

November 02, 2023

Dear Provost and Vice President Academic Dr. Airini,

I am reaching out in my capacity as a representative of the University of Saskatchewan Students' Union, which encompasses the entirety of our undergraduate student body, to discuss the 2024-2025 Operating Budget for USask.

Within this report, you will discover a comprehensive set of recommendations that reflect a broad spectrum of student priorities that we believe should be considered in alignment with the University's financial planning for the upcoming year. These suggestions have been meticulously categorized into two primary areas: those that pertain to the University at large and those with a specific focus on individual colleges. Furthermore, this document delineates recommendations designed for immediate action as well as those intended for strategic, long-term implementation.

It is well understood that student contributions play a significant role in the University of Saskatchewan's operating budget, reinforcing the necessity for the University to prioritize student perspectives in the forthcoming fiscal strategy. Moreover, it is crucial to devise a strategic long-term plan that incorporates the following areas of focus:

1. Empowerment
2. Accessibility
3. Wellness

I wish to extend my sincere thanks for your proactive engagement with the Students' Union and for your commitment to addressing these essential priorities:

1. Indigenous Housing
2. Tuition Consultation
3. Waiving the Fee for Differential Exams
4. Safety Audits Across Colleges
5. Student Employment
6. Scholarships, Bursaries, & Other Student Supports
7. Wellness Spaces

Your willingness to consider our perspective is a testament to the University's dedication to its students. We look forward to seeing these priorities reflected in the 2024-2025 USask Operating Budget.

Warm regards,



Ishita Mann, S.V.M.

President | University of Saskatchewan Students' Union (USSU)

Acknowledgements

As a Union of Indigenous and Non-Indigenous students, we acknowledge that we gather on Treaty 6 territory, the homeland of the Cree, Saulteaux, Blackfoot, Métis, Dene and Dakota people. We acknowledge the harm that colonial institutions, such as the University of Saskatchewan, have done. We remember that there were centuries of governance and education on this land before the settlers arrived and that these forms of education and governance are continuing today. We honour and reaffirm our relationships with one another and the land that we are on as we work to dismantle the systematic barriers to education that First Nations, Métis, Inuit and other marginalized people face.

Navigating university life presents a distinct array of stressors that can arise at various junctures of the academic year, at times impinging upon student well-being. The USSU is unwavering in its mission to advocate for, serve, and support the comprehensive needs—both academic and non-academic—of the University of Saskatchewan’s undergraduate students. We are committed to fostering accountable, dynamic, and cohesive leadership. Integral to our mandate is the preservation and defence of high-quality, accessible public education.

Collaborators

*This report, compiled by **President Ishita Mann, S.V.M.** (she/her), includes contributions from:*

- **Elisabeth Bauman**, VP Academic Affairs (she/her)
- **Nishtha Mehta**, VP Operations and Finances (she/her)
- **Gurbaz Singh**, VP Student Affairs (he/him)
- **Meghal Meghal**, International Students (she/her)
- **Shahmeer Ahmed**, Kinesiology (he/him)
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- **Eileen Knox**, Nursing (she/her)
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- **Hayley Jenkins**, Western College of Veterinary Medicine (she/her)
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- **Lamisha Rahman**, Pharmacy & Nutrition
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- **Aayush Choksi**, International Students (he/him)
- **Ajak Madit Deng**, Engineering
- **Inshal Anees**, USC Chairperson (she/her)

Empowerment

Recommendations:

- **Increasing student employability across the university while ensuring adequate wage compensations that reflect the current economic climate and cost of living.**
 - **Strategic actions:**
 - **University-Industry Partnerships:** Establish or expand partnerships with local and national businesses to generate more internship and co-op positions, allowing students to gain hands-on experience in their fields of study.
 - **Career Development Programs:** Strengthen career services to provide more robust training programs, resume-building workshops, and networking events, connecting students directly with potential employers.
 - **Research Opportunities:** Increase funding for undergraduate research positions, enabling students to contribute to and learn from cutting-edge research, preparing them for post-graduate education or entry into highly skilled workforces.
 - **Wage Assessments:** Conduct regular assessments of student wages for on-campus employment to ensure they are competitive and fair, providing students with a wage to support their academic pursuits and living expenses.
 - There should also be considerations to support and fund students' work if their contributions are aiding any work at a policy and governance level.
 - **Skill Certification Courses:** Offer subsidized or free certification courses that provide skills which are in high demand across various industries, thereby increasing student marketability upon graduation.
 - **Alumni Mentorship Programs:** Strengthen mentorship programs that pair students with alumni in their field of interest, providing guidance, advice, and potential networking opportunities.
 - **Entrepreneurial Support:** Create an incubator program to support student startups, assist/host hackathons, and offer business advice, seed funding, and office space to encourage student innovation and entrepreneurship.
- **Strategic revision in the sequencing of the Nursing program curriculum to better align theoretical coursework with clinical placements for undergraduate nursing students.**
 - Currently, nursing students attend theory classes concurrently with clinical placements, which can result in students entering clinical environments without thorough theoretical preparation. This may contribute to heightened stress and potential safety risks.

- Theory courses should be completed before the start of clinical placements. This approach is successfully implemented in spring term sessions and should be expanded to fall and winter terms to ensure comprehensive theoretical grounding prior to clinical application.

Accessibility

Recommendations:

- **We advocate for the University of Saskatchewan to undertake a strategic expansion of its on-campus housing options to accommodate the growing student population better and enhance accessibility to convenient and affordable living spaces.**
 - **Strategic Initiatives:**
 - **Construction of New Housing Facilities:** Develop a plan for the construction of additional on-campus housing facilities, prioritizing energy efficiency and sustainable design.
 - **Renovation of Existing Structures:** Assess and renovate current underutilized buildings to convert them into student housing, thereby increasing the housing stock in a cost-effective manner.
 - **Diverse Housing Options:** Offer a range of housing options that cater to different needs, including single rooms, family units, and graduate student accommodations.
 - **Financial Aid for Housing:** Explore opportunities for financial assistance programs specifically aimed at reducing housing costs for low-income and international students.
 - **Integrated Support Services:** Ensure that new and existing housing includes access to support services, such as counselling, academic advising, and career services, to support the overall success of residents.
 - We also request a reserved quota of on-campus housing spots specifically for international students to support their transition and integration into the university community, recognizing the later international student application deadline of May 1st.
- **We propose the creation of a dedicated Indigenous student housing facility within the University of Saskatchewan residences, complete with appropriate spaces for cultural practices such as prayer and smudging.**
 - Indigenous housing serves as a pivotal home away from home, offering Indigenous students a communal living space that not only accommodates their residential needs but also fosters a culturally sensitive and inclusive environment. The presence of such a space is instrumental in building a solid support network amongst students, drawn together by shared cultural experiences and values.
 - We draw inspiration from *McGill University's First Peoples' House*, which provides a 10-room residence specifically catering to Indigenous students. This facility is a testament to the success and impact of dedicated

Indigenous housing in supporting the academic journey and cultural well-being of Indigenous students.

- Visit: <https://www.mcgill.ca/fph/prospective-students/residence>
- The USSU proposes that **one floor of the campus quarter** could be converted into Indigenous student housing.
- **The University of Saskatchewan should undertake an initiative to significantly increase the number and variety of study spaces available to students on campus.**
 - Adequate study spaces are integral to academic success and student well-being. Access to a variety of study environments accommodates diverse learning styles and needs, which is essential for an inclusive academic atmosphere. Students require easily accessible spaces where they can concentrate, collaborate, and connect with resources necessary for their studies.
 - **Proposed Measures:**
 - **Assessment of Current Spaces:** Conduct a comprehensive review of current study areas to identify utilization patterns and unmet needs.
 - **Renovation and Repurposing:** Modify underutilized areas on campus into study spaces with appropriate facilities such as power outlets, lighting, and ergonomic seating.
 - **Extended Hours:** Ensure that existing study spaces are open for extended hours, particularly during peak academic periods like exams.
 - **Diversity of Spaces:** Create a mix of quiet study areas, group work zones, and low-sensory and tech-enabled rooms for multimedia learning and virtual collaboration.
 - **Clear Signage and Information:** Implement clear signage for locating available study spaces and provide real-time availability updates through a dedicated app or website.
 - **Accessibility Compliance:** Guarantee that all study spaces meet accessibility standards, providing equitable access for all students, including those with disabilities.
- **We must establish comprehensive wellness spaces across the University of Saskatchewan campus, intentionally designed to support the mental, emotional, spiritual, and social health of all students.**
 - **Implementation Strategy:**
 - **Integrated Wellness Hubs:** Develop wellness hubs that offer resources and areas designated for quiet meditation, mindfulness, & prayer rooms.
 - **Universal Design Principles:** Apply universal design principles to make these spaces welcoming and accessible to individuals of all abilities, cultures, and faiths.
 - **Diverse Programming:** Offer a variety of programs that cater to different wellness practices, from guided mindfulness sessions to interfaith prayer meetings.

- **Professional and Peer Support:** Staff these centers with trained professionals and peer supporters who can guide and assist students in their wellness journey.
 - **Resilient and Secure Infrastructure:** Ensure the sustainability and safety of these spaces, integrating features that promote longevity and a secure environment.
 - **Student-Centric Approach:** Engage with the student body to inform the development of these wellness spaces, ensuring they align with the actual needs and desires of students.
- **We urge the University of Saskatchewan to expand its scholarship, sponsorship, and bursary programs to alleviate the financial strain on students, particularly for Indigenous and International student populations facing unique institutional barriers.**
 - Scholarships and bursaries are more than just financial aid; they are investments in the future of students and society. With the rising costs of tuition and related expenses, many students are forced into significant debt burdens that hinder their post-graduate financial independence and contributions to society. An enhanced scholarship program will serve as a critical tool for empowering students financially and academically.
 - Please consider:
 - **Increase Funding for Scholarships and Bursaries:** Identify and allocate additional funds to increase the number and value of scholarships and bursaries available to students.
 - **Targeted Support for Underrepresented Groups:** Develop and expand scholarship programs specifically designed to support Indigenous and International students, acknowledging the unique financial challenges they face.
 - **Broaden Eligibility Criteria:** Re-evaluate the criteria for scholarship eligibility to encompass a wider range of academic achievements and life circumstances, promoting greater accessibility.
 - **Financial Literacy Programs:** Introduce financial literacy and planning workshops for scholarship recipients to maximize the impact of their awards and encourage responsible financial management post-graduation.
 - **Transparent Application Process:** Ensure that the process for applying for scholarships and bursaries is transparent, streamlined, and accessible to all students, regardless of background.
 - **Enhanced Outreach:** Actively promote scholarship and bursary opportunities to potential applicants through various channels, ensuring that all eligible students are aware of the financial support available to them.
- **To foster trust and ensure accountability, we recommend that the University of Saskatchewan enhances transparency regarding the allocation of financial aid, specifically concerning the number and total dollar value of bursaries**

and scholarships awarded to international students, Indigenous students, and other marginalized communities.

- Students invest substantially in their education, both financially and through their contributions to the university community. They rightfully expect openness about how their funds are managed and distributed, especially concerning financial aid. Greater transparency is a common call from student leaders and is essential for building trust between the institution and its student body.
- **Proposed Measures:**
 - **Detailed Reporting:** Publish an annual financial aid report detailing the number of scholarships and bursaries awarded, inclusive of the total dollar amount, with disaggregated data to show distribution among international students, Indigenous students, and other marginalized groups.
 - **Communication Strategy:** Develop a communication strategy that utilizes multiple channels to inform students about how financial aid funds are allocated, ensuring the information is easily accessible and understandable.
 - **Feedback Mechanism:** Establish a feedback loop where students can voice their concerns and suggestions regarding financial aid, with the institution providing timely responses and explanations for funding decisions.
 - **Collaborative Review:** Involve student representatives in reviewing financial aid policies and practices to ensure that the process meets the needs and expectations of the student population.
 - **Regular Updates:** Commit to providing regular updates to the student community on any changes to financial aid policies or available funds.
- **We strongly recommend that the University of Saskatchewan consider capping the differential tuition rates for current international students and enhancing financial support through targeted scholarships and bursaries.**
 - The continuous increase in differential tuition rates, which currently stands at approximately 4.2 times the base rate after the annual college-specific increases (up to 4% for most colleges and 11% for Engineering), places a substantial financial burden on international students. Additionally, the fact that the benefits of the ongoing Engineering renovations will not be experienced by current students further exacerbates the issue.
 - **Proposed Solutions:**
 - **Tuition Differential Rate Cap:** Introduce a cap on the differential rate at the level at which students enrolled, maintaining this rate for the duration of their degree program, mirroring practices in other provinces.
 - **Increase in Targeted Financial Aid:** Increase scholarships and bursaries specifically for international students to help mitigate the financial impact of differential rates and other economic pressures.

- **Transparent Allocation of Funds:** Ensure transparency in how the increased differential rates are invested back into the university, especially into services and infrastructure that directly affect current students.
 - **Engagement with Student Representatives:** Involve international student representatives in discussions about tuition fee structures to ensure their perspectives are incorporated into decision-making processes.
 - **Comprehensive Financial Education:** Offer financial planning resources and education to help international students navigate scholarships, bursaries, and budget management.
- **We urge the University of Saskatchewan to address the scarcity of parking spaces on campus and to work collaboratively with local transit authorities to improve the reliability of public transportation, especially during critical periods such as the commencement of each academic term.**
 - Accessible and reliable transportation is essential for an inclusive educational environment. Currently, the limited availability of parking coupled with inconsistent transit services poses a significant barrier for many students, impacting their ability to arrive on campus in a timely and stress-free manner.
 - **Action Steps:**
 - **Parking Space Expansion:** Assess current campus utilization to identify areas where additional parking could be developed, possibly through the construction of a new parking structure or the expansion of existing lots.
 - **Transit Service Consultation:** Engage with local transit authorities to enhance the frequency and reliability of service routes to campus, prioritizing peak times and the beginning of each term.
 - **Improved Communication:** Establish a communication protocol with transit services to promptly inform students of delays or changes in service, allowing for better planning and reduced inconvenience.
- **We propose a strategic initiative to recruit and retain additional qualified faculty members within the Hydrology Department at the University of Saskatchewan, ensuring that all necessary courses are offered with adequate frequency to meet graduation requirements.**
 - A deficiency in teaching personnel within the Hydrology Department has led to a situation where students are unable to enroll in required courses, potentially delaying their progress toward degree completion.
 - **Suggestions:**
 - **Adjunct and Part-Time Faculty:** Consider hiring adjunct and part-time faculty, including industry professionals, to teach specific courses, ensuring that students have access to the full complement of classes required for their studies.

- **Graduate Teaching Fellowships:** Utilize advanced graduate students in hydrology-related programs, where appropriate, to lead labs or discussion sections under the supervision of permanent faculty, thereby expanding teaching capacity.
- **Continuous budget allocation for accessibility resources and audits on campus.**
 - Your funding of \$200,000 during 2023-2024 has laid the foundation to start the accessibility committee and some great projects. This continuous allocation of funds in the next few years will make the campus inclusive, safe and welcoming for all students.
- **Broaden the availability of essential specialized software, such as Image J, ArcGIS, and ArcGIS PRO, by installing it in computer labs across various buildings, including those used by the College of Agriculture and Bioresources.**
 - Currently, access to critical software like Image J, ArcGIS and ArcGIS PRO is restricted to a limited number of computer labs within the Arts and Science buildings. This setup poses a significant inconvenience to students from disciplines like Agriculture and Bioresources, who now require these tools for new certificate programs and other coursework.
 - **Action Steps:**
 - **Software Installation:** Ensure that ArcGIS and ArcGIS PRO are installed on computers in the Agriculture and Engineering buildings.
 - **Cross-Departmental Collaboration:** Work with IT services and academic departments to manage software licenses and installations across different colleges.
 - **Access Monitoring:** Monitor software usage to assess needs and adjust the number of available licenses and workstations accordingly.
 - **Training Sessions:** Offer training sessions for students in the use of the software, to be held in the newly equipped computer labs.
 - **Communication:** Inform students of the updated availability of the software through class announcements, email bulletins, and the university's online portals.

Wellness

Recommendations:

- **Transition the nursing program's lecture components to be delivered in person on the Saskatoon and Prince Albert Campuses as a means of building student community. We recommend a strategy that recognizes the different needs of nursing students in urban centers and distributed settings by implementing separate delivery streams to support students in each setting.**
 - Persistent online lectures have contributed to a sense of isolation among nursing students and concerns about the efficacy of their learning experience. There is an urgent need to revise the current delivery model to address student wellness and improve engagement.
 - **Action Steps:**
 - **In-Person Discussions:** Complement recorded lectures with discussion sessions, which will facilitate peer interaction and enhance understanding of the material.
 - **Technology Integration:** Ensure that classrooms are equipped with the necessary technology to support high-quality recording and streaming of lectures.
- **Establish a university-wide comprehensive communication and marketing strategy aimed at increasing student awareness and utilization of available academic and non-academic support services.**
 - Across the University of Saskatchewan, there is a notable disconnect between the multitude of support services offered and the student body's awareness of these resources. The *College of Nursing* is a prime example where this disparity has been observed, with many students being unaware of the assistance available to them.
 - **Action Steps:**
 - **Awareness Campaigns:** Execute targeted awareness campaigns using a mix of digital and physical channels to educate students about available resources.
 - **Peer-to-Peer Information Sharing:** Facilitate and encourage information sharing about support services through existing student networks and associations.
 - **Continuous Feedback Loop:** Set up a mechanism to gather student feedback on the accessibility and effectiveness of the communication strategy, allowing for ongoing improvements.
- **Continuation of an extensive review of the University's policies, procedures, and approaches to Academic Integrity. Consistent, long-term commitment (perhaps an extension of the temporary Academic Integrity Specialist position, resources for an Academic Integrity committee, or college-specific procedure re-structuring committees).**
 - Academic integrity pressures put an enormous mental and emotional toll on students, especially those in academic misconduct hearing procedures.

- The University should, therefore, move to proactive rather than reactive strategies.
- **Suggestions:**
 - **Skill-based Assessments:** Creating assessments that equip students to use tools they will use in the workforce (e.g. learning how to use generative AI in an ethical manner within each specific field).
 - **Clear Communication:** Communicating clearly academic integrity expectations not only for the whole university but with departments/courses-specific guidelines (e.g. Professors teach about it in each class, academic integrity modules that are course-specific.)
 - Increase student awareness of the seriousness of academic misconduct and its potential consequences.
 - **Safe Learning Environment:** Create a learning environment (and university culture) where integrity is upheld, and misconduct is addressed in a timely and efficient manner. Some way to encourage instructors to bring up suspected misconduct and ensure they are equipped to do this in a way that, if misconduct is found, the consequences are proportionate and do not have a domino effect on the student's life and academic career.
 - Ensure hearings take a holistic view to consider external and internal factors that drive students to academic misconduct.
 - **Post-hearing Support:** More allocation of resources for post-hearing support (e.g. immediate and urgent support from student wellness, automatic meeting with an academic advisor).
 - **Focused Support Structures:** Long-term investment in an Academic Integrity Office or dedicated positions in existing structures (library, governance, teaching centres).

Conclusion

The University of Saskatchewan Students' Union is grateful for the chance to contribute to the University of Saskatchewan's 2023-2024 budget considerations. We have endeavoured to present a detailed compilation of student concerns, aligning closely with USask's strategic objectives, mission, and core values. The thoughtful deployment of tuition fees and other forms of revenue has been pivotal in advancing the educational journey of our students. We trust that our recommendations will assist both University Leadership and Students pursue our shared vision of creating the *“University the World Needs”*.

I also wish to express my heartfelt thanks for the ongoing support that the University has extended to its student body. It is my belief that through our collective efforts, we can enhance the accessibility, affordability, and fairness of higher education. Should you require any additional information or need to discuss these matters further, please do not hesitate to reach out.

Sincerely,



Ishita Mann, S.V.M.

President | University of Saskatchewan Students' Union (USSU)