

Introduction

In 2019, the UASU Department of Research and Advocacy began collecting data on student association (SA) fees nationwide. We worked from publicly-available information and from close contact with other SAs to build a fee dataset for 2019/20 (and, where possible, 2018/19). Our dataset includes the full fee schemes for 41 SAs. This was an extraordinarily complex process, and we welcome questions, additional context, or corrections beyond what our counterparts have provided throughout the project.

When we designed this project, we aimed to understand the impacts of Ontario's Student Choice Initiative and the risks of voluntary student unionism (VSU). We also hoped to identify patterns and outliers that could inform relationships with transit authorities, public interest research groups, post-secondary institutions (PSIs), government, campus media, and other organizations.

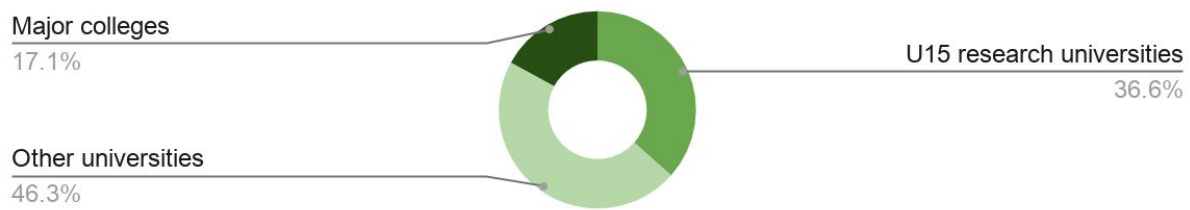
Since we started our research, the COVID-19 pandemic has destabilized the student experience across the higher education sector. We hope this dataset will help SAs as they reevaluate and strengthen their value propositions for students.

The Dataset

Our data combines public and self-reported fee information, and uses them to verify and clarify each other whenever possible. Some SAs provided their detailed fee information in confidence, so the raw data is not available. Our dataset focuses on 2019/20 fees, but we collected information on 2018/19 whenever available. Our master table for 2019/20 alone identifies 717 fees.

Based on project participation or publicly posted information, our dataset includes the complete fee schedules of 41 graduate and/or undergraduate SAs. (See [Appendix A](#).) For any given fee type, our dataset typically offers 30-40 relevant examples. For a sense of scale, Universities Canada [lists](#) 95 member universities at time of writing; Colleges and Institutes Canada [lists](#) 136 other PSIs; and 77 SAs are [members](#) of AMICCUS-C.

Student associations included in dataset



NOTES AND CAVEATS:

- Most of the SAs we included operate at large, Anglophone schools in either Ontario (22 SAs) or Western Canada (16 SAs), and our data should be interpreted in that context.
- To estimate full-year totals for per-credit fees, we estimated a full course load for a given school with reference to its definition of a 'credit.' (A full-time student could earn anywhere from four to 30 'credits' in two semesters.)
- If part-time and full-time students paid different rates for the same fee, we recorded it as two separate fees.
- We only included fees specific to SAs and third parties (e.g. PIRGs, campus media). If an SA collected the fee on paper but remitted it all to the host university or college, we did not consider it an SA fee and did not include it. We only encountered a handful of these cases. If the fee was split between the SA and the host PSI (as with some fees for student-centred buildings), we included it. We encountered very few of these cases.
- We did not include fees specific to faculty/department associations.
- SA fee structures are highly individualized. Typically, we found an envelope of 25-40 SAs for any given comparison. Further notes specific to data fields are found in [Appendix B](#).

Capital Fees

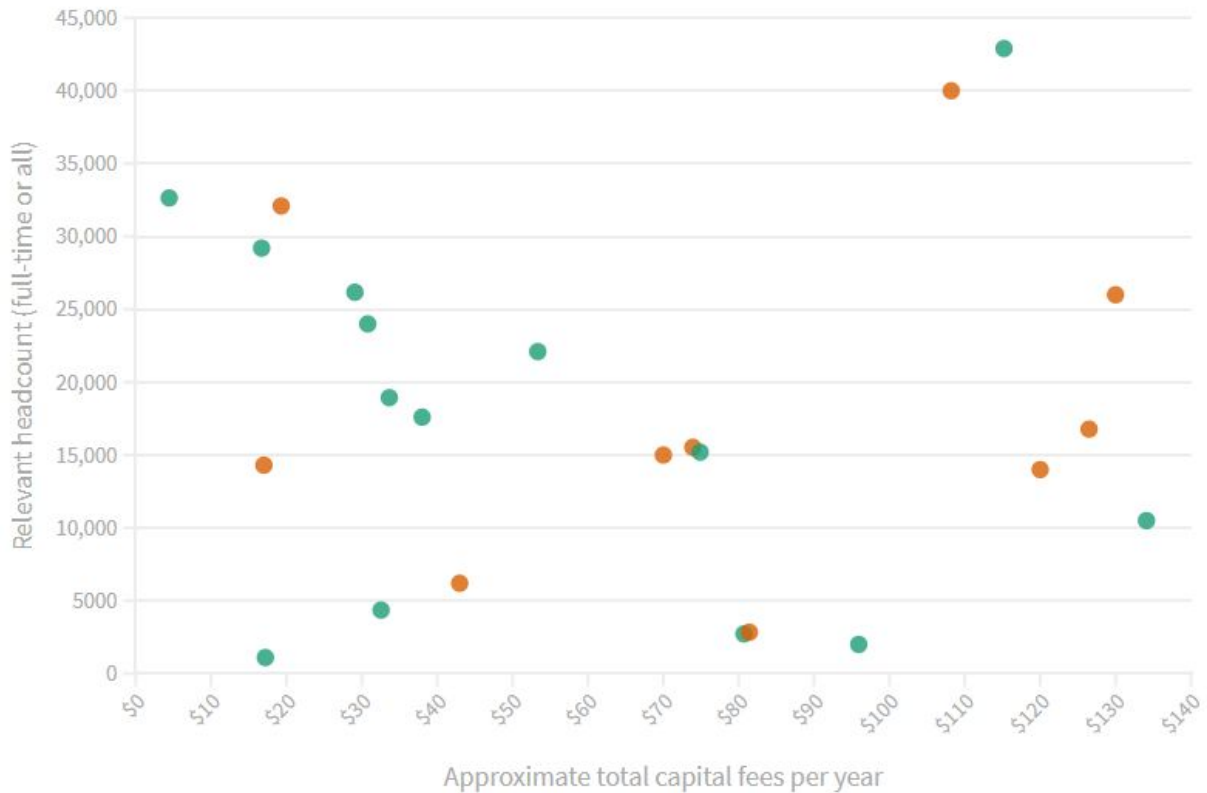
These fees are directly related to physical facilities and related capital projects. Most are tied to the construction, maintenance (including deferred maintenance), or upgrading of students' union buildings. Virtually all of the highest fees in this category were established to build new student facilities.

In a few cases, it appears that the SA shares fees (and the responsibility for a given space) with the host PSI. One example would be the Guelph CSA's University Centre Fee, controlled by a joint board of students and University representatives.

Per-student capital fees (2019/20)

Only fees levied on full-time students or all students

● Central/Eastern Canada ● Western Canada



We also identified a handful of fees that are specific to sustainability-focused projects. Examples include the SUB Renewal Building Fee (UBC AMS's The Nest), the Guelph CSA Energy Retrofit, and the 2020/21 UASU Sustainability and Capital Fund (\$50/year, not shown in the chart above).

Operating and Program-Specific Fees

This envelope includes core operating fees and whatever SAs fund with those fees. It also includes dedicated program-specific fees, and administrative fees connected to but separate from health insurance and transit levies. The envelope includes omnibus 'all-in-one' SA fees, but also includes 'stripped-down' operating fees (e.g. after Student Choice Initiative restructuring).

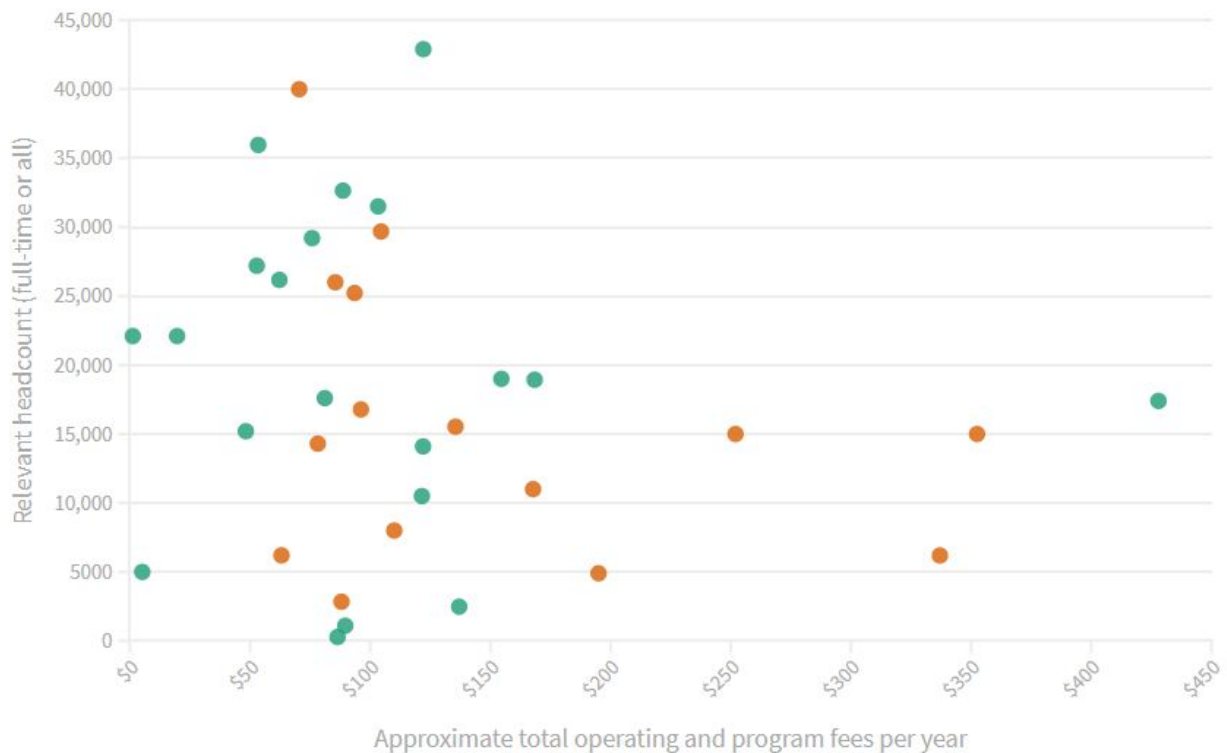
There are significant challenges to comparability. Large outliers in this category (~\$250-\$450 per year) are typically broad omnibus fees and/or shared with host PSIs. So far as we can arrange, this envelope is generally restricted to the fees that SUs use to keep existing and provide programs and services with its own employees.

Note that each mark on the chart represents the sum of the operating and program fees pertaining to a single SA; each SA would only have one mark.

Per-student operating and program fees (2019/20)

Only fees levied on full-time students or all students

● Eastern/Central Canada ● Western Canada



Insulating Operational Fees under SCI

One of the guiding principles of Ontario's Student Choice Initiative was that generic, omnibus SA fees needed to become optional or break apart into mandatory and optional components. Some SAs responded with a strategy of insulation. When a certain program or operation could be deemed mandatory, SAs assessed the associated central administration costs as a separate, usually small, mandatory administrative fee.

Three successful examples stood out in our 2019 dataset.

- It appears that Algonquin College Students' Association was already using this strategy in 2018, via a \$3.42 UPass administrative fee. When SCI began, ACSA simply adjusted the fee (which remained mandatory) to \$5.51.
- NCSAC at Niagara College levied three mandatory, program-specific administrative fees. Each was in the \$22-\$25 range per year, comparable to NCSAC's optional membership fee.
- The Queen's AMS split off several administrative fees from its general membership fee, which fell from \$86 to \$52 per year. Each individual mandatory administrative fee was under \$6 per year.

Based on each school's full-time enrollment, this strategy appears to have insulated tens or hundreds of thousands of dollars in core operating revenue.

This strategy requires a firm understanding of the central administration costs/time (IT, marketing, HR, etc.) that support any given program or department.

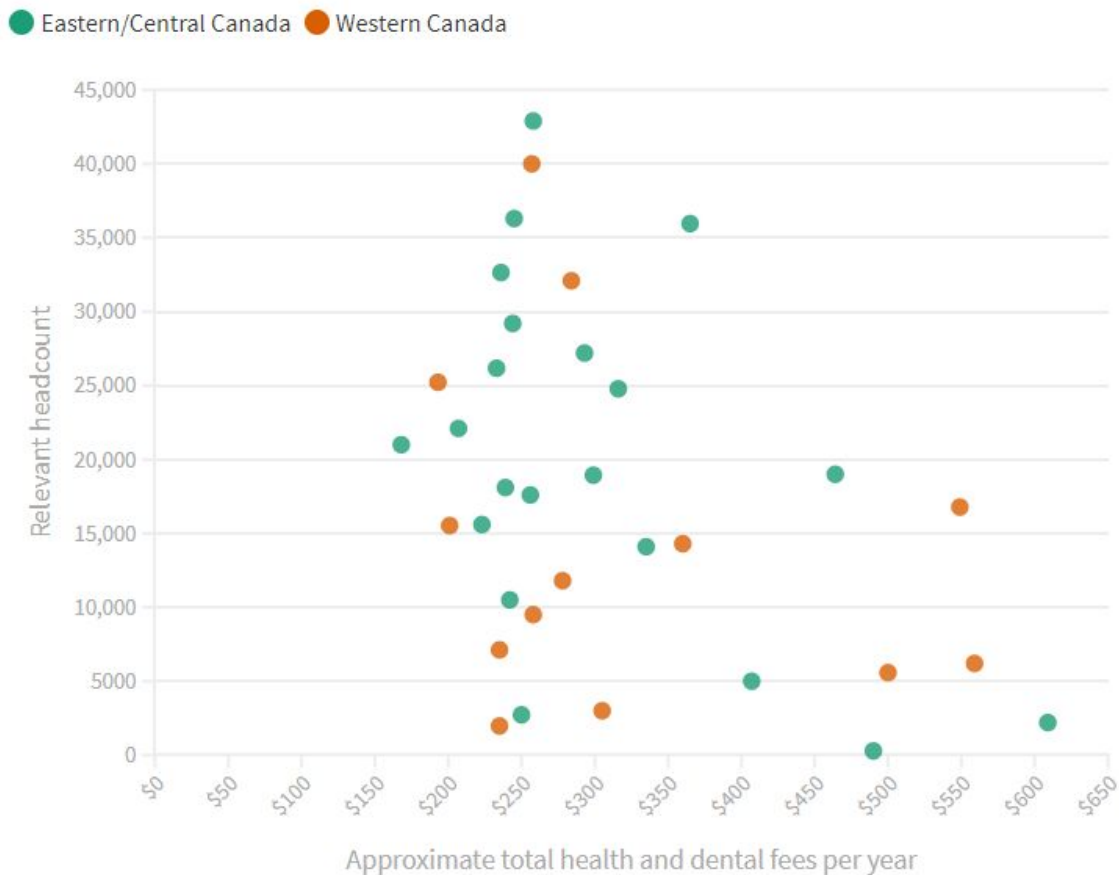
Health and Dental Fees

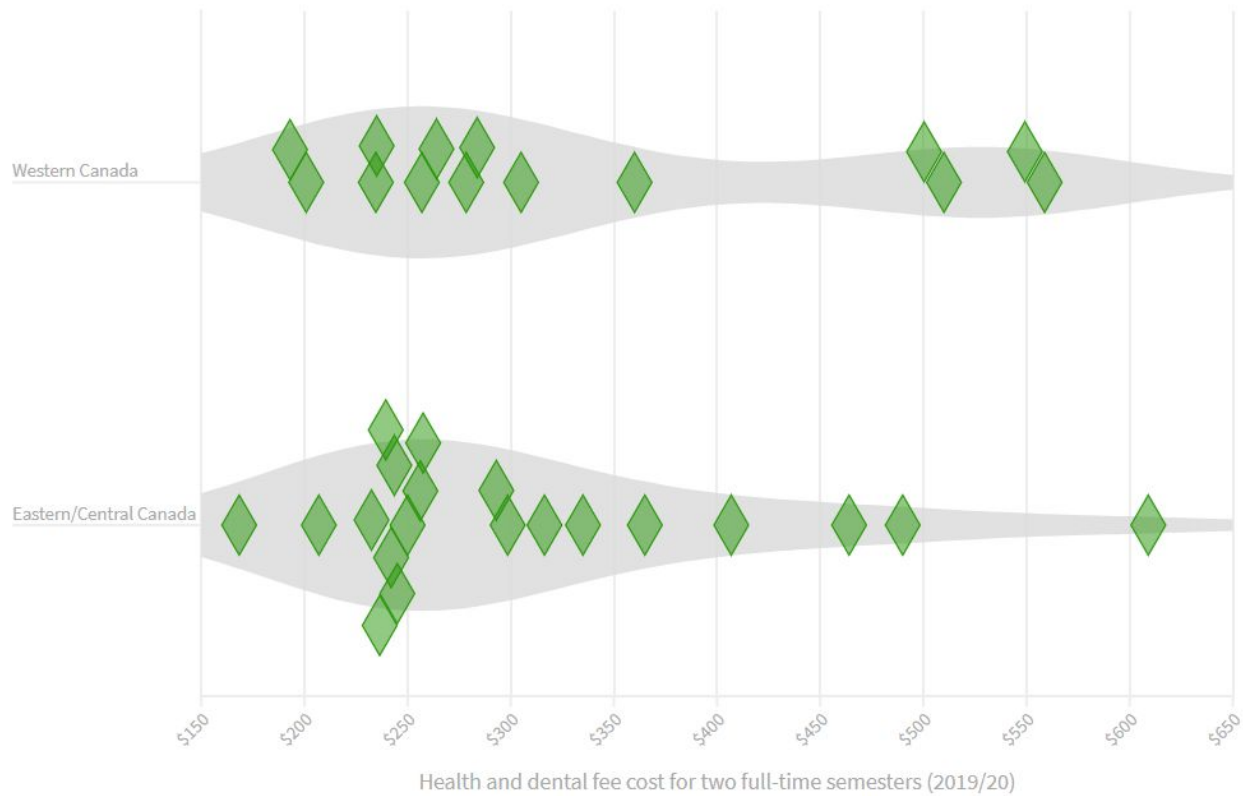
Most student associations negotiate with insurance brokers/providers to provide the student body with affordable health and dental coverage. Naturally, the details of this coverage vary by institution, but a clear pattern emerged. Most SAs, regardless of relevant headcount, have negotiated per-student health and dental fees of \$200-\$300 per year. However, a handful of SAs - typically smaller ones, including some graduate student associations - are outliers whose students pay around twice as much.

Premiums are mostly driven by direct costs, which will be higher for graduate student associations (due to older membership and higher member awareness of coverage). There are other challenges to comparability, including provincial regulations, provincial health coverage/pharmacare, and opt-out conditions with proof of alternate coverage.

Per-student health and dental fees (2019/20)

Only fees levied on full-time students or all students

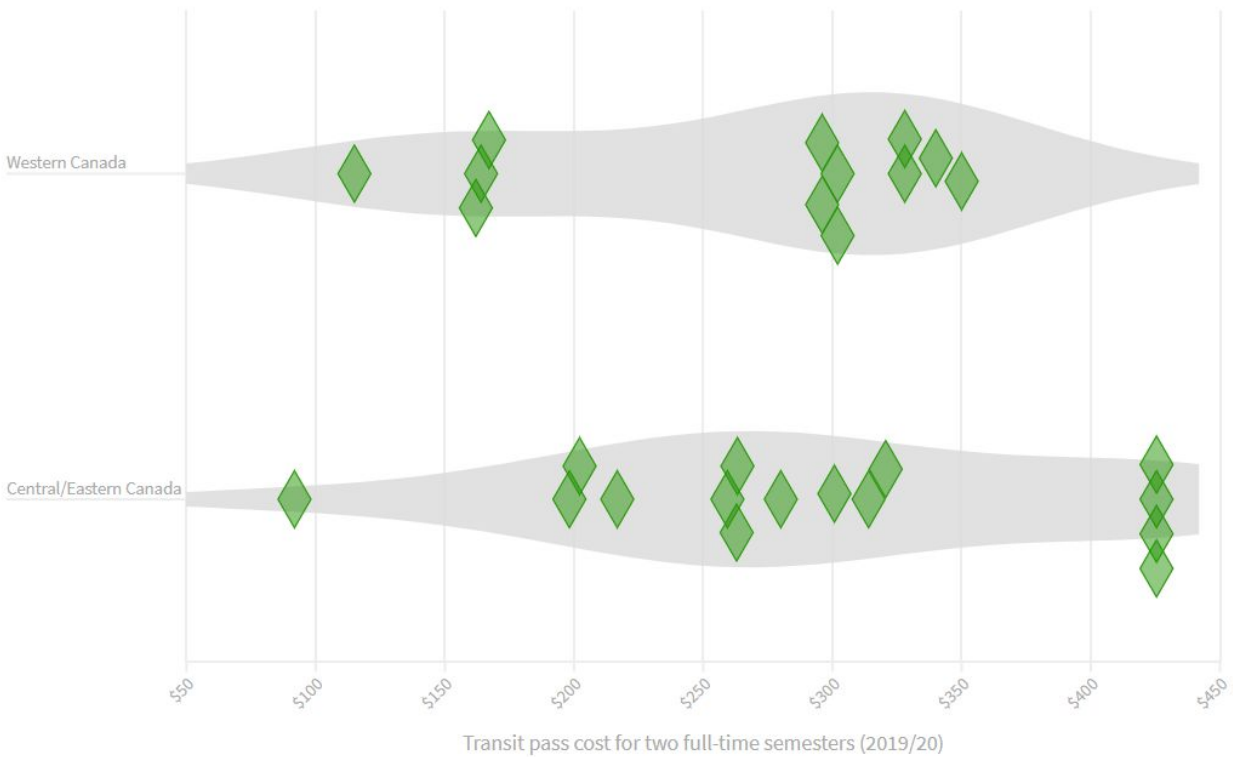




	MEAN ANNUAL FEES	MEDIAN ANNUAL FEES
Undergraduate SAs (Western Canada)	\$310	\$268
Undergraduate SAs (Eastern/Central Canada)	\$282	\$250
Graduate SAs	\$505	\$500

Transit Passes

Many post-secondary students benefit from discounted and/or subsidized transit passes. Public transit authorities make agreements with institutions and/or SAs. The degree to which any given SA is involved is hard to determine, so this data includes all listed transit passes for the schools represented in our dataset. As a general rule, however, the SA is a vital delivery partner and advocacy driver.



REGION	MEAN TRANSIT FEES/YEAR	MEDIAN TRANSIT FEES/YEAR
Western Canada	\$262.51	\$299.00
Central/Eastern Canada	\$294.09	\$280.00

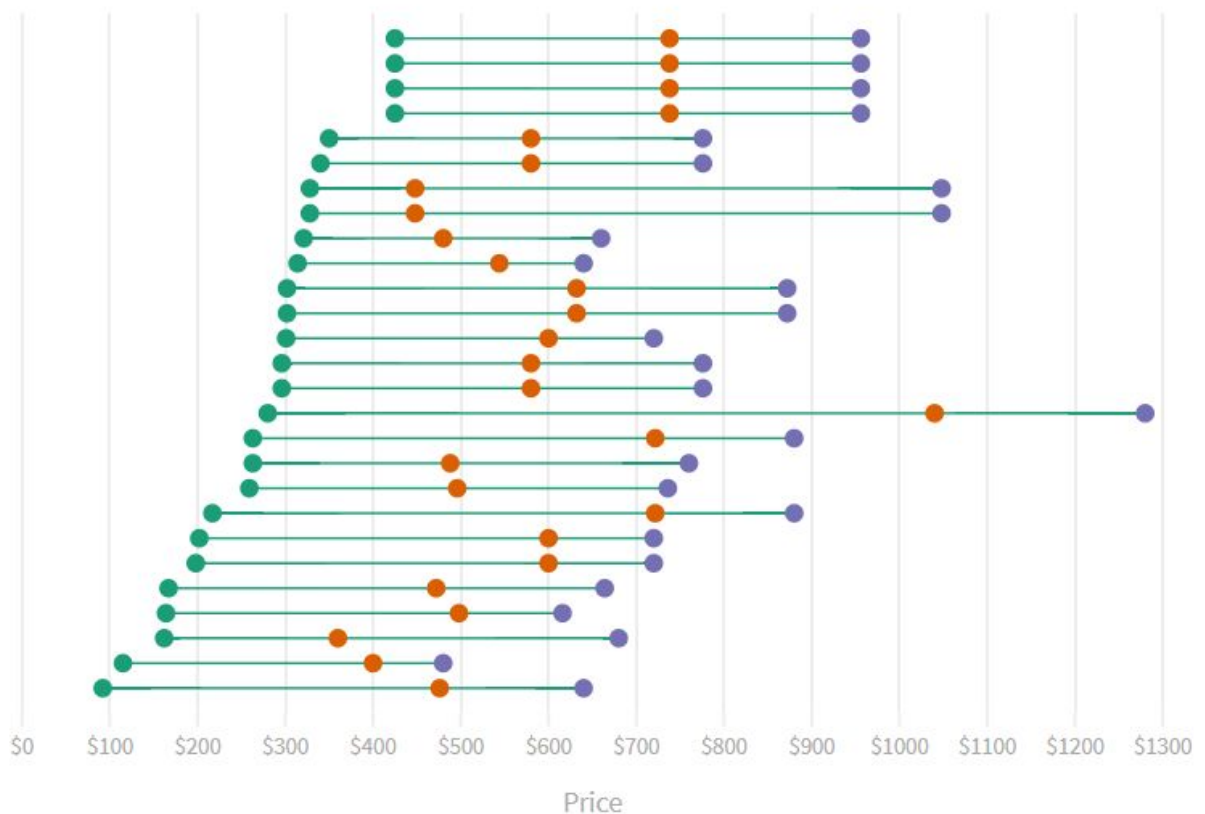
Just as important as sticker price is the discount afforded by transit pass programs - the difference between the price of a student transit pass and standard transit passes in a given host city. It quickly becomes clear that transit pass programs represent a gigantic part of student associations' value proposition.

- Compared to standard adult fare, the average student transit pass discount in our dataset was 66%, representing an average of \$529 in savings over an eight-month period.
- Compared to standard youth fare (typically capped at 17-19), the average student transit pass discount in our dataset was 52%, representing an average of \$309 in savings over an eight-month period.

SA transit pass versus two semesters of host city transit pass

Each line represents a student's options while attending a given SA in its host city

● Student pass ● Youth pass ● Adult pass



Note that we chose to consider a few full-year student passes to be comparable with the rest (which generally cover an 8-month period). This means that, at some schools, a student's savings could be even higher than our estimates.

External Association Memberships

Most SAs are dues-paying members of external advocacy associations. At the federal level, the most noteworthy players are the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations (CASA) and the Canadian Federation of Students (CFS), though several institutions attempt their own independent federal advocacy at times. The landscape is more diverse at the provincial level: the CFS has provincial advocacy branches (most notably the CFS-Ontario), and there are many other external advocacy associations.

A few examples, with revenue estimated from published financial statements or (if necessary) from published fee and membership information:

SELECTED FEDERAL ADVOCACY ASSOCIATIONS		
ASSOCIATION	APPROX. REVENUE AS OF 2017/18 OR 2018/19	APPROX. STUDENTS IN 2020
CFS	\$2,750,000	530,000
CASA	\$640,000	365,000
SELECTED PROVINCIAL ADVOCACY ASSOCIATIONS		
ASSOCIATION	APPROX. REVENUE AS OF 2017/18 OR 2018/19	APPROX. STUDENTS IN 2020
OUSA	\$510,000	135,000
CAUS	\$155,000	130,000
QSU	\$1,010,000	90,000
SNS	\$105,000	20,000
BCFS	\$970,000	170,000
ASEC	\$260,000	105,000

Most of the SAs in our database hold memberships in one or two of these associations. In some cases (particularly as required by Ontario's Student Choice Initiative), external membership dues are funded through dedicated fees. In many cases, however, SAs pay for external membership dues out of less specific revenue.

By comparing the data we received with external organizations' bylaws and financial information, when available, we noted a few points of interest. (As a matter of fair disclosure, the UASU is a member of CASA and CAUS.)

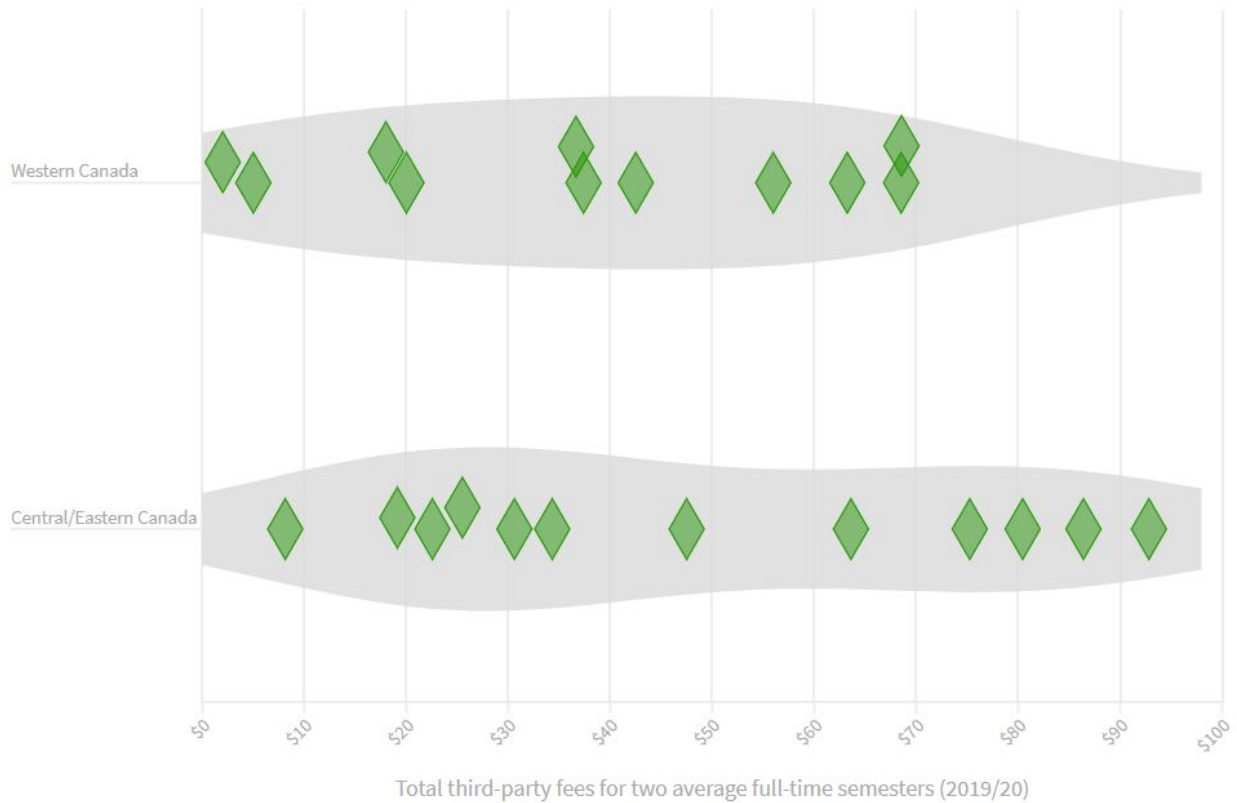
- At the federal level, CASA's membership dues are roughly \$2.50 to \$3.50 per FTE as charged to the member SA. This translates well to the actual cost to students. (For example, one CASA member in Ontario hived off its CASA fee due to the Student Choice Initiative: each full-time student was charged \$2.92 per year.)

- Federal CFS membership dues translate to \$9.34 per year as charged to a full-time student at several member schools in our database.
- At the provincial level, various advocacy organizations' membership dues (as paid by SAs within our dataset) range from around \$2.50 to around \$9.50 per full-time student per year.
- SAs belonging to both CFS and CFS-Ontario reliably pay \$17 per full-time student per year. Within our dataset, this is significantly higher than any other SA's external association membership dues.
- Within our dataset, the median of external association membership fees was \$13.30; after removing Ontario CFS member SAs, the median was \$6.32.

Third-Party Fees

Many students pay fees to support third parties, such as campus newspapers or public interest research groups (PIRGs). It is quite common for SAs to collect these fees from students and remit them to the third-party organizations; it is also common for the third party to have an unclear relationship to the SA. There is no consistency in how these fees are presented (as SA fees, as SA-collected but independent fees, as PSI fees, as fully-independent third-party fees), and students often interpret them as SA fees. This category does not include transit passes, health or dental coverage, or membership in advocacy associations like CFS or CASA.

With all these factors in mind, we opted to include all third-party fees in our dataset, even though this money goes to the third-party organization rather than the SA.

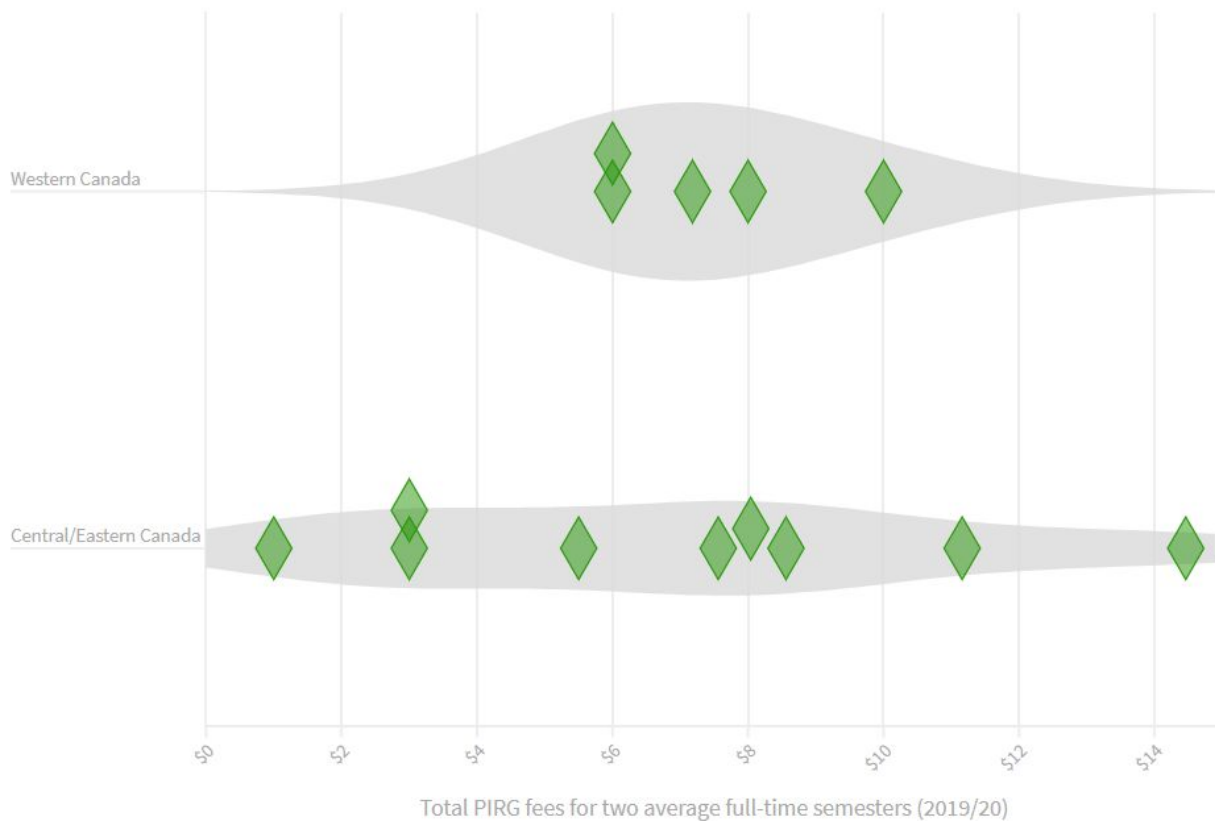


REGION	MEAN THIRD-PARTY FEES/YEAR	MEDIAN THIRD-PARTY FEES/YEAR
Western Canada	\$37.98	\$37.38
Central/Eastern Canada	\$48.85	\$40.90

Spotlight on PIRGs

Public Interest Research Groups (PIRGs) are independent student-driven nonprofits that often hire a small number of full-time staff members. PIRGs tend to focus on grassroots organizing and support for specific and sometimes partisan causes.¹ They have been known to attract criticism on freedom of association grounds, which represents a risk for SAs - a potential gateway to voluntary student unionism (VSU). The Student Choice Initiative (SCI) forced PIRG fees, among others, to become optional. Premier Doug Ford famously painted Ontario's SAs as 'crazy Marxist nonsense', and PIRG activities may have contributed to Ford's misunderstanding of SAs.

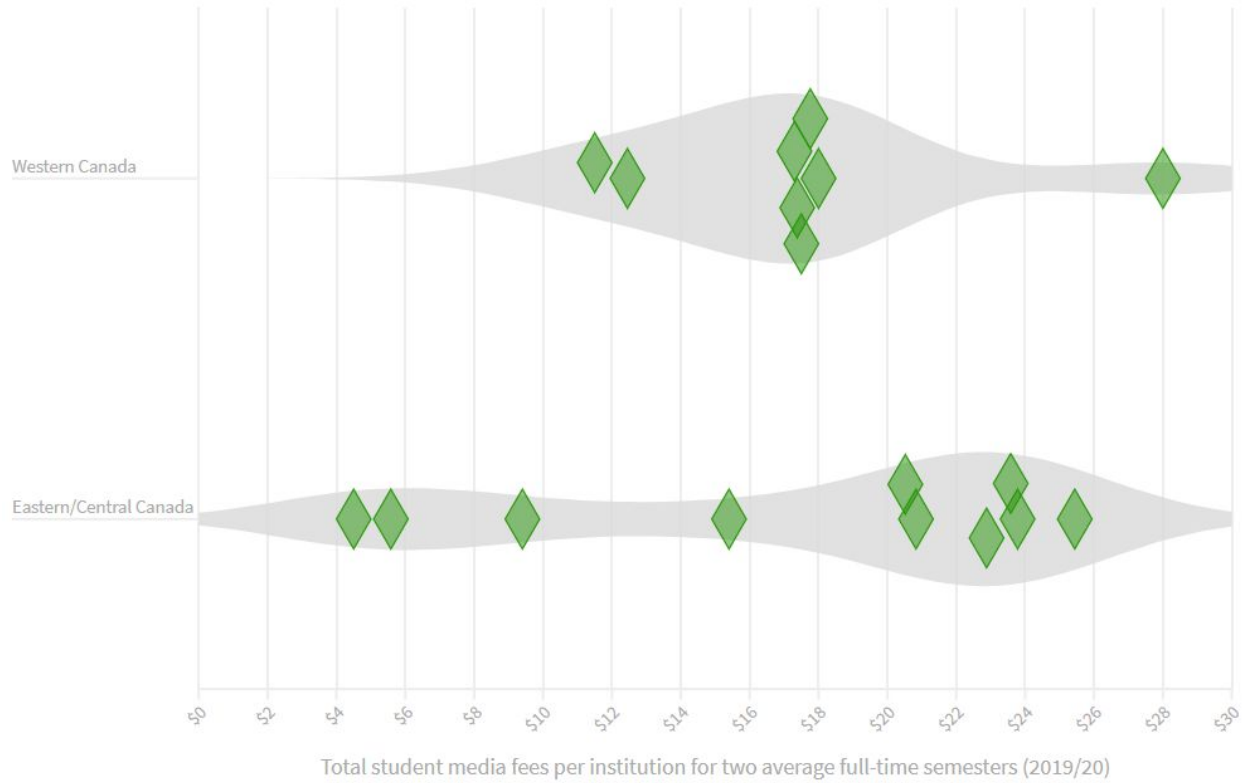
We identified 14 PIRG fees within our 2019/20 dataset; four (all in Western Canada) were mandatory, and ten optional. Note that PIRG fees are quite small (typically \$10/year or less).



¹ For example, OPIRG-Ottawa, part of Ontario's OPIRG network, gives funding and training to the following ['Action Groups'](#): Wild Pollinator Partners, Critical Urban Research Society, People's Republic of Delicious, Millhaven Lifers Liaison Group, and Extinction Rebellion Ottawa. All of these have a strongly progressive flavour; Extinction Rebellion can be considered explicitly partisan.

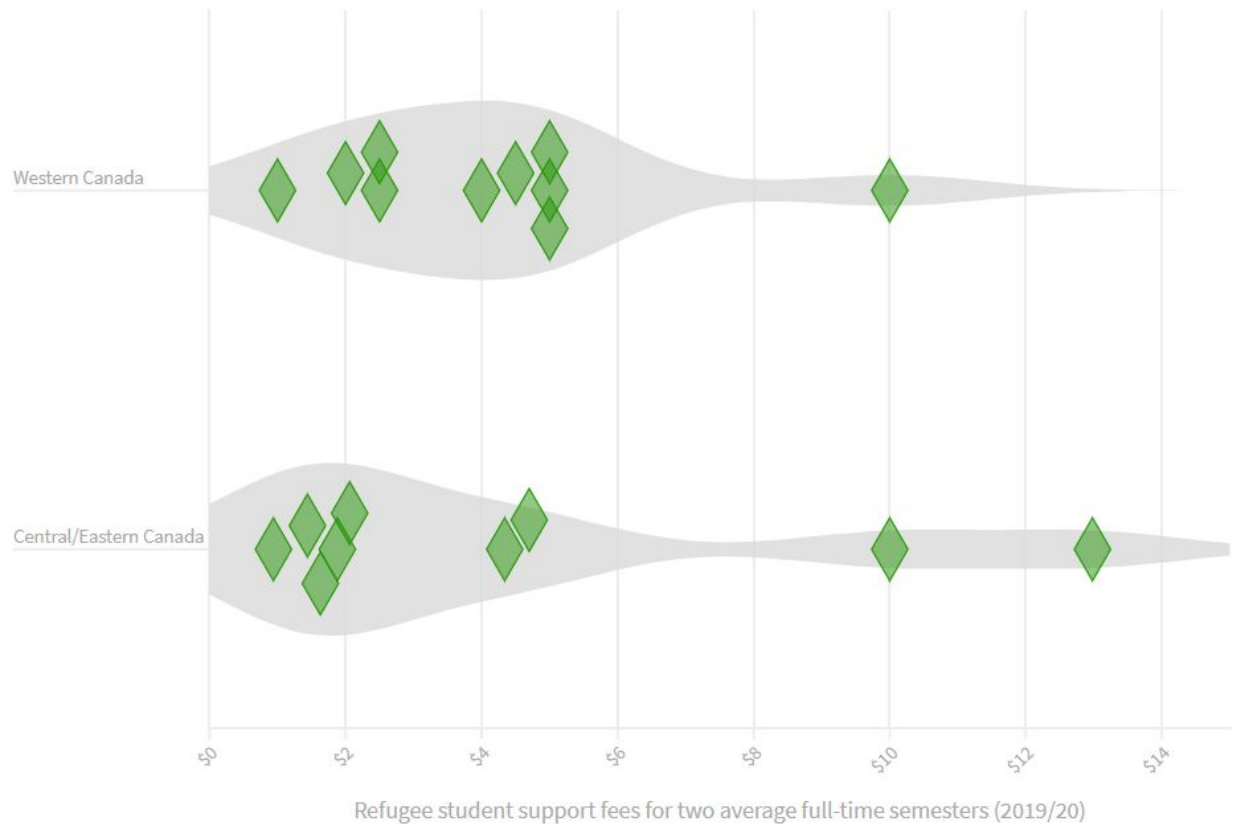
Spotlight on Student Media

Student media organizations - newspapers, radio stations, magazines, and a variety of outliers - are typically independent. We included them in the database when they had a public, defined link to an SA, generally a fee collection/remittance relationship with fees listed together.



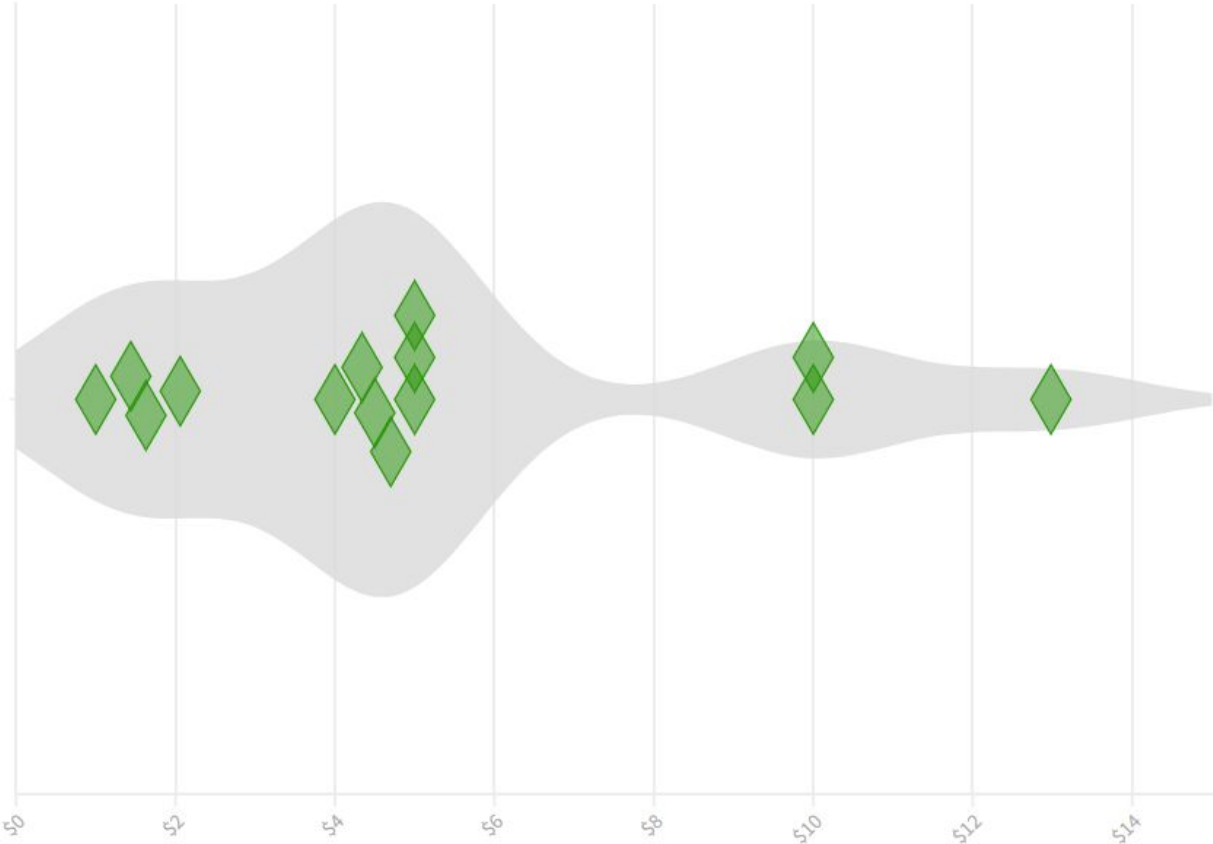
Spotlight on Refugee Student Support

WUSC and its predecessor organizations (the World Student Christian Federation and European Student Relief Committee) have a century of history within the Canadian post-secondary system.² WUSC levies and comparable refugee student support fees are relatively common at post-secondary institutions across Canada. We identified 21 full- and part-time refugee student fees across 14 SAs, roughly half the SAs in our dataset.



² As just one example, UAlberta students supported ESRC's work financially in 1924 or earlier. "Again the call came for support of the work of the European Student Relief Committee and again the students and staff of the University of Alberta responded." *Evergreen and Gold: The annual publication of the students of the University of Alberta (1924/25)*, archived at <http://peel.library.ualberta.ca/bibliography/9022.5/38.html>

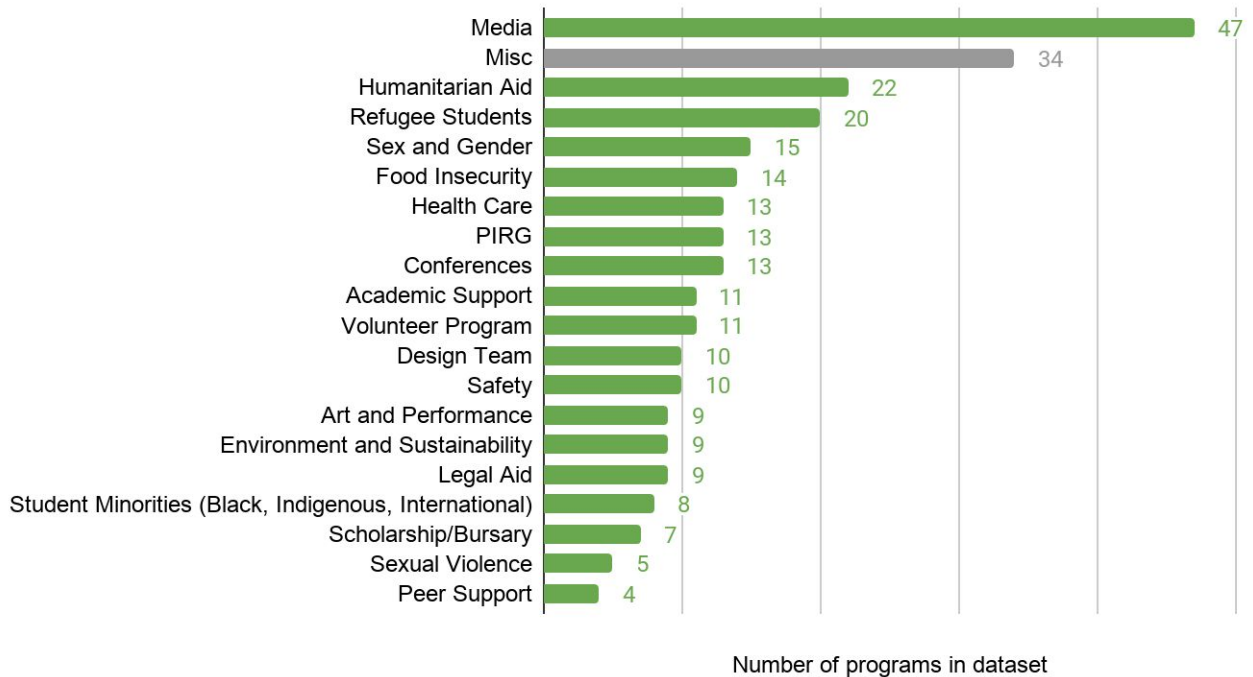
Taking a closer look at just the fees assessed to all students or only full-time students, we see three distinct groups: \$1.50-\$2 per year, \$4-\$5.50 per year, and \$10+ per year.



Refugee student support fees for two average full-time semesters (2019/20) w/o part-time student fees

Appendix A: Program Types with Dedicated Fees

Student associations either provide or indirectly facilitate a wide range of programs, as discussed above. This section offers a closer look at the types of internal and external programs supported by dedicated fees. It combines the program-specific fees discussed in the Operating and Program-Specific Fees section with the fees discussed in the Third-Party Fees sections. In other words, these are programs that have dedicated fees and may be operated by SA staff or third parties.



FEE GROUP	EXAMPLES
Sex and Gender	Sexual health, women’s shelter support, menstrual products, Pride, LGBTQ/sexual and gender minority resource centres, women and girls in STEM
Food Insecurity	Food banks, soup kitchens, gardens, fresh food farmers’ markets
Health Care	Student health care services, on- and off-campus health advocacy and fundraising
Academic Support	Ombuds, general academic support services
Safety	Campus first aid/emergency response teams, walkhome/safewalk, student patrols

Appendix B: Student Associations Included

As many as possible of these SAs are represented in any given chart above.

POST-SECONDARY INSTITUTION	STUDENT ASSOCIATION
Algonquin College	Algonquin Students' Association (ASA)
Bishop's University	Students' Representative Council (BUSRC)
Brock University	Brock University Students' Union (BUSU)
Carleton University	Carleton University Student Association (CUSA)
	Carleton Academic Student Government (CASG)
Dalhousie University	Dalhousie Student Union (DSU)
George Brown College	Student Association of George Brown College (SAGBC)
Kwantlen Polytechnic University	Kwantlen Student Association (KSA)
MacEwan University	Students' Association of MacEwan University (SAMU)
McMaster University	Graduate Students Association (GSA McMaster)
	McMaster Students Union (MSU)
Memorial University of Newfoundland	MUN Students' Union (MUNSU)
Northern Alberta Institute of Technology	NAIT Students' Association (NAITSA)
Niagara College	Niagara College Student Administrative Council (NCSAC)
NorQuest College	Students' Association of NorQuest College (SANQC)
Queen's University	Alma Mater Society (Queen's AMS)
Red Deer College	Students' Association of Red Deer College (SARDC)
Red River College	Red River College Students' Association (RRCSA)
Ryerson	Continuing Education Students' Association of Ryerson (CESAR)
	Ryerson Students' Union (RSU)

Simon Fraser University	Simon Fraser Student Society (SFSS)
Southern Alberta Institute of Technology	SAIT Students' Association (SAITSA)
St. Paul's University	St. Paul's University Student Association (SPUSA)
University of Alberta	Graduate Students' Association (GSA)
	University of Alberta Students' Union (UASU)
University of British Columbia	Alma Mater Society (UBC AMS)
University of Calgary	University of Calgary Students' Union (UCSU)
University of Guelph	Central Student Association (CSA)
University of Lethbridge	University of Lethbridge Students' Union (ULSU)
University of Manitoba	University of Manitoba Students' Union (UMSU)
University of Northern British Columbia	Northern Undergraduate Student Society (NUGSS) <i>Prince George campus only</i>
University of Ottawa	Student Federation of the University of Ottawa (SFUO) <i>Represented students until 2018</i>
	University of Ottawa Students' Union (UOSU) <i>Represented students beginning in 2019</i>
University of Saskatchewan	University of Saskatchewan Students' Union (USSU)
University of Toronto	University of Toronto Students' Union (UTSU)
	Victoria University Students' Administrative Council (VUSAC) <i>Victoria College only</i>
University of Victoria	University of Victoria Students' Society (UVSS)
University of Waterloo	Waterloo Undergraduate Student Association (WUSA)
Western University	University Students' Council (Western USC)
Wilfrid Laurier University	Graduate Students' Association (WLUGSA)
	Students' Union (WLUSU)
York University	York Federation of Students (YFS)

Appendix C: Data Fields

- Province
- SA and host PSI
- Year (2018/19 or 2019/20)
- Fee Class (Mandatory or Optional)
 - Virtually all health and dental fees are mandatory except for some degree of recognition of prior coverage; we classified all health and dental fees as mandatory.
- Fee Type
 - Operating (consolidated/core SA fees or general operating fees that don't easily fit under other categories)
 - Capital (focused on buildings, infrastructure, and some spaces as appropriate)
 - Health
 - Dental
 - Health + Dental (for SAs that charge a single fee for both)
 - Transit Pass
 - Third-Party Fees (e.g. campus media or PIRGS, whether or not the SA is explicitly listed as the collector/remitter)
 - Association Membership (e.g. CASA, CFS, CAUS)
 - Recreation
 - Program (specific to a program)
 - Other
- Student Type (Full-time/Part-time/All Students)
 - We recorded a few cases of short-term apprenticeship programs with per-credit fees as part-time, even when there was a dedicated part-time fee for the same purpose.
- Relevant Headcount
 - The number of students who were levied that specific fee before any opt-outs, from official sources like Universities Canada's [enrollment tables](#). For example, Acme University has a total enrollment of 25,000:

SA	STUDENT TYPE	RELEVANT HEADCOUNT
Acme Student Union	Full-time	15,000
Acme Student Union	Part-time	5,000
Acme GSA	All	5,000

- Fee Name
- Fee Description
- Fee Amount
- Assessed Per...

- Per Credit (note that the definition and value of a credit vary widely across PSIs)
- Per Term
- Per Year
- Per Course
- Other
- Fall opt-out (#) if any
- Fall opt-out (%) if any
- Fall # students passing through opt in/out portal
- Winter opt-out (#) if any
- Winter opt-out (%) if any
- Separate Spring/Summer Fee? (Only if enrolled during Spring or Summer/Yes/No)
- Sprint/Summer opt-out (#) if any
- Sprint/Summer opt-out (%) if any
- Source Link (permanent hyperlink to the source of the information if available)
- Self-reported? (Yes/No)