

Top ten myths on tuition fees

10. The present funding crisis in BC's post-secondary education system has been caused by 6 years of a tuition fee freeze.

Paul Martin's massive cut to post-secondary education transfers to the province in 1995 was the start of the funding crisis, not the tuition fee freeze. Between the years of 1995-2000, over \$1 billion was cut in federal transfer payments to BC. The BC Liberals have only exacerbated the problem with their funding freeze in 2002 and funding cuts scheduled for next year.

9. High tuition is not a barrier to education.

Studies show that many middle and lower income students are dissuaded from pursuing post-secondary education by the high cost of tuition fees. Many of these students, therefore, don't even consider further education, because the fear of massive debt is too strong. Individuals from lower income backgrounds have been historically underrepresented in the post-secondary system. Higher tuition fees will only worsen the situation.

8. There are plenty of scholarships and bursaries available to those who cannot afford a post-secondary education.

First of all, there are not nearly enough to go around. UVic's financial aid spending was maxed out last year, and many students still had problems making ends meet. Most scholarships are based on high grades, and if you have to work to pay for school, you may never be able to achieve those kinds of grades. Moreover, many students from lower income families will be deterred from attending school because there are no assurances that they will get the scholarships and bursaries they will need to finish their program.

7. Individual students are the only ones who benefit from post-secondary education, so they are the ones who should pay.

Students are not the only ones who benefit. BC is moving from a resource-based to a knowledge-based economy, with approximately 75% of all new jobs requiring some form of post-secondary education. All British Columbians benefit from a healthy economy.

6. If post-secondary education was free, students wouldn't take their studies seriously.

In the 1930's, high school education became a universal social program, as Canada needed skilled workers to grow its economy. These days, a high school education is no longer enough. If we're going to compete in the new knowledge-based global

economy, we must invest in post-secondary education. Also, of all the studies on why students drop-out of high school, not one suggested it is because high school is free.

5. The higher the tuition, the better quality the education.

Then how come during the tuition fee freeze, UVic's law school was one of the most prestigious and valued in the country with the lowest tuition fees? The latest tuition fee hikes have not gone into improving programs – they are merely covering the funding shortfall from the provincial government.

4. The student loan program is a progressive means of giving all students equal access to an education.

Maybe if the student loans program was completely interest free, this might be half true. The reality is if you can pay for your tuition and living expenses up front, you will pay less than if you need to take out a loan and pay interest on top of it. This program is especially regressive for traditionally marginalized groups, who typically make less upon graduation, thereby taking longer to pay back their loans, paying even more interest. A national system of needs-based grants is the most progressive answer, and one adopted by most G8 countries.

3. BC still has fairly low tuition – we're just catching up with the rest of the country.

It would be more accurate to say we're losing our position as a leader. In the late nineties, BC was leading the country in progressive post-secondary education policy, and other provinces (such as Manitoba and Newfoundland and Labrador) were starting to follow.

2. The government is stretched as far as it can go – there is no more money for the post-secondary education system.

If they were strapped for cash, then maybe the BC government shouldn't have given a risky and reckless \$1.5 billion tax cut that provided the most benefit to the wealthiest British Columbians, with another \$1 billion in corporate tax cuts. A progressive tax system should invest in post-secondary education to the benefit of all.

1. Free tuition would unfairly subsidise wealthy students on the tax dollars of lower income families.

Then why do we subsidise the wealthy through elementary and high school? Besides, individuals *do* pay for their education through the progressive tax system, over the course of their working life.