



Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance

The Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance is a non-partisan advocacy organization that represents the interests of approximately 150,000 undergraduate and professional, full-time and part-time university students at eight student associations across Ontario.

POLICY BRIEF: MATURE STUDENTS

Since 2010 mature students as an academic demographic have been recognized as a growing cohort of students within the province. Despite this recognition, mature students continue to face ongoing challenges. From financial barriers, to a lack of adequate support services, mature students feel underrepresented and often overlooked. Additionally, large portions of marginalized groups, such as Indigenous Students, attending post-secondary studies are often mature students. As a post-secondary sector that strives to provide high quality education to all of our students, we must ensure that mature students and adult learners are effectively supported throughout their academic studies.

THE PROBLEM

Lack of a Standardized Definition

Students believe that the lack of a standardized definition for “mature students” creates unnecessary complications within Ontario’s post-secondary education sector. By having different definitions at each of Ontario’s publicly assisted universities, as well as OSAP utilizing its own definition, this creates difficulties for mature students wishing to access post-secondary education.

Inadequate Data Collection

OUSA believes that the lack of publicly available data on Ontario’s mature student population creates a barrier to the development of support strategies and services tailored to the unique needs of mature students.

Barriers to Access

Students are concerned that OSAP funding calculations do not adequately factor in the additional financial responsibilities, such as residential costs, familial costs, and childcare costs, which mature students possess. Additionally, OSAP’s consideration of the income of the partners and spouses result in an inaccurate representation of a student’s financial resources, placing another financial access barrier on students with families.

Insufficient Support Services

Students believe that current support services on campuses are designed to support

students who enter university directly after secondary school studies, in turn not providing customized or additional programs that are tailored to the unique needs of mature students. Additionally, students recognize that Ontario universities lack the funding necessary to expand and create equitable support services that would support Ontario’s mature student population. Finally, there is a concern about the lack of safe and accessible space on campuses for mature students.

Regarding childcare, students have identified the lack of easily accessible online information for on-campus childcare facilities as a concern. Additionally, mature students are not always able to easily access childcare facilities which are funded through municipal funding subsidy programs, placing an additional stress on students who are attempting to complete their post-secondary education.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Setting a Standardized Definition

To address the issues facing the definition of mature students, OUSA recommends that the provincial government should mandate that all Ontario universities adopt OSAP’s definition of “independent students” and “sole-support parent,” inclusive of married students with dependents, as their official definition of mature students.

MATURE STUDENTS

Collecting Data

Students recommend that the provincial government partner with the Council of Ontario Universities to conduct research and collect data on mature student needs in order to ensure successful academic achievement and a positive academic experience. This data should be published and reported in an accessible manner.

Removing Financial Barriers

Students believe that the provincial government should provide additional OSAP funding with the needs of mature students in mind, increasing formulas for monthly living costs to account for 80% of the expected living expenses. Additionally, the Government of Ontario should examine the Child Care Bursary formula in OSAP with the intention of developing an option that allows students to address any gaps that may arise if they cannot receive adequate funding from their municipality. Finally, students recommend that the government eliminate partner/spousal contributions from OSAP assessments for mature students.

Providing Equitable Support Services

OUSA's membership recommends that the provincial government allocate funding for the training of support staff and the expansion of support programs, as well as the customization of existing support programs, that are intended to support the specific needs of mature students. The provincial government should also provide funding to support groups that provide peer-support and help build peer-relationships among mature students. Students also believe that the Ministry of Advanced Education & Skills Development should work with the Council of Ontario Universities to create best practice models for supporting mature students.

Additionally, the provincial government should also work with post-secondary institutions to develop accessible waitlists on university webpages as outlined in the Regulation to Ban Wait List Fees released in 2016. Finally, the Government of Ontario should work with municipalities to ensure that childcare facilities within a 5-kilometre radius of post-secondary institutions accept subsidy applicants who are enrolled in university degree programs.