



VICE-PRESIDENT ACADEMIC AND PROVOST
AFFORDABILITY AND ACCESS STUDY 2003
(Institutional Planning & Analysis)

FROM REPORT TO BOARD ON OPERATIONS

Student Accessibility and Affordability

Strategic Plan Objective 2: To ensure that outstanding students from diverse regions and backgrounds have the opportunity to attend the University of Victoria and that there are no hurdles to admission except academic and creative potential.

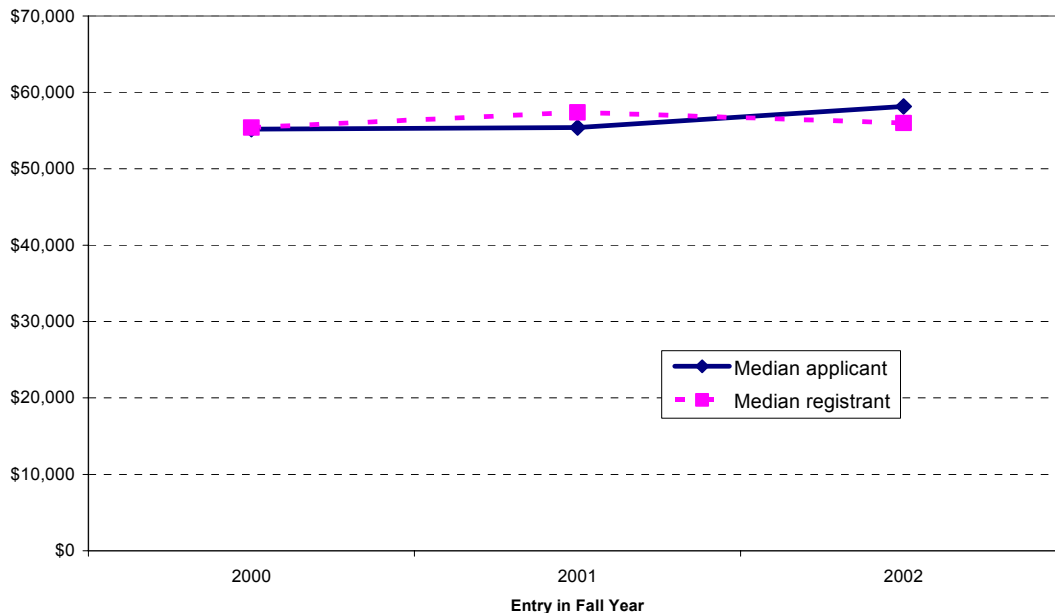
In 2002, the provincial government lifted a six-year tuition freeze at BC's postsecondary institutions with the result that tuition fees increased from 20 to 30% at most institutions. Increases in tuition levels at BC universities have prompted concerns that higher education in the province may no longer be as widely accessible as it has been in the past. In particular, Boards are concerned that recent tuition increases may cause the socioeconomic make-up of the undergraduate population to change.

1. Family Income Study

Institutional Planning & Analysis has developed a long-term study to monitor and analyze the effect of tuition increases on affordability and access. We used three years of applicant and registration data (2000, 2001, and 2002), but median household income for the neighborhood is based on data for 2000 – the most recent available from Statistics Canada. Therefore when we look at trends over time, we are actually looking at trends in how the applicants or students were distributed across neighborhood median incomes as they were described in 2000. The advantage of this is that there are no effects due to economic changes in income over the period; we are looking purely at an average index of the neighborhood incomes of our students.

Figure 1 summarizes the results of UVic applicants and registrants over the three years.

Figure 1:
Median Neighborhood income of BC Grade 12
Applicants and Registrants to UVic



Several observations are apparent. First, the median neighborhood income of applicants and registrants is very closely aligned demonstrating the stability of the data. Second, applicant income exceeds registrant income in 2002 – a reflection of the very small class of new high school registrants admitted to UVic in that year.

Third, there is a trend of increasing median neighborhood incomes over the three years. However, there is no evidence that the trend is the result of tuition increases. Between 2000 and 2001 tuition fees decreased by 5% while median neighborhood income of registrants increased by 3.61%. Between 2001 and 2002, tuition fees increased by an average of 30% at UVic and the median neighborhood income of registrants decreased by 2.44%.

2. The Survey

In addition to the postal code study, we have conducted surveys of our students. At the end of 2002, we surveyed first year secondary school entrants to BC universities and asked specific questions related to how they are coping with the financing of their university education.

The survey was conducted via the web. Each student was sent an email from their respective VPs inviting them to respond to a short survey. A total of 7,366 students were invited to participate in the survey, and 1,740 or 26% responded; 328 of these respondents were from UVic.

The Results

Forty-eight percent of parents/guardians of students attending UVic had a bachelor's degree or higher, far above the provincial average. Seventy-five percent of UVic students reported that scholarships/bursaries were a significant component in paying for their education.

How are you paying for your first year at University (including tuition, living, books and transportation expenses)?		
Scholarships/bursaries	247	75%
Savings	178	54%
Direct family help (tuition paid for)	158	48%
Indirect family help (live at home, etc.)	115	35%
Income from work	99	30%
Government loans	43	13%
Other	19	6%
Private loan	13	4%
<i>Total answering question</i>	328	

Students' primary method of coping with increase in costs is to cut back on extras.

What steps have you taken to control your living and education costs and meet your expenses?		
Cut back on extras (entertainment, etc.)	235	72%
Summer employment	233	71%
Live at home	140	43%
Employment during school term	112	34%
Attended local university rather than preferred university	90	27%
Share accommodation	58	18%
Took fewer courses	33	10%
Other	14	4%
None	10	3%
Took cheaper program	4	1%
<i>Total answering question</i>	328	

Students who worked do so for an average of 14.1 hours a week. Students indicated that they would cope with future tuition increases primarily by asking for or borrowing more money and cutting back on living expenses and earning more money. Few indicated that they would leave their studies, take fewer courses, or finish their program sooner than planned.

If tuition increased, how likely would you be to:	Earn more money		Ask for or borrow more money		Take fewer courses	
Very unlikely	51	15.9%	49	15.4%	136	43.6%
Somewhat unlikely	32	10.0%	35	11.0%	59	18.9%
Neither likely nor unlikely	84	26.3%	55	17.2%	52	16.7%
Somewhat likely	65	20.3%	73	22.9%	44	14.1%
Very likely	88	27.5%	107	33.5%	21	6.7%
<i>Total</i>	<i>320</i>		<i>319</i>		<i>312</i>	

If tuition increased, how likely would you be to:	Cut back on living expenses		Leave/quit studies		Finish program sooner than planned	
Very unlikely	24	7.6%	184	58.2%	134	43.4%
Somewhat unlikely	46	14.6%	53	16.8%	76	24.6%
Neither likely nor unlikely	71	22.5%	37	11.7%	59	19.1%
Somewhat likely	82	26.0%	29	9.2%	27	8.7%
Very likely	92	29.2%	13	4.1%	13	4.2%
<i>Total</i>	<i>315</i>		<i>316</i>		<i>309</i>	

If tuition increased, how likely would you be to:	Take longer than planned (more time away from school to earn money)	
Very unlikely	69	21.9%
Somewhat unlikely	63	20.0%
Neither likely nor unlikely	79	25.1%
Somewhat likely	55	17.5%
Very likely	49	15.6%
<i>Total</i>	<i>315</i>	

When asked how university costs should be distributed, students responded that on average 49.9% should be paid by taxpayers, 28.9% by students, and 13.1% by parents.

Finally, students were asked how they would like to see their tuition fees spent. The largest single response (25%) was that UVic should increase financial assistance followed by hiring more faculty and reduce class size and curriculum improvements. When taken together, more faculty, curriculum improvements, and increased sections comprise 53% of respondents.

Where do you want to see your tuition fees spent?		
Student financial assistance	79	24.6%
Hire more faculty/reduce class sizes	67	20.9%
Curriculum improvements	56	17.4%
More sections	48	15.0%
Technology improvements	15	4.7%
Improve instructional technology and equipment	14	4.4%
Teaching assistants	13	4.0%
Other	10	3.1%
Research	8	2.5%
Building improvements	5	1.6%
Library improvements	2	0.6%
Recreation	2	0.6%
Recycling programs	1	0.3%
Transportation	1	0.3%
<i>Total answering question</i>	<i>321</i>	

3. Survey of Non-Arrivers in 2002

Further evidence that increases in tuition fees have not played a major role in denial of access is obtained from a survey conducted in summer 2002 of students who were granted an offer of admission to UVic but chose not attend this University; 1,635 students responded to the online survey.

Of those 262 respondents, 240 or 92% said that they were going to attend another postsecondary institution instead. Of those 22 who were not planning on attending postsecondary, 10 planned to travel or take part in an exchange program, 8 planned on working, and only 1 indicated that they were not attending university due to financial reasons. The remaining three respondents cited "other" reasons.

Of those respondents who were planning on attending a postsecondary institution other than UVic, the majority reported that they were attending a university or college local to their home. While the low number of respondents makes it difficult to draw conclusions, the high proportion of students attending another university suggests that tuition fees at UVic were not a major deterrent to attending.

4. Student Debt Loads

2 years after graduation (2000 Survey of 1998 Grads)

Percent who incurred debt

UVic: 53%

Provincial Average: 47%

Median Debt upon graduation

UVic: \$18,000

Provincial Average: \$16,000

Percent who have repaid all debt

UVic: 19%
Provincial Average: 21%

Amount left to be repaid

UVic: \$13,000
Provincial Average: \$10,000

5 years after graduation (2001 Survey of 1996 Grads)

Percent who incurred debt

UVic: 55%
Provincial Average: 47%

Median Debt upon graduation

UVic: \$17,000
Provincial Average: \$15,000

Percent who have repaid all debt

UVic: 34%
Provincial Average: 39%

Amount left to be repaid

UVic: \$5,000
Provincial Average: \$3,600

Conclusions

These studies taken together confirm the results of many other studies, most recently “The Price of Knowledge,” that students who access postsecondary education tend to be from a higher socioeconomic group and there is a trend toward continuing higher bifurcation by socioeconomic status (SES) of those who attain postsecondary education. However, this phenomenon cannot be attributed to tuition increases or even more general affordability issues. Certainly, substantial numbers of students from low SES backgrounds are able to attend University with the assistance of financial aid policies and programs.

Our survey results show that there is a small group of students who are at the margin where further cost increases would prevent them from completing their studies. This provides some guidance to us in the formulation of appropriate financial assistance policies. The survey also shows that students access a wide variety of sources of income to pay for their education. Parents play a crucial role but scholarships, bursaries, loans, and employment income are also major contributors.