the fossil fuel industry and other corporations that engage in a range of harmful environmental practices.

**Concern:** Post-secondary institutions lack the incentives, expertise, and/or resources to transition to fossil fuel-free and carbon-neutral investment portfolios.

**Concern:** By investing in unsustainable businesses and practices to support student endowment funds, investment managers' investment strategies do not represent the interests of students.

**Concern:** Lack of legislation defining the role of environmental concerns within Ontario's fiduciary duty framework creates an obstacle to institutions looking to make their investments more environmentally responsible.

**Recommendation:** The provincial government should incentivize post-secondary institutions, through Strategic Mandate Agreements, to begin the process of divestment immediately and fully divest by no later than 2026.

**Recommendation:** The provincial government should incentivize post-secondary institutions, through Strategic Mandate Agreements, to produce publicly available, annual reports on the status of their divestment initiatives.

**Recommendation:** The provincial government should incentivize post-secondary institutions, through Strategic Mandate Agreements, to only partner with managers that have sustainable fund alternatives or do not have fossil fuel investments.

**Recommendation:** The provincial government should implement a regulation under the *Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities Act* to ensure oversight on environmental sustainability.

**Recommendation:** The provincial government should pass legislation in the style of the *South African Trust Investments Act* to redefine fiduciary responsibility to enable post-secondary institutions to choose to make investment decisions based on environmental impact.

**Recommendation:** In order to inform how investment managers can best uphold their fiduciary duty to students as managers of student endowment funds, the provincial government should create regular opportunities—namely, annual surveys, focus groups, and other feedback campaigns—for students to provide feedback on and identify concerns with their post-secondary institutions’ fund management and sustainability practices.

As the climate emergency intensifies, students are increasingly concerned about their futures, the ways in which they contribute to climate change, and how they can contribute to a greener and cleaner world. On campuses across Ontario, students have raised concerns about their universities’ misuse of energy resources and have demanded action from their administrators in order to minimize universities’ contributions to climate change.<sup>4</sup> At Queen’s, the student-led organizations Queen’s Backing Action on Climate Change and Divest Queen’s organized a strike in September of 2019 to draw attention to their university’s emissions, drawing a crowd of over 500 protestors.<sup>5</sup> That same month, students from across Ontario’s university campuses—from Western to McMaster—participated in the Global Climate Strike.<sup>6</sup> Since then, an increasingly large number of student groups have arisen across Ontario’s campuses to demand climate action from their institutions, such as Western’s Climate Crisis Coalition.

Ensuring sustainable energy usage and sourcing for our universities should come through the concurrent pursuit of divestment and operational adaptations. The implementation of sustainable business practices, however, is not simply a social responsibility<sup>7</sup> for our post-secondary institutions; it is also a financially wise decision. Sustainable business practices increase an institution’s ability to respond to risk. In fact, the value at stake from sustainability issues can be as high as 70% of earnings before interest, tax, depreciation, and amortization; as such, sustainable practices are the pragmatic choice.<sup>8</sup> In addition, pursuing sustainability creates growth and increases returns on capital in dynamic ways.<sup>9</sup> Consider the following: between 2006 and 2010, the top 100 sustainable global companies experienced significantly higher mean sales growth, return on assets, profit before taxation, and cash flows from operations in some sectors compared to control companies.<sup>10</sup> Evidently, the belief that sustainability is antithetical to profitability is a misconception.

There are several measures the provincial government can and should take to address these issues. First, the government should use Strategic Mandate Agreements (SMAs) to incentivize post-secondary institutions to begin the process of divestment immediately and fully divest by no later than 2026. Similarly, using SMAs, the government should incentivize post-secondary institutions to produce publicly available, annual reports on the status of their divestment initiatives, and to only partner with managers that have sustainable fund alternatives or do not have fossil fuel investments.

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<sup>4</sup> Canadian Federation of Students. “Students call on post-secondary institutions to commit to fossil fuel divestment,” *GlobeNewswire*. September 25, 2019. <https://www.globenewswire.com/news-release/2019/09/25/1920765/0/en/Students-call-on-post-secondary-institutions-to-commit-to-fossil-fuel-divestment.html>

<sup>5</sup> Stafl, Hannah. “Hundreds strike for climate action on campus,” *Queen’s Journal*. September 27, 2019. <https://www.queensjournal.ca/story/2019-09-27/news/hundreds-strike-for-climate-action-on-campus/>

<sup>6</sup> Prévost-Manuel, Jade. “Eyes on the Green: London Students Strike for Climate,” *Western Gazette*. September 23, 2019.

[https://westerngazette.ca/culture/eyes-on-the-green-london-students-strike-for-climate/article\\_d189dffb-de1e-11e9-badc-7f96f5da4123.html](https://westerngazette.ca/culture/eyes-on-the-green-london-students-strike-for-climate/article_d189dffb-de1e-11e9-badc-7f96f5da4123.html); Wu, Wei Yan. “McMaster in the race against the climate crisis,” *The Silhouette*. October 3, 2019. <https://www.thesil.ca/mcmaster-in-the-race-against-the-climate-crisis>

<sup>7</sup> Also known as corporate social responsibility, this is an ethical framework which suggests that individuals or organizations have a responsibility to act in the best interests of their society by being sensitive to social, cultural, economic, and environmental issues. *What is Social Responsibility?* Accessed December 1, 2020. <https://asq.org/quality-resources/social-responsibility#business>.

<sup>8</sup> Bonini, Sheila and Steven Swartz. “Profits with purpose: How organizing for sustainability can benefit the bottom line,” *McKinsey on Sustainability & Resource Productivity*. 12.

<https://www.mckinsey.com/~ /media/McKinsey/Business%20Functions/Sustainability/Our%20Insights/Profits%20with%20purpose/Profits%20with%20Purpose.pdf>.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid 11.

<sup>10</sup> Whelen, Tensey and Carly Fink. “The Comprehensive Business Case for Sustainability,” *Harvard Business Review*. October 21, 2016. <https://hbr.org/2016/10/the-comprehensive-business-case-for-sustainability>.

Further, by investing in unsustainable businesses and practices to support student endowment funds, university investment managers fail to represent the interests of students. Unfortunately, there continues to be a lack of legislation defining the role of environmental concerns within Ontario's fiduciary duty framework, and this creates an obstacle to institutions looking to make their investments more environmentally responsible. In order to address this issue, the provincial government should enact legislation in the style of the *South African Trust Investments Act*; this should redefine fiduciary responsibility to enable post-secondary institutions to choose to make investment decisions based on environmental impact, even if doing so is not the most financially prudent option. Furthermore, to promote student engagement in this area, the provincial government should create regular opportunities—namely, annual surveys, focus groups, and other feedback campaigns—for students to provide feedback on and identify concerns with their post-secondary institutions' fund management and sustainability practices.

### ***Operating Cleaner Campuses***

**Principle:** Post-secondary institutions have an ethical duty, social responsibility, financial incentive, and oftentimes a fiduciary duty to operate their campuses in sustainable ways.

**Principle:** Post-secondary institutions have a duty to create environmentally sustainable campuses.

**Concern:** Post-secondary institutions may not have strong enough incentives to operate their campuses in more sustainable ways.

**Concern:** Post-secondary institutions do not allocate sufficient financial resources to build the necessary infrastructure for more sustainable operations.

**Concern:** Post-secondary institutions often lack the policies, planning, and infrastructure to create environmentally sustainable campuses.

**Concern:** Post-secondary institutions are not required to adhere to a common standard for environmental sustainability when constructing campus buildings.

**Recommendation:** The provincial government should incentivize post-secondary institutions, through Strategic Mandate Agreements, to switch to clean energy sources.

**Recommendation:** The provincial government should incentivize post-secondary institutions, through Strategic Mandate Agreements, to meet LEED certification standards when constructing campus buildings.

**Recommendation:** The provincial government should incentivize post-secondary institutions, through Strategic Mandate Agreements, to retrofit all existing campus buildings to meet LEED certification standards by 2030.

**Recommendation:** The provincial government should update the Greenhouse Gas Campus Retrofit program to ensure that post-secondary institutions can receive funding to meet LEED standards.

**Recommendation:** The provincial government should subsidize post-secondary institutions' procurement of LED, sensor-operated lights, and other sustainable technologies.

**Recommendation:** The provincial government should mandate that post-secondary institutions conduct and publicly release the results of annual internal and operational energy and emissions audits.

**Recommendation:** The provincial government should incentivize post-secondary institutions, through Strategic Mandate Agreements, to establish Green Revolving Funds for the purpose of developing sustainable campus energy sources, implementing carbon-capturing mechanisms, and retrofitting buildings.

**Recommendation:** The provincial government should mandate that all post-secondary institutions implement net-zero-carbon emission standards by 2026.

Post-secondary institutions have a social responsibility to operate their campuses in sustainable ways. Adaptations can help to ensure Ontario's universities are engaging in sustainable energy use and sourcing. Ensuring that operational adaptations are sustainable is also cost-effective. By using resources more effectively, our institutions derive more optimal use of fixed and non-renewable assets. In turn, our institutions are able to improve their operating margins and optimize the usage of capital expenditure.<sup>11</sup> In fact, a McKinsey report has found that 70 percent of productivity opportunities today—from improving the energy efficiency of buildings to moving to more efficient irrigation—have an internal rate of return of more than 10 percent at current prices.<sup>12</sup>

Students are also concerned that post-secondary institutions are not required to adhere to a common standard for environmental sustainability when constructing campus buildings. The LEED certification process offers an independent standard that institutions can adhere to in new builds, renovations, and retrofit projects, helping to ensure they are using (and wasting) as little energy as possible.<sup>13</sup> The provincial government should, therefore, use Strategic Mandate Agreements (SMAs) to incentivize institutions to meet LEED certification standards when constructing campus buildings. The government should also use SMAs to incentivize institutions to retrofit all existing campus buildings to meet LEED certification standards by 2030. To assist post-secondary institutions in meeting these goals, the government should update the Greenhouse Gas Campus Retrofit program to ensure that institutions receive enough funding to satisfy LEED standards. Similarly, the government should subsidize institutions' procurement of LED and sensor-operated lights as well other sustainable technologies.

There are a number of additional steps that the provincial government should take to help institutions operate cleaner campuses as well. First, broadly speaking, the government should use Strategic Mandate Agreements (SMAs) to incentivize post-secondary to switch to clean energy sources. Further, the government should mandate that post-secondary institutions conduct and publicly release the results of annual internal and operational energy and emissions audits. Doing so would increase transparency and ensure that institutions are being held accountable in their efforts to reduce their carbon footprints. Additionally, the government should use SMAs to incentivize institutions to establish Green Revolving Funds<sup>14</sup> for the purpose of developing sustainable campus energy sources, implementing carbon-

<sup>11</sup> Tonello, Matteo. "The Sustainability Business Case," *Harvard Law School Forum on Corporate Governance*. June 28, 2013. <https://corpgov.law.harvard.edu/2013/06/28/the-sustainability-business-case/>.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Canada Green Building Council. *Lead Certification Process*. Accessed December 1, 2020. [https://www.cagbc.org/CAGBC/Programs/LEED/LEED\\_Certification\\_Process.aspx](https://www.cagbc.org/CAGBC/Programs/LEED/LEED_Certification_Process.aspx).

<sup>14</sup> A Green Revolving Fund is "an internal capital pool that is dedicated to funding energy efficiency, renewable energy, and/or sustainability projects that generate cost savings. A portion of those savings are then used to replenish the fund (i.e. revolved) allowing for reinvestment in future projects of similar value. This establishes an ongoing funding vehicle that helps drive energy efficiency and sustainability over time, while generating cost savings and ensuring capital is available for important projects." U.S. Department of Energy. *Green Revolving Funds*. Accessed December 1, 2020. [https://betterbuildingsolutioncenter.energy.gov/toolkits/green-revolving-funds#:~:text=A%20Green%20Revolving%20Fund%20\(GRF,projects%20that%20generate%20cost%20savings](https://betterbuildingsolutioncenter.energy.gov/toolkits/green-revolving-funds#:~:text=A%20Green%20Revolving%20Fund%20(GRF,projects%20that%20generate%20cost%20savings).

capturing mechanisms, and retrofitting buildings. Finally, the government should mandate that all post-secondary institutions implement net-zero-carbon emission standards by no later than 2026.

## CAMPUS ECOSYSTEM

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### *Land Use, Biodiversity & Green Space*

**Principle:** Our post-secondary institutions should build and maintain their campus grounds in sustainable ways.

**Principle:** Our post-secondary institutions should cultivate green spaces on their campuses.

**Principle:** Students should have access to their campus's green spaces.

**Principle:** Green spaces on campus should be biodiverse and not conflict with local ecosystems.

**Concern:** Our post-secondary institutions often use land in unsustainable ways, such as by engaging in overdevelopment or by using monoculture cultivation techniques.

**Concern:** Students often do not have access to optimal naturalized, green, or biodiverse ecosystems on campus.

**Recommendation:** The provincial government should create a green space fund for post-secondary institutions to protect existing biodiversity and support new forms of biodiversity on their campuses.

**Recommendation:** The provincial government should create a working group of post-secondary institutions and relevant stakeholders to develop a framework assisting institutions with implementing green spaces.

In recent years, there have been many efforts taken by environmental groups to raise awareness of the need for biodiversity to slow the effects of climate change. To address the harmful effects of agricultural chemicals on the environment, Ontario recently made amendments to the *Pesticides Act*, ensuring that toxic pesticides remained closely monitored.<sup>15</sup> In 2011, the provincial government released [Ontario's Biodiversity Strategy](#), in which it outlined a plan to engage a variety of sectors and stakeholders, reduce threats to climate change, enhance the resilience of greenspaces, and support research and data collection.<sup>16</sup> However, while this strategy was set to continue until 2020, the current government has yet to take action. Students across Ontario have expressed concern with the fate of biodiversity during the severe challenges of climate change.

Post-secondary students have indicated an interest in and responsibility to support biodiversity, and OUSA believes that colleges and universities should play an essential role in reversing the effects of climate change. Students also report that green spaces on campus primarily involve monoculture (the farming of one sole crop), as well as the use of chemicals and tools to prevent the growth of natural pollinators that play essential roles in ecosystems and in supporting bee populations.<sup>17</sup> Due to increasingly intensive farming practices and pesticide use, as well as rising temperatures, researchers have found that the population of bumble bees, a species native to Ontario, have declined by 46 percent across North

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<sup>15</sup> Pesticides Act, R.S.O. (1990). <https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/90p11/v22>.

<sup>16</sup> Ontario Biodiversity Council. *Ontario's Biodiversity Strategy, 2011: Renewing Our Commitment to Protecting What Sustains Us*. 2011. <http://ontariobiodiversitycouncil.ca/wp-content/uploads/Ontarios-Biodiversity-Strategy-2011-accessible.pdf>

<sup>17</sup> Alexa Varah et al., "Temperate Agroforestry Systems Provide Greater Pollination Service than Monoculture," *Temperate Agroforestry Systems Provide Greater Pollination Service than Monoculture*, 2020, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.agee.2020.107031>.

America since 1974.<sup>18</sup> Not only does this put several plant species at risk, it contributes to climate change and food insecurity as a whole.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, many of the green spaces on campus are not accessible for students to use, enjoy, and learn from.

In order to ensure the protection and promotion of biodiversity at post-secondary institutions, the Ministry of Environment, Parks and Conservation should create a fund to help subsidize the creation of green spaces on campus. This fund should be aimed at providing outdoor and indoor green spaces with various plants and organisms that are native to Ontario; they should also foster natural ecosystems, support pollinators, and be accessible to students. Further, the government should create a working group of post-secondary institutions and relevant stakeholders to develop a framework assisting institutions with implementing green spaces. This framework should allow institutions to equip students with the knowledge, resources, and tools needed to maintain these green spaces and grow their own green spaces off-campus.

### ***Community Gardens & Greenhouses***

**Principle:** Our post-secondary institutions should build and maintain their campus grounds in sustainable ways.

**Principle:** Post-secondary students should have access to local, healthy, and affordable produce and food items on campus.

**Principle:** Students should have access to resources that allow them to incorporate healthy and environmentally conscious habits into their daily lives.

**Principle:** Students should be given opportunities to learn about food sovereignty and the importance of supporting Ontario farmers and local food providers.

**Principle:** Campus and community gardens and greenhouses can be valuable resources to support sustainable supplemental food production.

**Concern:** Post-secondary institutions may not have the space or the financial resources to grow their own food through community gardens or greenhouses, or to purchase food from local food providers.

**Concern:** Due to a lack of educational opportunities, students are often unaware of the environmental and economic impacts of post-secondary institutions purchasing food from outside of the province and country.

**Recommendation:** In order to provide students with fresh, locally sourced food, the provincial government should provide post-secondary institutions with funding to create their own community gardens and greenhouses, and/or to partner with local farmers.

**Recommendation:** The provincial government should facilitate work-integrated learning opportunities between post-secondary institutions, interested students, and local agricultural operations.

Each Ontarian's diet contributes approximately 1.4 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions per year (estimated per capita).<sup>20</sup> One contributing factor is that post-secondary students in the province do not have a clear idea

<sup>18</sup> Peter Soroye, Tim Newbold and Jeremy Kerr. "Climate Change Contributes to Widespread Declines among Bumble Bees across Continents," *Science* 367, no. 6478. February 2020. 685-688. <https://doi.org/DOI: 10.1126/science.aax8591>.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Environmental Commissioner of Ontario. "Climate Pollution: Reducing My Footprint," *Environmental Commissioner of Ontario*. March 2019. <http://docs.assets.eco.on.ca/reports/other-publications/Reducing-My-Footprint.pdf>.

of where their food sources come from and the environmental impact that their food choices can have. Understanding where campus produce and other food items come from allows for a better understanding of the importance of food sovereignty and supporting Ontario and local agricultural sectors.

Unfortunately, post-secondary institutions may not have the space or the financial resources required to grow their own food through community gardens or greenhouses, or to purchase food from local food providers. So, in order to provide students with fresh, locally sourced food, the provincial government should provide post-secondary institutions with funding to implement their own community gardens, greenhouses, and/or partnerships with local farmers. Since greenhouses have the ability to produce food year-round, this would give students the opportunity to develop healthy, low-impact food consumption habits. It would also support local, independent food producers, in addition to supporting pollinators and promoting biodiversity for local ecosystems throughout the Spring and Summer months.<sup>21</sup>

Further, the provincial government should facilitate work-integrated learning opportunities between post-secondary institutions, interested students, and local agricultural operations. Not only would this benefit students studying within the agriculture sector, but it would also offer interdisciplinary opportunities through integrated systems such as aquaponics.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Ontario Centre for Climate Impacts and Adaptation Resources (OCCIAR). *Climate Change Impacts and Adaptation in Ontario: Food Production*. 2015. [http://www.climateontario.ca/doc/RACII/National\\_Assessment\\_Syntheses/SummarySheets/Chapter4-Food\\_Production.pdf](http://www.climateontario.ca/doc/RACII/National_Assessment_Syntheses/SummarySheets/Chapter4-Food_Production.pdf)

<sup>22</sup> The Aquaponic Source. *What is Aquaponics?* Accessed December 6, 2020. <https://www.theaquaponicsource.com/what-is-aquaponics/>.

## TRANSPORTATION

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### *Pedestrian-Friendly Campuses*

**Principle:** Students should be able to navigate their campuses and university communities in ways that are healthy, safe, secure, and sustainable.

**Concern:** University campuses often lack the infrastructure required to offer safe, secure, sustainable, and effective transportation such as sidewalks, pathways, bike routes, and bike storage.

**Concern:** In some cases, sustainable transportation mechanisms are less accessible than unsustainable mechanisms.

**Concern:** Post-secondary institutions often lack the framework and funding to establish, improve, and/or expand sustainable inter-campus transit shuttles for students and, as a result, rely on less sustainable methods.

**Recommendation:** The Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing and the Ministry of Colleges and Universities should create and audit policies regarding accessible pedestrian infrastructure, including the creation and maintenance of sidewalks, pathways, bike racks, and pedestrian drop-offs.

**Recommendation:** The Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing should provide ad hoc financial and informational support to municipalities in which universities are located in order to establish alternative active transit programs.

**Recommendation:** The provincial government should incentivize post-secondary institutions, through Strategic Mandate Agreements, to make accessibility-oriented improvements to their pedestrian infrastructure aimed at connecting campus buildings to students and transportation hubs.

**Recommendation:** The provincial government should incentivize post-secondary institutions, through Strategic Mandate Agreements, to implement campus-specific initiatives to reduce visitors' desire or need to operate cars on campus.

**Recommendation:** The provincial government should incentivize post-secondary institutions, through Strategic Mandate Agreements, to implement campus-specific initiatives to improve the safety and viability of biking on campus, including more secure bike storage and safer roads.

**Recommendation:** The provincial government should encourage post-secondary institutions to cluster their academic, research, administrative, residential, and recreational operations within walking distance, where possible, to reduce the need for on-campus vehicular traffic.

**Recommendation:** The provincial government should provide post-secondary institutions with the framework and funding to establish, improve, and/or expand inter-campus shuttle systems and other clean transportation infrastructure on campus.

Students should be able to navigate their campuses without worrying about increasing their carbon footprint. Further, making campuses pedestrian-friendly can significantly reduce students' reliance on

cars, which helps to reduce emissions. In OUSA's consultations with students, we heard concerns that many campuses do not offer enough sidewalks, pathways, bike routes, and other sustainable transportation methods. This may be because post-secondary institutions lack the infrastructure to implement these methods, or because doing so can be prohibitively expensive. We also heard concerns from students who avoid biking on campus due to safety issues and a lack of dedicated bike lanes.

To address these concerns, the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing and the Ministry of Colleges and Universities should create and audit policies regarding accessible pedestrian infrastructure, including the creation and maintenance of sidewalks, pathways, bike racks, and pedestrian drop-offs. When doing so, the government should seek to emulate the example set in 2016 by the City of London, which produced an extensive set of guidelines for promoting cycling in their municipality.<sup>23</sup> The government should also incentivize post-secondary institutions, through Strategic Mandate Agreements (SMAs), to make accessibility-oriented improvements to their pedestrian infrastructure aimed at connecting campus buildings to students and transportation hubs. This would likely increase public transportation use, especially in the colder Winter months. Similarly, through SMAs, the government should encourage institutions to implement campus-specific initiatives to reduce visitors' desire or need to operate cars on campus.

To address bike safety concerns and encourage cycling on campus, the government should incentivize to implement campus-specific initiatives to improve the safety and viability of biking on campus, including more secure bike storage and safer roads. Further, connecting campus buildings to one another, via pathways or underground tunnels, can reduce students' reliance on cars to navigate campus (especially in Winter months). Accordingly, wherever possible, the government should encourage universities to cluster academic, research, administrative, residential, and recreational facilities within walking distance to reduce the need for on-campus vehicular traffic. Underground tunnels are one way of accomplishing this, and Carleton University is a good example to follow.<sup>24</sup> Finally, to further reduce students' reliance on cars, the government should provide post-secondary institutions with the framework and funding to establish, improve, and expand inter-campus shuttle systems and other clean transportation infrastructure on campus.

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<sup>23</sup> City of London and MMM Group. *City of London Cycling Master Plan: Final Report*. September 2016. <http://unitedwayem.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/City-of-London-Cycling-Master-Plan-September-2016.pdf>.

<sup>24</sup> Carleton University. *Tunnel Distances*. Accessed December 6, 2020. <https://carleton.ca/healthy-workplace/lunchtime-activities/outdoor-walking-group/tunnels/>.

## ***Promoting Eco-Friendly Transportation***

### *Short-term*

**Principle:** Installing accessible electric charging stations on campus encourages students to use sustainable transportation methods.

**Principle:** Sustainable transportation methods should be a realistic and accessible option for students when traveling to and from campus.

**Principle:** Ensuring that sustainable transportation methods are affordable and accessible to students can help reduce vehicle usage and pollution.

**Principle:** Giving post-secondary students the option to avoid unnecessary travel helps to lower CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.

**Concern:** Electric vehicles, charging stations, and other clean modes of transportation are currently not a viable option for most post-secondary students due to price and lack of accessibility.

**Concern:** Students who struggle to access municipal transportation will often use less eco-friendly transportation instead.

**Concern:** The lack of virtual or nearby opportunities for employment, education, and experiential learning often leads to excess vehicular travel to and from campus and/or workplaces, which increases pollution.

**Recommendation:** The provincial government should provide institutions with funding and create Strategic Mandate Agreements to facilitate virtual or nearby employment, education, and experiential learning opportunities.

In 2018, Ontario emitted roughly 165 megatonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>e, 10 megatonnes more than in 2017, highlighting a need to reduce vehicle use and emissions wherever possible.<sup>25</sup> By reducing the need for excessive and unnecessary travel to and from campuses and work opportunities, we can lower emissions created by student transportation. Allowing students to access work-integrated learning opportunities, pedagogies, and education virtually would reduce the number of kilometers travelled by students while still allowing them to experience the modern-day workplace and classroom from home. Importantly, however, this requires significant investment: workplaces and institutions need tools and funding to reduce technological and opportunity barriers and ensure students have the highest quality experience possible in a remote setting. The provincial government should, therefore, provide institutions with funding to increase the availability of virtual employment, education, and experiential learning opportunities. It should also incentivize institutions, through strategic mandate, to create these opportunities wherever possible.

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<sup>25</sup> Buchanan, Sarah. "Why are Ontario's gas emissions going up instead of down?" *Environmental Defence*. April 21, 2020.

## Long-Term

**Principle:** Ensuring that eco-friendly transportation is easily accessible will encourage students to use it more often.

**Principle:** Students can decrease their carbon footprint by increasing their use of green transportation methods.

**Concern:** Current eco-friendly transportation methods are not always accessible, reliable, convenient, or safe for students.

**Concern:** Not enough advancements in green transportation are currently being made in the scope of post-secondary education.

**Recommendation:** To promote students' use of sustainable transportation methods, the provincial government should provide municipalities with funding to expand and increase the frequency of public transit routes.

**Recommendation:** The provincial government should provide funding to municipalities for advancements in green transportation, such as electric busses and rapid transit.

Transportation accounts for one-quarter of Canada's carbon emissions, yet Ontario's Ministry of Transportation does not include sustainability or a goal to minimize Ontario's environmental impact in its five key priorities.<sup>26</sup> Long-term initiatives, such as investing in environmental technologies and sustainable infrastructure, are necessary to assist the Government of Canada in achieving its goal of reducing carbon emissions below 30% of 2005 levels by 2030 and 80% by 2050 (in accordance with the Country's commitment in the Paris Agreement).<sup>27</sup>

StudentMoveTO, a recent study of students from 10 post-secondary institutions in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area, shows that local public transit is students' most common mode of transportation, used by two-thirds of students, followed by car/motorized travel, regional public transit, walking, and bicycle transit.<sup>28</sup> However, students also claim that the unreliability and inconvenience of public transportation hinders their participation at university, and that it is a barrier in both co-curricular experience and academic success.<sup>29</sup> Further, while some progress has been made, there is generally a lack of eco-friendly public transportation in university towns in Ontario. Recently, London, Ontario and Oakville, Ontario finalized plan to switch from diesel-fueled busses to electric busses.<sup>30</sup> This suggests that switching to electric busses in other cities in Ontario is not only possible, but that planning for this change should start now.

Transit systems need government funding to invest in new, reliable, and convenient green technologies. While the government should provide municipalities with funding to increase public transit routes and

<sup>26</sup> Ontario Ministry of Transportation. *Published plans and annual reports 2019-2020: Ministry of Transportation*. Accessed December 3, 2020. <https://www.ontario.ca/page/published-plans-and-annual-reports-2019-2020-ministry-transportation>.

<sup>27</sup> Government of Canada. *Progress towards Canada's greenhouse gas emissions reduction target*. Accessed December 3, 2020. <https://www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/services/environmental-indicators/progress-towards-canada-greenhouse-gas-emissions-reduction-target.html>.

<sup>28</sup> [http://www.studentmoveto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/StudentMoveTO\\_2019\\_finalReport1.pdf](http://www.studentmoveto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/StudentMoveTO_2019_finalReport1.pdf)

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Government of Ontario. "Press Release: Canada and Ontario invest in modern, green public transit for residents of Oakville," *Newsroom*. July 29, 2020. <https://news.ontario.ca/en/release/57810/canada-and-ontario-invest-in-modern-green-public-transit-for-residents-of-oakville>; LeBel, Jacquelyn. "London Transit Commission approves \$83K feasibility study into electrifying its bus fleet," *Global News*. January 30, 2020. <https://globalnews.ca/news/6479583/london-transit-ltc-electric-bus-study/>.

frequency in order to reduce personal vehicular travel, many bus systems in the province are still a significant source of pollution. More often than not, city buses are diesel powered and, as a result, emit chemicals harmful to the environment and human health (nitrogen dioxide (NO<sub>2</sub>), particulate matter (PM), and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs)).<sup>31</sup> Subway trains emit CO<sub>2</sub> and other harmful chemicals, and are often enclosed in poorly ventilated subway stations leading to severe environmental and health concerns. To promote a shift away from these pollutants, the provincial government should provide funding to municipalities for advancements in green transportation, such as electric busses and rapid transit. This will help ensure that students are encouraged to use eco-friendly transportation methods, helping them reduce their carbon footprints.

## WASTE MANAGEMENT

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### *Compost, Recycling & Litter*

**Principle:** Compostable waste from campuses should be composted instead of being sent to landfills.

**Principle:** Paper, plastic, food, and other waste on campus should be reduced whenever possible; when reduction is not possible, waste should be reused and recycled efficiently.

**Concern:** Improper management of compostable foods leads to excess emissions.

**Concern:** Students often do not have sufficient access to composting bins on campus.

**Concern:** Local wildlife can disrupt waste management practices if waste facilities are not adequately protected and secured.

**Concern:** There is an excess amount of paper, plastic, food, and other waste on campuses.

**Recommendation:** The provincial government should work with municipalities to ensure that effective waste systems are in place to sort and manage compost, recycling, and litter.

**Recommendation:** The provincial government should incentivize post-secondary institutions, through Strategic Mandate Agreements, to meet a 50% waste diversion rate by 2030.

Effective waste treatment helps slow down climate change by reducing the amount of litter in landfills and emissions released from decomposing trash. Unfortunately, due to public misunderstanding about recycling practices and the lack of appropriate recycling bins readily available in public spaces such as post-secondary institutions, most recyclable products are sent to landfills. Compostable materials, including food waste, are reported to be the recyclable product most often found in waste bins; this results in considerable contributions to greenhouse gas emission levels, and it means that compostable materials are not being used to produce fertilizer to enrich soils.

In 2015, an environmental assessment revealed that Ontario's restaurants, residents, retail outlets and farmers generated 3.7 million tonnes of food and organic waste, making up 32 percent of Ontario's total waste.<sup>32</sup> The report also showed that 60 percent of this waste was sent to landfill, much of which could

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<sup>31</sup> Government of Canada. *School Busses and Diesel Exhaust*. Accessed December 2, 2020. <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/air-quality/road-traffic-air-pollution/school-buses-diesel-exhaust.html>.

<sup>32</sup> Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change, and Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change, Ontario Government Food and Organic Waste Framework § (2015). <https://www.ontario.ca/page/food-and-organic-waste-framework>.

have been eaten or reused.<sup>33</sup> Improperly treated compost has a much more significant impact on the environment than one might expect, due to its emission of high volumes of methane.<sup>34</sup> This greenhouse gas is 25 times more potent than carbon dioxide over 100 years.<sup>35</sup> Additionally, compost contaminates groundwater with leachate, a liquid that leaks from landfill trash and wastes any potential for reusing the energy or nutrients found in the food.<sup>36</sup> Likewise, students have reported that grey and blue bins are difficult to find on campus, especially in university residences.

This reflects a more significant challenge in the recycling of plastic and paper products. A report from Deloitte for Environment and Climate Change Canada reveals that in 2016, more than 3.2 million metric tonnes of recycling were disposed of in the garbage.<sup>37</sup> This report also indicates that Canada recycles only nine percent of its plastics, with the rest being sent to landfills.<sup>38</sup> According to Environment Canada, paper and paper products accounted for more than one-third of Canada's waste, including six million tonnes of paper and paperboard annually. Unfortunately, only one-quarter of Canada's waste paperboard is recycled.<sup>39</sup> This data is essential as we consider how individual actions can be changed to reduce waste and the environmental implications of landfills, as well as what universities can do to take action on this matter.

In order to slow the effects of climate change through effective waste management, the provincial government should work with municipalities to ensure that effective waste systems are in place to sort and manage compost, recycling, and litter. This would significantly reduce the volume of recyclable products improperly disposed of in waste bins. Furthermore, by diverting food waste and recycling from landfills, the province will be able to save costs associated with dumping in landfills that are exceeding their full capacity or approaching it.

Additionally, the provincial government should incentivize post-secondary institutions, through Strategic Mandate Agreements, to meet a 50% waste diversion rate by 2030. This will encourage post-secondary institutions to take sustainable practices into their own hands, reducing the volume of recyclable products sent to landfills, and in turn, their negative impact on the environment.

## **Water Usage**

**Principle:** Post-secondary institutions should minimize water waste and reuse water whenever possible.

**Principle:** Post-secondary institutions should have the ability to process and manage water waste efficiently.

**Concern:** Post-secondary institutions create significant and unnecessary water waste.

**Recommendation:** The provincial government should allocate funding to incentivize institutions to implement low-flow facilities and modernize their water infrastructure.

Excessive water consumption is a major contributor to climate change that is very often overlooked. The volume of water required to power institutions supporting over 500,000 students and thousands of staff

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Melikoglu, Mehmet, Carol Lin, and Colin Webb. "Analysing Global Food Waste Problem: Pinpointing the Facts and Estimating the Energy Content." *Central European Journal for Open Engineering* 3, no. 2 (2013). <https://doi.org/10.2478/s13531-012-0058-5>.

<sup>35</sup> Melikoglu, Mehmet, Carol Lin and Colin Webb. "Analysing Global Food Waste Problem: Pinpointing the Facts and Estimating the Energy Content." *Central European Journal for Open Engineering* 3, no. 2 (2013). <https://doi.org/10.2478/s13531-012-0058-5>.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Welsh, Moira, and Alex Ballingall. "Canada Recycles Just 9 per cent of Its Plastics. A New 'Circular Economy' Could Change That — and Create Jobs, Report Says." *The Toronto Star*, April 19, 2019. <https://www.thestar.com/news/investigations/2019/04/18/canada-recycles-just-9-per-cent-of-its-plastics-a-new-circular-economy-could-change-that-and-create-jobs-report-says.html>.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

alike is significant, and as such, it is important for us to raise awareness of the environmental implications of wasting water or using it inefficiently.

Although the province has access to three great lakes and canals leading to the ocean, freshwater makes up a very small fraction of all water on the planet. While nearly 70 percent of the world is covered by water, only 2.5 percent of that water is fresh, and only one percent is accessible.<sup>40</sup> In other words, fresh water is a limited resource, and post-secondary institutions play an essential role in conservation efforts. Unfortunately, many colleges and universities use older models of faucets, toilets, and water supply sources, all of which are inefficient in managing water usage.

Additionally, our limited access to fresh water is at risk due to the degrading health of Canadian watersheds. According to a recent national assessment of Canada's freshwater systems, each of the country's 25 watersheds, known as areas of land that catch rain and snow, or seeps them into marches, streams, rivers or groundwater, face multiple environmental threats.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, Eastern Lake Huron, Lake Ontario and Niagara Peninsula watersheds were identified as being the most disturbed in Canada, largely due to high volumes of water use and fragmentation.<sup>42</sup> Disturbed watersheds may have an irregular or overwhelming flow of water that can disrupt and destroy ecosystems and lead to poor water quality. Left ignored or unaddressed by choosing not to replace older water usage systems with water-efficient ones, the health of watersheds will weaken, reducing the amount of safe, fresh water available for consumption, food production and environmental sustainability.<sup>43</sup>

To conserve water and advance environmental sustainability, OUSA recommends that the provincial government allocate funding for post-secondary institutions to replace older appliances with new, low-flow water facilities that can reduce non-irrigation water use by 30 percent. In line with the Made-in-Ontario plan to promote the use of technologies and practices to ensure water is used more efficiently, this fund will drastically reduce the volume of water wasted and energy consumed, further alleviating the pressure on Ontario's watersheds. Moreover, reducing the amount of water consumed in these major institutions will allow for more freshwater to be used in agriculture, health systems, and a variety of industries without adding pressure to municipal water sources.

### ***Waste Reduction***

**Principle:** Post-secondary institutions should prioritize environmental sustainability, waste reduction, and the reduction of greenhouse emissions.

**Principle:** Post-secondary institutions should efficiently manage recyclable and non-recyclable waste produced on their campus.

**Principle:** Waste management audits should be readily accessible and clearly communicated to potential readers, including concerned citizens.

**Concern:** Improper treatment of food waste increases the greenhouse gas emissions generated from a campus.

**Concern:** Waste management audits are not readily accessible and clear for potential readers, including concerned citizens.

<sup>40</sup> Kuylenstierna, Johan, Pierre Najlis, and Gunilla Björklund. "The Comprehensive Assessment of the Freshwater Resources of the World-Policy Options for an Integrated Sustainable Water Future." *Routledge Taylor & Francis Group*, 1998. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1080/02508069808686730>.

<sup>41</sup> Semeniuk, Ivan. *The Globe and Mail*, 2017. <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/canada-fresh-water-review-1/article35262579/>.

<sup>42</sup> World Wildlife Foundation. "Canadian Watershed Reports," *WWF*. 2017. <http://watershedreports.wwf.ca/>.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*.

**Concern:** Post-secondary institutions produce a significant amount of unspoiled food waste that is not used for composting, put toward energy sources, or donated to those in need.

**Concern:** Many post-secondary institutions are not on track to meet and follow the provincial government's zero waste targets.

**Concern:** Post-secondary institutions do not have frameworks in place to ensure that recyclable and non-recyclable waste is processed responsibly.

**Concern:** There is a lack of accountability and transparency regarding waste management practices at post-secondary institutions.

**Recommendation:** The provincial government should implement a minimum environmental framework for post-secondary institutions to ensure that they are on track to achieve the government's long-term goal of a waste-free Ontario.

**Recommendation:** The provincial government should incentivize post-secondary institutions, through Strategic Mandate Agreements, to invest in effective waste reduction programs.

**Recommendation:** The provincial government should mandate that post-secondary institutions publish comprehensive waste management reports on an annual basis.

As per the goals of the provincial government's Strategy for a Waste-Free Ontario,<sup>44</sup> post-secondary institutions should be making an effort to convert the current linear waste-to-landfill mindset into a circular economy where participants strive to minimize material waste, extend product lifespans, and maximize the usefulness of goods and products. Currently, most of Ontario's post-secondary institutions are not on pace to meet the interim waste diversion requirements of 50% by 2030. With the waste sector being responsible for 6% of the province's total greenhouse gas emissions,<sup>45</sup> more can be done within our institutions to reduce and manage waste in a more sustainable and environmentally conscious manner. To this end, the provincial government should implement a minimum environmental framework to help post-secondary institutions ensure that they are on track to meet the government's long-term goals for a waste-free Ontario. The government should also use Strategic Mandate Agreements to incentivize institutions to invest in effective waste reduction programs.

Further, the provincial government should mandate that post-secondary institutions publish comprehensive annual waste management reports. This would offer transparency and allow the provincial government to track whether goal projections are in compliance with the Strategy for a Waste-Free Ontario. These reports would also allow students (and concerned citizens in the community) to understand the efforts being taken by their institutions to handle and manage waste responsibly. Doing so would offer data-driven results from the sector, allowing us to further understand emission projections and identify where improvements are needed to meet waste diversion goals.

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<sup>44</sup> Government of Ontario. *Strategy for a Waste-Free Ontario: Building the Circular Economy*. Accessed November 28, 2020. <https://www.ontario.ca/page/strategy-waste-free-ontario-building-circular-economy>.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

## RESOURCE PROCUREMENT

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### *Reducing Paper Usage*

**Principle:** Increasing access to e-books, online educational resources, and digital learning platforms can reduce paper waste on campus.

**Concern:** Excessive use of paper for educational purposes increases the amount of waste on campus.

**Concern:** Many post-secondary institutions are heavily reliant on paper resources for learning and testing purposes.

**Recommendation:** The provincial government should incentivize online educational resources in post-secondary institutions to eliminate paper resources for learning, except as required for students' accessibility needs.

The average student's academic experience often involves using paper and hardcopy books for learning; however, the rise of climate change calls for innovation. The State of the World's Forests Report by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations reveals that seven million hectares of forest are lost annually while agricultural land expands by six million hectares per year.<sup>46</sup> This report further explained that the production of paper is one of the most prominent threats to forests today, along with palm oil, fabric production, and logging.<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, from 2010 to 2015, natural forest area decreased by a net 6.5 million hectares per year, with less than 3.7 billion hectares remaining on earth today.<sup>48</sup> This is a significant challenge in the context of climate change because forests store 50 percent of the Earth's terrestrial carbon and maintain the world's abundant biodiversity, essential for life on Earth.<sup>49</sup> The loss of forests and ecosystems also means the loss of carbon sinks, which leads to an increase in emissions into the atmosphere.<sup>50</sup>

In addition to the effects of deforestation, paper production uses a significant amount of energy in order to crop, pulp, process, and transport paper. Moreover, paper accounts for more than one-third of Canada's waste, including six million tonnes of paper and paperboard annually, according to Environment Canada.<sup>51</sup> Unfortunately, only one-quarter of Canada's waste paperboard is recycled.<sup>52</sup> In the university context, students express that there are very few recycling bins on campus with proper signage, further contributing to high paper waste.

To improve sustainability on campuses, and across post-secondary education more broadly, the provincial government should incentivize post-secondary institutions, through Strategic Mandate Agreements, to eliminate paper resources for learning and testing purposes, except as required for students' accessibility needs. This would help ensure that professors and instructors select texts that do not require the purchase and production of paper, which would in turn reduce the number of trees, as well as the amount of energy and water, used in the paper production process.

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<sup>46</sup> "State of the World's Forests." *Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations*. 2016. <http://www.fao.org/publications/sofo/2016/en/>.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> Whitehead, David. "Forests as Carbon Sinks - Benefits and Consequences." *Tree Physiology* 31, no. 9 (2011). <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1093/treephys/tpr063>.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> Welsh, Moira, and Alex Ballingall. "Canada Recycles Just 9 per Cent of Its Plastics. A New 'Circular Economy' Could Change That — and Create Jobs, Report Says." *The Toronto Star*. April 19, 2019. <https://www.thestar.com/news/investigations/2019/04/18/canada-recycles-just-9-per-cent-of-its-plastics-a-new-circular-economy-could-change-that-and-create-jobs-report-says.html>.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

## ***Food & Beverage***

**Principle:** Students should have access to affordable, local, ethically sourced, and organic foods.

**Principle:** Students should have access to affordable, low-waste food and beverage products on campus.

**Concern:** Post-secondary institutions often purchase food and beverage products with excessive food packaging, including single-use plastics.

**Concern:** Post-secondary institutions often purchase food and beverage products that are not locally sourced and which, as a result, have a higher carbon footprint due to the extensive travel required to transport them to campus.

**Concern:** Locally sourced and organic food products available to students are often significantly more expensive than non-local, non-organic food products.

**Recommendation:** The provincial government should incentivize post-secondary institutions to offer locally sourced, organic food products that are cautious of single-use plastics to students for a price not more than 25% higher than the price of non-locally sourced, non-organic food products on campus.

The consumption of locally grown foods has been praised for its benefits for local economies; however, it is less often recognized as an act of environmental sustainability that is necessary to slow the effects of climate change. Canada's fresh produce imports have long surpassed exports and production, and in 2015, the country imported \$9,313,138 in value of fruit more than it exported.<sup>53</sup> The energy involved in importing produce to feed Canadians is significant: 92 percent of imported food travels more than 1500 kilometres to get to Canada, and 22 percent travels more than 7000 kilometres to reach various regions of the country.<sup>54</sup>

The environmental implications of extensive food transportation are troubling, largely due to the dependence on most transport models' fossil fuels and energy inefficiency. For example, 57 percent of all US and Canada trade products are transported by trucks, including more than \$20 billion in agricultural products from the United States every year.<sup>55</sup> Furthermore, food which is transported by flight has an even more significant environmental impact, heightened by the lack of environmental regulations in the regions exporting that food.<sup>56</sup> A report from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations states that carbon density in Industrialized, South and Southeast Asia is among the highest in the world due to the high production of cereal products and minimal environmental regulations in farming practices.<sup>57</sup> The report further illustrates that many foods exported across great distances are spoiled and lead to food waste. The average carbon footprint of food waste per year is about 500 kilograms of carbon dioxide per capita, contributing to exceedingly high volumes of greenhouse gas emissions.<sup>58</sup> A report from the World Resources Institute indicates that these environmental concerns must be addressed and acted

<sup>53</sup> Wang, Jennie and Abdoul-Razak Mamane. Household food consumption and Canadian greenhouse gas emissions, 2015. Government of Canada, Statistics Canada, October 9, 2019. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/16-508-x/16-508-x2019004-eng.htm>.

<sup>54</sup> Kissinger, Meidad. "International Trade Related Food Miles – The Case of Canada." *Food Policy* 37, no. 2 (2012): 171–78. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.foodpol.2012.01.002>.

<sup>55</sup> Canada, Global Affairs. "Canada's State of Trade: Trade and Investment Update 2012." GAC, April 30, 2013.

[https://www.international.gc.ca/economist-economiste/performance/state-point/state\\_2012\\_point/2012\\_5.aspx?lang=eng](https://www.international.gc.ca/economist-economiste/performance/state-point/state_2012_point/2012_5.aspx?lang=eng).

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> BIO-Intelligence Service, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). "Food Wastage Footprint - Impacts on Natural Resources – Summary Report." *Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations*, 2013. <http://www.fao.org/3/i3347e/i3347e.pdf>.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

on because unsustainable agriculture alone could raise the Earth's average temperature more than 1.5 degrees above that of pre-industrial times.<sup>59</sup>

Many students have expressed concern that the food served to them on campus is not locally-sourced, fresh, or of high quality. Student consultations indicate that they care about where their food comes from, as well as the environmental implications in the production and transportation of that food. To reduce the carbon footprint of sourcing food from outside of Canada, OUSA recommends that the provincial government create a tax credit available to post-secondary institutions who source more than 50 percent of their food and beverages from Canadian farmers and food producers. This credit would help more post-secondary institutions access locally sourced foods and incentivize them to do so. Moreover, it would challenge them to review their food purchasing choices from an environmentally sustainable lens and reduce their carbon footprint.

### ***Furniture, Electronics & Other Learning Materials***

**Principle:** Procuring furniture made with sustainable, recyclable materials can help decrease post-secondary institutions' carbon footprints.

**Principle:** The improper disposal of electronic equipment, including computers, batteries, printer cartridges, and similar items, results in toxic chemicals leaking into landfills.

**Concern:** Post-secondary institutions often do not purchase sustainably-made furniture, increasing levels of greenhouse gas emissions.

**Concern:** Students often do not have access to proper disposal bins and systems to ensure their used electronic equipment is processed properly without harm to the environment.

**Recommendation:** The provincial government should provide post-secondary institutions with funding to cover at least some of the cost of purchasing sustainable furniture and other learning materials.

**Recommendation:** The provincial government should partner with existing electronic waste reduction programs and organizations to allow post-secondary institutions to repurpose electronic materials on campus by donating them to departments using them for class studies or projects.

While much of the attention on recycling and waste management focuses on plastics and food waste, very few initiatives raise awareness of the environmental and health risks associated with electronic and furniture waste. Fast furniture—the process of purchasing low cost, mass-produced furniture that often has short life cycles, and the fashion trend that accompanies it—has raised serious environmental concerns in recent years. While there is very little data on Canadian furniture disposed of in landfills, the Environmental Protection Agency states that approximately 9.7 billion pounds of furniture are sent to landfills every year in the United States.<sup>60</sup> This number has increased by 38 percent since 2005, and significantly since 1960, when Americans threw away only about two million tonnes of furniture per year.<sup>61</sup> The diversity of products used to create furniture makes it difficult to separate and adequately sort

<sup>59</sup> Chung, Emily. "Your Meals Are Speeding up Climate Change, but There's a Way to Eat Sustainably." *CBC News*, 2018. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/technology/food-climate-change-carbon-footprint-1.4930062>.

<sup>60</sup> Hague, Matthew. "Fast Furniture Doesn't Have the Same Poor Reputation as Fast Fashion, but It Should." *The Globe and Mail*, 2020. <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/life/home-and-design/article-fast-furniture-doesnt-have-the-same-poor-reputation-as-fast-fashion/>.

<sup>61</sup> Eleanor Cummins, "Fast Furniture Is an Environmental Fiasco," *The New Republic*, January 2020, <https://newrepublic.com/article/156208/fast-furniture-environmental-fiasco>.

for recycling purposes. As a result, it is estimated that more than 9 million tonnes of wood, metal, glass, fabric, leather, and foam waste degrade in landfills, releasing greenhouse gas emissions and toxic leakage into soils.<sup>62</sup> This problem is amplified at post-secondary institutions, where frequent re-branding and renovation initiatives cause schools to purchase new furniture and dispose of older models. Furthermore, students changing apartments throughout their degree, without ample options to properly dispose of old furniture or carry it on to their future living arrangements, cause high volumes of furniture to be disposed of rather than repurposed.

Another serious concern expressed by students on sustainability issues is the risk of chemical leakage from electronic materials in landfills. According to a report from the University of British Columbia, Canadians generate 725,000 tonnes of electronic waste (or e-waste) annually, and only 20 percent is recycled every year.<sup>63</sup> It is becoming the fastest growing waste stream, with an estimated 53.6 million tonnes in scrap yards each year, equivalent to 0.3 percent of global emissions from the energy sector.<sup>64</sup> This total is expected to increase to 74.7 million tonnes by 2030, nearly doubling the annual amount of new e-waste in only 16 years. Due to the increase in purchases of technology and electronic products with shorter lifecycles and fewer options to repair, creating recycling and repurposing programs for this equipment is essential to reduce the volume of toxic chemicals released into landfills. Without a reliable system for waste management, an estimated 98 million tonnes of harmful substances in e-waste, such as mercury, brominated flame retardants, chlorofluorocarbons, and hydrofluorocarbons, will be released into landfills and water streams every year.<sup>65</sup> Furthermore, it is estimated that 50 million tonnes of mercury are likely found in undocumented e-waste flows, which threatens soil quality, water sources, ecosystems and human health.<sup>66</sup> Many post-secondary students express that they are not aware of any electronic recycling bins in their communities or how they recyclable materials should be processed appropriately.

Given the considerable risks involved in fast furniture and improper management of e-waste, it is critical that the provincial government consider the following recommendations put forward by OUSA to improve the sustainability of post-secondary institutions and greater communities as a whole. First, the provincial government should provide post-secondary institutions with funding to cover at least some of the cost of purchasing sustainable furniture and other learning materials. Second, OUSA recommends that the provincial government create additional guidelines for post-secondary institutions to repurpose used electronic materials on campus by donating them to departments using them for class studies or projects. Not only would this initiative reduce the amount of chemical leakage from e-waste, but it would also support student learning with minimal administrative costs.

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<sup>62</sup> Hague, Matthew. "Fast Furniture Doesn't Have the Same Poor Reputation as Fast Fashion, but It Should." *The Globe and Mail*, 2020. <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/life/home-and-design/article-fast-furniture-doesnt-have-the-same-poor-reputation-as-fast-fashion/>.

<sup>63</sup> Kumar, Amit and Maria Holuszko, "Electronic Waste and Existing Processing Routes: A Canadian Perspective," *Resources* 5, no. 4 (April 2016): p. 35, <https://doi.org/10.3390/resources5040035>.

<sup>64</sup> United Nations University and International Solid Waste Association, "Surge in Global E-Waste, up 21 per Cent in 5 Years," The Global E-Waste Statistics Partnership, 2020, <https://globalewaste.org/news/surge-global-waste/>.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

## EDUCATIONAL CAMPAIGNS

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**Principle:** All post-secondary students should learn about environmental sustainability and climate change.

**Principle:** Waste management practices between municipalities differ, and students who have moved to a new location for education are likely unfamiliar with the practices of the municipality they have moved to.

**Concern:** Educational resources on environmental sustainability, climate change, and the importance of living sustainably are lacking; as a result, students are not well informed on the climate crisis and how they can create positive change in their own lives and their communities.

**Recommendation:** The Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance should create standards requiring post-secondary institutions to implement campus-specific learning modules for municipal waste management systems, climate science, and environmental sustainability that will equip students and post-secondary institutions with the tools they need to live and act more sustainably.

In many post-secondary programs, students are required to complete mandatory training. For example, in science fields, many students are required to complete health and safety training in order to access lab facilities. Similarly, students on varsity sports teams are often required to attend training on sexual harassment and abuse. Students should also have an opportunity to learn about climate change, as well as how to incorporate sustainable habits into their daily lives and create positive change in their communities. University resources, locations, and standards differ, as do the waste management practices of each municipality. As a result, as students begin university and (in many cases) adjust to a new city, they may not be aware of that city's waste management practices or environmental efforts. To address this issue, the Ontario Universities' Council on Quality Assurance should create standards requiring that post-secondary institutions implement campus-specific learning modules; these should include information about local waste management systems, climate science, and techniques for forming sustainable habits.

## INSTITUTIONAL SUSTAINABILITY POLICIES

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**Principle:** Post-secondary institutions should be environmentally conscious in all of their practices and daily operations.

**Principle:** Information regarding environmental sustainability efforts and policies at each post-secondary institution should be readily accessible and easy to understand.

**Principle:** Setting deadlines can help post-secondary institutions ensure that they are on track to reduce emissions.

**Principle:** Post-secondary students should be able to play a role in environmental sustainability efforts at their institution.

**Principle:** Indigenous land and practices should be respected and incorporated when developing environmental sustainability policies.

**Concern:** In many cases, post-secondary institutions do not prioritize the creation or implementation of campus-wide environmental sustainability policies.

**Concern:** Many post-secondary institutions do not publish reports regarding environmental sustainability and campus operations.

**Concern:** In cases where post-secondary institutions have set emission reduction deadlines, they are often not well-equipped to meet those deadlines.

**Concern:** In most cases, post-secondary institutions do not consult with and follow Indigenous practices when developing environmental sustainability policies.

**Recommendation:** The provincial government should create regulations under the *Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities Act* to mandate that each university produce an environmental sustainability strategy or policy by 2023.

**Recommendation:** The provincial government should mandate that post-secondary institutions publish annual environmental sustainability reports indicating targets, accomplishments, and shortcomings.

**Recommendation:** The provincial government should establish short- and long-term emissions standards for post-secondary institutions to follow and include in their sustainability policies.

**Recommendation:** The provincial government should create an Indigenous lands and environment working group, open on a voluntary basis to all interested Indigenous communities and nations, that post-secondary institutions can consult when creating environmental sustainability policies.

**Recommendation:** The provincial government should incentivize post-secondary institutions, through Strategic Mandate Agreements, to meet the emissions and waste management goals included in their sustainability policies.

Post-secondary institutions are relatively large economic drivers for local economies, which means they also account for large portions of their municipality's environmental impact. However, in many cases,

institutions have not committed to creating or implementing a campus-wide environmental sustainability policy.<sup>67</sup> Where post-secondary institutions have set emission reduction deadlines, they often lack the resources or incentives required to meet those deadlines. To remedy this, the provincial government should create regulations under the *Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities Act* which mandate that, by 2023, all post-secondary institutions in Ontario produce an environmental sustainability strategy or policy. Similarly, the government should mandate that institutions produce annual environmental sustainability reports indicating targets, accomplishments, and shortcomings. Doing so offers transparency and allows the post-secondary institution, the local community, and provincial stakeholders to analyze and assess the effectiveness of the institution's short- and long-term strategies.

Further, to standardize the environmental sustainability goals that institutions should be aiming for, the provincial government should establish short- and long-term emissions standards for post-secondary institutions to follow and include in their sustainability strategies. This, combined with financial

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<sup>67</sup> Council of Ontario Universities. *The Road to Low-Carbon University Campuses: 2017 Going Greener Report on Environmental Sustainability*. 2017. <https://cou.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/COU-Going-Greener-2017.pdf>

incentives offered by the province to institutions that meet emissions and waste management goals, will help ensure that sustainability plans are consistent throughout the post-secondary sector.

Finally, post-secondary institutions often fail to consult with Indigenous peoples when developing environmental sustainability policies. When forming environmental strategies, efforts to conserve an area's natural ecosystem and habitat play a fundamental role in maintaining Indigenous cultures and land. The provincial government should, therefore, create an Indigenous lands and environment working group, open on a voluntary basis to all interested Indigenous communities and nations, that post-secondary institutions can consult when creating environmental sustainability policies.

## RESEARCH INITIATIVES

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**Principle:** Environmental sustainability is a multi-faceted concern affecting everyone and should involve the engagement of as many educational disciplines as possible.

**Principle:** There should be as much Indigenous engagement and representation as possible, and as desired, by Indigenous communities and nations in all environmental science and sustainability research.

**Principle:** Research projects for environmental science or sustainability benefit from taking a community-based approach.

**Concern:** There is the potential for more research than currently exists on economic, social, and other non-scientific aspects of environmental issues.

**Concern:** There is a lack of opportunities for Indigenous contribution and perspectives in current research on environmental science and sustainability.

**Concern:** While environmental sustainability research engages the public to some extent, this research would be more effective if it engaged the public further.

**Recommendation:** The provincial government should expand the "Priority Topics" for the Ontario Research Grants to ensure that there are environmental sustainability research opportunities for each discipline of study.

**Recommendation:** The provincial government should create grants for Indigenous scholars in environmental studies and advertise opportunities for Indigenous researchers to apply for grants related to environment and energy.

**Recommendation:** The provincial government should mandate that researchers provide Indigenous communities and nations with an opportunity to consult and provide feedback prior to and/or during research on relevant environmental science and sustainability matters.

**Recommendation:** The provincial government should create research grants that favour integrative research and community engagement.

Research on environmental sustainability has become increasingly important in recent years. As a result, it is vital that students and post-secondary institutions in Ontario conduct extensive research on

environmental issues in various disciplines, and that this research include the perspectives of Indigenous peoples in Canada.

Currently, there is a limited number of research grants in Ontario for topics related to climate change and environmental sustainability.<sup>68</sup> These are major concerns that affect and involve multiple disciplines, and available research opportunities should reflect this. Many educational disciplines can offer valuable insights into environmental issues. For example, the social sciences can provide expertise on how the climate emergency is likely to affect society over time, helping us plan ahead effectively. Similarly, with enough funding, commerce scholars may be able to develop models for transitioning to green energy with minimal effects on Ontario's workforce or economic output. Other fields, including but not limited to architecture, art, health sciences, and political science, should have environmental research opportunities as well. To address this concern, the provincial government should expand the "Priority Topics" for the Ontario Research Grants to ensure that there are environmental sustainability research opportunities for each discipline of study.

Further, in accordance with the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks' values and statements regarding the Environmental Bill of Rights and the Ministry of Indigenous Affairs, there should be further engagement with Indigenous communities when conducting research concerning the environment.<sup>69</sup> The special relationship that Indigenous peoples have with the environment needs to be recognized, and the cultural, social, economic, and environmental perspectives of Indigenous peoples need to be considered. To this end, the provincial government should mandate that researchers provide Indigenous communities and nations with an opportunity to consult and provide feedback prior to and/or during research on relevant environmental science and sustainability matters. In addition, the government should create grants for Indigenous scholars in environmental studies and advertise opportunities for Indigenous researchers to apply for grants related to environment, energy, and sustainability.

Finally, ensuring that research is community-integrated is an important way to increase the effectiveness of climate change and sustainability research. A publication by the Government of Canada explains the importance of in-depth research projects in which entire communities are involved and the research direction is based on the community's needs.<sup>70</sup> This is critical in all communities, but especially in Indigenous communities. The publication explains that when the community is involved, "[they] own both the process and the results" and "the community discovers itself and uses knowledge about the past and the present to change the future." To improve the effectiveness and raise the quality of research being done, the Ontario government should provide funding for research grants which favour integrative and community-based research.

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<sup>68</sup> Government of Ontario. *Ontario Community Environment Fund*. Accessed November 28, 2020. [ontario.ca/page/ontario-community-environment-fund](https://ontario.ca/page/ontario-community-environment-fund).

<sup>69</sup> Government of Ontario. Statement of Environmental Values: Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation. Accessed November 28, 2020. <https://ero.ontario.ca/page/sevs/statement-environmental-values-ministry-indigenous-relations-and-reconciliation>

<sup>70</sup> Public Safety Canada. *Community Development and Research*. Accessed November 28, 2020. <https://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/cnt/rsrscs/pblctns/cmmnt-dvlpmnt/index-en.aspx#part2>

## BROAD CLIMATE CHANGE ACTION

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**Principle:** Climate change is an urgent crisis which requires immediate and extensive action.

**Concern:** The provincial government is not adequately prioritizing action to fight climate change.

**Concern:** Provincial government initiatives may not adequately prioritize Indigenous knowledge, understanding, and worldviews of climate change.

**Recommendation:** The provincial government should work with external groups to develop comprehensive and immediate measures to address the climate crisis.

**Recommendation:** The provincial government should prioritize transitioning the province to sustainable energy sourcing and use.

**Recommendation:** The provincial government should support Indigenous-led climate action initiatives.

While the majority of recommendations in this policy are focused on promoting sustainable practices on post-secondary campuses and among students, student concerns extend beyond how environmental issues affect their education. There is also a need for immediate and extensive action by the provincial government to address the growing climate change emergency.

In 2016, Ontario's greenhouse gas emissions were the lowest since reporting began in 1990.<sup>71</sup> However, according to the Environmental Commissioner of Ontario in 2018, the provincial government's replacement for cap and trade, the *Cap and Trade Cancellation Act*, lacks most of the features of a good climate law.<sup>72</sup> In its report, the Commissioner states that "cap and trade was providing the motivation and billions in funding for meaningful emission reductions across the province; climate leadership was enhancing Ontario's reputation and drawing in foreign investment. In short, there was some inefficiency, but cap and trade was on its way to producing many economic and environmental benefits for the people of Ontario." The report goes on to argue that the government has "essential roles [in the fight against climate change] that no one else can play" and that "only with strong, clear provincial targets, rules and incentives can municipalities and the private sector do their best ... The window for action is shrinking fast. The sooner we act, the easier and less costly it will be."<sup>73</sup> It is clear that the provincial government should prioritize transitioning the province to sustainable energy use and sourcing, and that it should work with as many external groups as needed to develop comprehensive and immediate measures to address the climate crisis.

Students are also concerned that the provincial government is not prioritizing Indigenous knowledge, understanding, and worldviews of climate change in its environmental efforts. Often, Indigenous peoples are heavily impacted by climate change, which can affect their access to healthy food and other necessities.<sup>74</sup> There are several Indigenous-led climate initiatives across Canada, including the Indigenous Climate Hub, which contains the First Nation Adapt Program, the Indigenous Community-Based Climate Monitoring Program, and the Climate Change and Health Adaptation program.<sup>75</sup> The provincial government should support Indigenous-led climate initiatives, following the lead of previous governments.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Environmental Commissioner of Ontario. *Climate Action in Ontario: What's Next? 2018 Greenhouse Gas Progress Report*. 2018. <http://docs.assets.eco.on.ca/reports/climate-change/2018/Climate-Action-in-Ontario-Summary.pdf>

<sup>72</sup> Ibid 4.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid 2.

<sup>74</sup> Flanagan, Ryan. "Climate change harming Indigenous access to healthy food and 'the worst is yet to come': report," *CTV News*. October 21, 2020. <https://www.ctvnews.ca/climate-and-environment/climate-change-harming-indigenous-access-to-healthy-food-and-the-worst-is-yet-to-come-report-1.5154155>

<sup>75</sup> Indigenous Climate Hub. Accessed December 2, 2020. <https://indigenousclimatehub.ca/>.

<sup>76</sup> Government of Ontario. "Ontario Partnering With First Nations to Address Climate Change," *Newsroom*. March 17, 2016. <https://news.ontario.ca/en/release/36187/ontario-partnering-with-first-nations-to-address-climate-change>.

Finally, as an advocacy organization focused on post-secondary education, rather than broader climate change initiatives, OUSA would welcome the opportunity to partner with environmental and climate change stakeholders and advocacy groups in Ontario, recognizing that their expertise is invaluable in bringing about positive change in this area.

## **POLICY STATEMENT**

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### ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

**Whereas:** Post-secondary institutions across Canada heavily invest in the fossil fuel industry and other corporations that engage in a range of harmful environmental practices;

**Whereas:** Post-secondary institutions lack the incentives, expertise, and/or resources to transition to fossil fuel-free and carbon-neutral investment portfolios;

**Whereas:** By investing in unsustainable businesses and practices to support student endowment funds, investment managers' investment strategies do not represent the interests of students;

**Whereas:** Lack of legislation defining the role of environmental concerns within Ontario's fiduciary duty framework creates an obstacle to institutions looking to make their investments more environmentally responsible;

**Whereas:** Post-secondary institutions may not have strong enough incentives to operate their campuses in more sustainable ways;

**Whereas:** Post-secondary institutions do not allocate sufficient financial resources to build the necessary infrastructure for more sustainable operations;

**Whereas:** Post-secondary institutions often lack the policies, planning, and infrastructure to create environmentally sustainable campuses;

**Whereas:** Post-secondary institutions are not required to adhere to a common standard for environmental sustainability when constructing campus buildings;

**Whereas:** Our post-secondary institutions often use land in unsustainable ways, such as by engaging in overdevelopment or by using monoculture cultivation techniques;

**Whereas:** Students often do not have access to optimal naturalized, green, or biodiverse ecosystems on campus;

**Whereas:** Post-secondary institutions may not have the space or the financial resources to grow their own food through community gardens or greenhouses, or to purchase food from local food providers;

**Whereas:** Due to a lack of educational opportunities, students are often unaware of the environmental and economic impacts of post-secondary institutions purchasing food from outside of the province and country;

**Whereas:** University campuses often lack the infrastructure required to offer safe, secure, sustainable, and effective transportation such as sidewalks, pathways, bike routes, and bike storage;

**Whereas:** In some cases, sustainable transportation mechanisms are less accessible than unsustainable mechanisms;

**Whereas:** Post-secondary institutions often lack the framework and funding to establish, improve, and/or expand sustainable inter-campus transit shuttles for students and, as a result, rely on less sustainable methods;

**Whereas:** Electric vehicles, charging stations, and other clean modes of transportation are currently not a viable option for most post-secondary students due to price and lack of accessibility;

**Whereas:** Students who struggle to access municipal transportation will often use less eco-friendly transportation instead;

**Whereas:** The lack of virtual or nearby opportunities for employment, education, and experiential learning often leads to excess vehicular travel to and from campus and/or workplaces, which increases pollution;

**Whereas:** Current eco-friendly transportation methods are not always accessible, reliable, convenient, or safe for students;

**Whereas:** Not enough advancements in green transportation are currently being made in the scope of post-secondary education;

**Whereas:** Improper management of compostable foods leads to excess emissions;

**Whereas:** Students often do not have sufficient access to composting bins on campus;

**Whereas:** Local wildlife can disrupt waste management practices if waste facilities are not adequately protected and secured;

**Whereas:** There is an excess amount of paper, plastic, food, and other waste on campuses;

**Whereas:** Post-secondary institutions create significant and unnecessary water waste;

**Whereas:** Improper treatment of food waste increases the greenhouse gas emissions generated from a campus;

**Whereas:** Waste management audits are not readily accessible and clear for potential readers, including concerned citizens;

**Whereas:** Post-secondary institutions produce a significant amount of unspoiled food waste that is not used for composting, put toward energy sources, or donated to those in need;

**Whereas:** Many post-secondary institutions are not on track to meet and follow the provincial government's zero waste targets;

**Whereas:** Post-secondary institutions do not have frameworks in place to ensure that recyclable and non-recyclable waste is processed responsibly;

**Whereas:** There is a lack of accountability and transparency regarding waste management practices at post-secondary institutions;

**Whereas:** Excessive use of paper for educational purposes increases the amount of waste on campus;

**Whereas:** Many post-secondary institutions are heavily reliant on paper resources for learning and testing purposes;

**Whereas:** Post-secondary institutions often purchase food and beverage products with excessive food packaging, including single-use plastics;

**Whereas:** Post-secondary institutions often purchase food and beverage products that are not locally sourced and which, as a result, have a higher carbon footprint due to the extensive travel required to transport them to campus;

**Whereas:** Locally sourced and organic food products available to students are often significantly more expensive than non-local, non-organic food products;

**Whereas:** Post-secondary institutions often do not purchase sustainably-made furniture, increasing levels of greenhouse gas emissions;

**Whereas:** Students often do not have access to proper disposal bins and systems to ensure their used electronic equipment is processed properly without harm to the environment;

**Whereas:** Educational resources on environmental sustainability, climate change, and the importance of living sustainably are lacking; as a result, students are not well informed on the climate crisis and how they can create positive change in their own lives and their communities;

**Whereas:** In many cases, post-secondary institutions do not prioritize the creation or implementation of campus-wide environmental sustainability policies;

**Whereas:** Many post-secondary institutions do not publish reports regarding environmental sustainability and campus operations;

**Whereas:** In cases where post-secondary institutions have set emission reduction deadlines, they are often not well-equipped to meet those deadlines;

**Whereas:** In most cases, post-secondary institutions do not consult with and follow Indigenous practices when developing environmental sustainability policies;

**Whereas:** There is the potential for more research than currently exists on economic, social, and other non-scientific aspects of environmental issues;

**Whereas:** There is a lack of opportunities for Indigenous contribution and perspectives in current research on environmental science and sustainability;

**Whereas:** While environmental sustainability research engages the public to some extent, this research would be more effective if it engaged the public further;

**Whereas:** The provincial government is not adequately prioritizing action to fight climate change; and

**Whereas:** Provincial government initiatives may not adequately prioritize Indigenous knowledge, understanding, and worldviews of climate change;

**Be it resolved that:** The provincial government should incentivize post-secondary institutions, through Strategic Mandate Agreements, to begin the process of divestment immediately and fully divest by no later than 2026;

**Be it further resolved that:** The provincial government should incentivize post-secondary institutions, through Strategic Mandate Agreements, to produce publicly available, annual reports on the status of their divestment initiatives;

**BIFRT:** The provincial government should incentivize post-secondary institutions, through Strategic Mandate Agreements, to only partner with managers that have sustainable fund alternatives or do not have fossil fuel investments;

**BIFRT:** The provincial government should implement a regulation under the *Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities Act* to ensure oversight on environmental sustainability;

**BIFRT:** The provincial government should pass legislation in the style of the *South African Trust Investments Act* to redefine fiduciary responsibility to enable post-secondary institutions to choose to make investment decisions based on environmental impact;

**BIFRT:** In order to inform how investment managers can best uphold their fiduciary duty to students as managers of student endowment funds, the provincial government should create regular opportunities—namely, annual surveys, focus groups, and other feedback campaigns—for students to provide feedback on and identify concerns with their post-secondary institutions’ fund management and sustainability practices;

**BIFRT:** The provincial government should incentivize post-secondary institutions, through Strategic Mandate Agreements, to switch to clean energy sources;

**BIFRT:** The provincial government should incentivize post-secondary institutions, through Strategic Mandate Agreements, to meet LEED certification standards when constructing campus buildings;

**BIFRT:** The provincial government should incentivize post-secondary institutions, through Strategic Mandate Agreements, to retrofit all existing campus buildings to meet LEED certification standards by 2030;

**BIFRT:** The provincial government should update the Greenhouse Gas Campus Retrofit program to ensure that post-secondary institutions can receive funding to meet LEED standards;

**BIFRT:** The provincial government should subsidize post-secondary institutions’ procurement of LED, sensor-operated lights, and other sustainable technologies;

**BIFRT:** The provincial government should mandate that post-secondary institutions conduct and publicly release the results of annual internal and operational energy and emissions audits;

**BIFRT:** The provincial government should incentivize post-secondary institutions, through Strategic Mandate Agreements, to establish Green Revolving Funds for the purpose of developing sustainable

campus energy sources, implementing carbon-capturing mechanisms, and retrofitting buildings;

**BIFRT:** The provincial government should mandate that all post-secondary institutions implement net-zero-carbon emission standards by 2026;

**BIFRT:** The provincial government should create a green space fund for post-secondary institutions to protect existing biodiversity and support new forms of biodiversity on their campuses;

**BIFRT:** The provincial government should create a working group of post-secondary institutions and relevant stakeholders to develop a framework assisting institutions with implementing green spaces;

**BIFRT:** In order to provide students with fresh, locally sourced food, the provincial government should provide post-secondary institutions with funding to create their own community gardens and greenhouses, and/or to partner with local farmers;

**BIFRT:** The provincial government should facilitate work-integrated learning opportunities between post-secondary institutions, interested students, and local agricultural operations;

**BIFRT:** The Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing and the Ministry of Colleges and Universities should create and audit policies regarding accessible pedestrian infrastructure, including the creation and maintenance of sidewalks, pathways, bike racks, and pedestrian drop-offs;

**BIFRT:** The Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing should provide ad hoc financial and informational support to municipalities in which universities are located in order to establish alternative active transit programs;

**BIFRT:** The provincial government should incentivize post-secondary institutions, through Strategic Mandate Agreements, to make accessibility-oriented improvements to their pedestrian infrastructure aimed at connecting campus buildings to students and transportation hubs;

**BIFRT:** The provincial government should incentivize post-secondary institutions, through Strategic Mandate Agreements, to implement campus-specific initiatives to reduce visitors' desire or need to operate cars on campus;

**BIFRT:** The provincial government should incentivize post-secondary institutions, through Strategic Mandate Agreements, to implement campus-specific initiatives to improve the safety and viability of biking on campus, including more secure bike storage and safer roads;

**BIFRT:** The provincial government should encourage post-secondary institutions to cluster their academic, research, administrative, residential, and recreational operations within walking distance, where possible, to reduce the need for on-campus vehicular traffic;

**BIFRT:** The provincial government should provide post-secondary institutions with the framework and funding to establish, improve, and/or expand inter-campus shuttle systems and other clean transportation infrastructure on campus;

**BIFRT:** The provincial government should provide institutions with funding and create Strategic Mandate Agreements to facilitate virtual or nearby employment, education, and experiential learning opportunities;

**BIFRT:** To promote students' use of sustainable transportation methods, the provincial government should provide municipalities with funding to expand and increase the frequency of public transit routes;

**BIFRT:** The provincial government should provide funding to municipalities for advancements in green transportation, such as electric busses and rapid transit;

**BIFRT:** The provincial government should work with municipalities to ensure that effective waste systems are in place to sort and manage compost, recycling, and litter;

**BIFRT:** The provincial government should incentivize post-secondary institutions, through Strategic Mandate Agreements, to meet a 50% waste diversion rate by 2030;

**BIFRT:** The provincial government should allocate funding to incentivize institutions to implement low-flow facilities and modernize their water infrastructure;

**BIFRT:** The provincial government should implement a minimum environmental framework for post-secondary institutions to ensure that they are on track to achieve the government's long-term goal of a waste-free Ontario;

**BIFRT:** The provincial government should incentivize post-secondary institutions, through Strategic Mandate Agreements, to invest in effective waste reduction programs;

**BIFRT:** The provincial government should mandate that post-secondary institutions publish comprehensive waste management reports on an annual basis;

**BIFRT:** The provincial government should incentivize online educational resources in post-secondary institutions to eliminate paper resources for learning, except as required for students' accessibility needs;

**BIFRT:** The provincial government should incentivize post-secondary institutions to offer locally sourced, organic food products that are cautious of single-use plastics to students for a price not more than 25% higher than the price of non-locally sourced, non-organic food products on campus;

**BIFRT:** The provincial government should provide post-secondary institutions with funding to cover at least some of the cost of purchasing sustainable furniture and other learning materials;

**BIFRT:** The provincial government should partner with existing electronic waste reduction programs and organizations to allow post-secondary institutions to repurpose electronic materials on campus by donating them to departments using them for class studies or projects;

**BIFRT:** The Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance should create standards requiring post-secondary institutions to implement campus-specific learning modules for municipal waste management systems, climate science, and environmental sustainability that will equip students and post-secondary institutions with the tools they need to live and act more sustainably;

**BIFRT:** The provincial government should create regulations under the *Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities Act* to mandate that each university produce an environmental sustainability strategy or policy by 2023;

**BIFRT:** The provincial government should mandate that post-secondary institutions publish annual environmental sustainability reports indicating targets, accomplishments, and short-comings;

**BIFRT:** The provincial government should establish short- and long-term emissions standards for post-secondary institutions to follow and include in their sustainability policies;

**BIFRT:** The provincial government should create an Indigenous lands and environment working group, open on a voluntary basis to all interested Indigenous communities and nations, that post-secondary institutions can consult when creating environmental sustainability policies;

**BIFRT:** The provincial government should incentivize post-secondary institutions, through Strategic Mandate Agreements, to meet the emissions and waste management goals included in their sustainability policies;

**BIFRT:** The provincial government should expand the “Priority Topics” for the Ontario Research Grants to ensure that there are environmental sustainability research opportunities for each discipline of study;

**BIFRT:** The provincial government should create grants for Indigenous scholars in environmental studies and advertise opportunities for Indigenous researchers to apply for grants related to environment and energy;

**BIFRT:** The provincial government should mandate that researchers provide Indigenous communities and nations with an opportunity to consult and provide feedback prior to and/or during research on relevant environmental science and sustainability matters;

**BIFRT:** The provincial government should create research grants that favour integrative research and community engagement;

**BIFRT:** The provincial government should work with external groups to develop comprehensive and immediate measures to address the climate crisis;

**BIFRT:** The provincial government should prioritize transitioning the province to sustainable energy sourcing and use; and

**BIFRT:** The provincial government should support Indigenous-led climate action initiatives.