

Accessibility to Post-Secondary Education at UBC:

A Critical, Decolonial Approach to Financial Accessibility

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Introduction

Accessibility to post-secondary education is a topic that encompasses many aspects. Improving accessibility for all students can disrupt current systems of power and oppression by allowing all students the opportunity to gain a post-secondary education. Considering how particular post-secondary institutions are working to improve this accessibility is important, and it is also imperative to consider what it means to promote accessibility to institutions that continually dispossess Indigenous land. Thus, accessibility to post-secondary education at UBC is particularly interesting and necessary to examine through a critical, decolonial lens. In order to decolonize the institution and disrupt the current system of privilege in place, it is necessary for UBC to improve accessibility to their institution by reducing costs, providing more resources, and ensuring that entire degrees are accessible for all students.

Literature Review

When it comes to access to post-secondary education, there are a variety of factors to keep in mind. Past research conducted in this area has been quite extensive, ranging from socio-economic dimensions to accommodations for particular student groups, and noting variations across countries and provinces. Though quite substantive, there is still limited research that examines the role of particular post-secondary institutions in improving accessibility to higher education. Before discussing this topic further and highlighting what this analysis will cover, I will provide an overview of the current literature, with a focus on web accessibility, accommodations for students with disabilities, Aboriginal student access, socio-economic dimensions, cross-country comparisons and cross-provincial comparisons.

Web Accessibility

In terms of research on web accessibility to post-secondary education, Cooper and Seale (2010) discuss various accessibility tools focused on reducing barriers to accessing the web. They contend that learning environments should be adjusted to the needs of the learner, and having teachers facilitate accessibility to e-learning through a focus on pedagogy in combination with these accessibility tools will help do so (Cooper & Seale, 2010). Le et al. (2010) takes these discussions a step further by discussing an innovative online learning program used at the University of Toronto Scarborough called webOption. This program posts recorded videos of lectures online for student access with the goal of providing students with flexibility regarding when and how they can engage with lecture material. This program is in high demand, as online lectures are convenient to furthering students' learning and gaining a better understanding of the material, which can result in better performance (Le et al., 2010). These accessibility tools are an important part of increasing access to post-secondary education for students with various learning needs.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

In a similar way, there has also been research conducted examining the accessibility of accommodations for students with disabilities, both physical and intellectual, at post-secondary institutions. Lindsay et al. (2018) argues that a holistic approach emphasizing improved collaboration among counsellors, high schools, disability organizations, post-secondary institutions and other parties should be adapted to facilitate the transition of youth with disabilities to post-secondary education. Yull (2015) takes this argument one step further by noting the importance of access to accommodations in post-secondary institutions, contending that a lack of accommodations can negatively impact the educational experience. The criteria for students to gain accommodations vary, but are often based on an official psychiatric diagnosis,

which may not be held by students from various socioeconomic or racial backgrounds (Yull, 2015). In order to improve access to these accommodations, Yull contends that eligibility for accommodations should be based on the level of impairment a student experiences in an educational context. It is imperative for students with disabilities to have access to these accommodations in order to provide an equitable learning environment.

Aboriginal Student Access

Providing access for Aboriginal students and further accommodating them in post-secondary institutions is essential for decolonizing higher education. Marker (2004) argues that Aboriginal students who attend post-secondary often feel conflicted because they are expected to adapt to the university's ways of knowing and give up their own traditional ways of knowing, which causes many students to experience a culture clash in the face of Western and neoliberal approaches to knowledge. Marker contends that the university should accommodate Aboriginal students by incorporating their traditional knowledge into the academy (2004). Johnson (2016) further argues that Indigenizing efforts must be specific to each institution, and since UBC's Vancouver campus is situated on unceded territory and its development has been done largely without consultation of the Musqueam peoples, Johnson contends Musqueam students should be able to freely access post-secondary education at UBC. She discusses further strategies to facilitate access and develop relationships between UBC and the Musqueam Indian Band that go beyond "merely acknowledging traditional territories in opening speeches" (Johnson, 2016, p. 136). Indigenizing post-secondary institutions is an important step in the reconciliation process and must be acknowledged in discussions of accessibility to post-secondary institutions, particularly at UBC.

Socio-economic Dimensions

Socio-economic status is an important dimension of accessibility to post-secondary education, as contended by Kim et al. (2009), who argues that post-secondary education is unaffordable for many prospective students and a lack of financial aid contributes to restricted post-secondary choices. Expectations about financial aid significantly impacts students' interest in institutions, applications to institutions, and ultimate enrolment decisions, particularly for low-income and minority students. Kim et al. (2009) contends we need more targeted financial aid policies towards under-represented minority populations to meet their expectations about financial aid and increase accessibility. Similarly, Simmons (2011) contends that low-income, minority, first-generation, and other vulnerable students are less likely to attend college, particularly because they lack the social capital to facilitate navigating the admissions and financial aid processes of colleges. Simmons argues reform should take place at both the high school counselling level, to specifically train counsellors on navigating the college admissions process and assisting these particular students, and at the post-secondary admissions level, for undergraduate admissions counsellors to provide the necessary information to these students (2011). These reforms could substantially impact accessibility to post-secondary for these students, and such socio-economic dimensions are necessary to address in discussions of accessibility for all students.

Cross-country Comparisons

Comparing financial accessibility across countries is one way to examine accessibility to post-secondary education. Belley et al. (2014) conducts a cross-country comparison between Canada and the US in terms of post-secondary attendance on the basis of parental income. Their study found that higher education and parental income is strongly correlated, especially in the US. This study also revealed the importance of needs-based aid: those who do not come from

high-income families are much less likely to attend post-secondary, and if they do, they are much more likely to require needs-based aid. The relationship between parental income and post-secondary attendance is so strong that financial aid would need to increase 60-100% for low-income students to eliminate the relationship completely (Belley et al., 2014). Finding ways to improve accessibility for financial aid to all students would be beneficial to ensure that students from less affluent backgrounds can still access post-secondary, in both Canada and the US.

Cross-Provincial Comparisons

As education is a provincial responsibility in Canada, it is beneficial to compare accessibility to post-secondary education across Canadian provinces. Harmsen and Tupper (2017) compare post-secondary education systems in BC and Ontario, noting that BC has a larger spectrum of institutions with a flexible transfer system, whereas Ontario has a hard division between colleges and universities with limited options for transfers. Fisher et al. (2009) discusses post-secondary education differences in BC, Ontario, and Quebec, similarly noting that BC has facilitated access to education by establishing strong transfer programs between colleges and universities, while Ontario has improved accessibility simply by increasing the number and variability of institutions. Post-secondary studies are most accessible in Quebec due to stronger needs-based loan and bursary programs, tuition-free colleges, and lower tuition at universities for students native to that province (Fisher et al., 2009). Thus, accessibility to post-secondary education is an important issue with various approaches by province, and Harmsen and Tupper argue for stronger inter-provincial dialogue and a well-coordinated overall system to meet growing post-secondary demands and improve accessibility (2017).

The Focus of this Analysis

As can be seen from this expansive literature review, the current literature is quite vast and focused on a variety of dimensions in relation to the accessibility of post-secondary education; yet, there is a lack of studies that focuses on accessibility to particular post-secondary institutions, examined through a situated, localized framework. This limitation has prompted my examination of accessibility to post-secondary education at UBC, with a particular consideration of what it means to access education at a colonial institution located on traditional, unceded territory. In order to address the dynamics of facilitating equal access to post-secondary education while recognizing the complicity of UBC in the dispossession of Indigenous territory, it is necessary to embody a decolonial framework. Though I recognize that the word ‘decolonial’ in itself can be complex to define, I draw on Tuck & Yang (2012) here to argue that decolonization is not a metaphor; rather, it is necessary to take action to acknowledge our colonial past and fight for a more equal future. A decolonial framework should seek to do so by making aware the knowledge of its colonial past, approaching all knowledge through a critical lens, and seeking to include the voices and perspectives of Indigenous peoples. Before discussing these dynamics in further detail, it is necessary to situate the context of UBC as a colonial institution, which will be the focus of the next few pages.

Situating UBC as a Colonial and Corporatized Institution

UBC is a colonial institution that has two campuses located on traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory. UBC’s Vancouver campus is located on the unceded territory of the Musqueam (Coast Salish) peoples, and UBC’s Okanagan campus is located on the unceded territory of the Syilx (Okanagan) peoples. Both of these campuses were developed without adequate consultation of these Indigenous nations, and they are continuously not acknowledged when discussing the history of UBC, as can be seen on UBC’s website which emphasizes the

acquisition of land and the importance of donors to the creation of UBC with little said to acknowledge the traditional territories that both campuses are located on (The University of British Columbia, 2018). Despite many attempts to get rid of its colonial past through lip service acknowledgements, signs in each respective Indigenous language, memorandums of understanding, dedicated buildings and more, the colonialist legacy of UBC persists because the institution still operates on unceded territory. As a student at UBC and a settler on this land, I am complicit in this continuing colonial legacy. It is necessary to recognize this history and continuing legacy and seek to embody a decolonial approach moving forward.

The Okanagan Campus

Despite UBC Okanagan's campus location on unceded Syilx territory, the dominant narrative of the city of Kelowna portrays it as "homogenously white," thereby erasing the vital Indigenous communities and never acknowledging the colonial roots of the city. The violent process of settler colonial urbanisation that has occurred so rapidly in the Okanagan is excluded from view through these narratives of Kelowna as a modern Western city, particularly with its liberal institution of UBC (Bagelman & Tedesco, 2017). In particular, the development of the Okanagan campus in its transition from Okanagan University College to UBC Okanagan is an example of neoliberalism that emphasizes UBC's corporate power and influence in the region, as it promised significant economic and social benefits to the region and was thus linked to the local capitalist bloc (Aguilar et al., 2008). However, the Okanagan campus was also developed with a Memorandum of Understanding with the Okanagan Nation Alliance (including the Syilx People), acknowledging the partnership between the Indigenous nation and the university from an early stage (Warburton, 2016; Grant, 2015). Though this is an important step forward in the colonial legacy of UBC, the fact remains that many students are still not aware of the colonial

roots of the Okanagan campus and the city of Kelowna, with dominant narratives of the “homogenously white” city continuing to prevail. Thus, there is still more work to be done in spreading awareness of the continual legacies of colonialism at this campus and in this city.

The Vancouver Campus

Similar to the Okanagan, there is a lack of acknowledgement of the traditional territory and role of the Coast Salish First Nations communities in Vancouver, despite the city’s multicultural and diverse discourse. This is particularly prevalent at UBC’s Vancouver campus, where many students are unaware of UBC’s colonial history and most decisions are made without consultation or consideration of impacts on the Musqueam community (Warburton, 2016). One example of this lack of awareness is the fact that a Memorandum of Affiliation at the Vancouver campus was only signed with the Musqueam Indian Band to formalize their relationship in 2006, while a similar Memorandum of Understanding was signed much earlier at the Okanagan campus’ inception in 2005 and re-signed on its ten-year anniversary in 2015 (Grant, 2015; The University of British Columbia, 2018). Since then, the Vancouver campus has taken more steps forward to encourage acknowledgement and discussion of UBC’s colonial history, including the building of the Indian Residential School History and Dialogue Centre that recently opened; however, as Johnson (2016) contends, more still must be done rather than simply acknowledging the traditional territory on which the campus is situated. Importantly, Johnson contends Indigenous peoples should be a part of these conversations and UBC should seek out their voices and opinions (2016). The inclusion of these communities is vital to the decolonization process at UBC.

The Institutional Environment

Apart from acknowledging UBC's colonial history and seeking to take steps to decolonize the institution, it is also important to acknowledge the impact that this colonial legacy has on the learning environment of the institution. Inherent to colonial institutions are beliefs in Western superiority that impact many aspects of the academy, leading the system to continue to perpetuate Western dominance and resist other ways of knowing, growth, and change (Vickers, 2002). Additionally, the environment of the institution can be shaped by the influence of those who provide funding to the institution. Post-secondary institutions have increasingly turned to corporations as a source of funding, making themselves accountable to these corporations. UBC has aligned with many corporations that continue to perpetuate colonial domination (Dahlstrom, 2016), and apart from supporting these corporations, UBC itself is also a corporation operating on unceded territory with its own set of goals (Walker, 2008). These dynamics create a complex web of mixed interests that impacts the educational climate for students at this institution, generating the university as a hub of entrepreneurial activity and commodified knowledge rather than a centre of education and autonomous space of reflection and resistance (Aguiar et al., 2008; Castree & Sparke, 2000).

Corporate Interests and The Impact on Ideology

UBC's partnership with corporations has been discussed by many scholars that have noted UBC is becoming increasingly dependent on and accountable to the corporate sector (Aguiar et al., 2008; Walker, 2008; Castree & Sparke, 2000; Dahlstrom, 2016). UBC's commitment to the social good through various documents such as Trek 2000, Trek 2010 and their Sustainable Development Policy is compromised through their goal to satisfy corporate demands (Walker, 2008; Moore, 2005). Such dynamics also impact the creation of these documents, such as Trek 2010, in which UBC proposes many general strategies with little direct

action – and without definitions and an achievable vision that can be measured, “excellence,” “being the best,” and “accountability” are just empty words (Walker, 2008). Similarly, the discourse of global citizenship promoted by UBC is another way of presenting an empty vision that lacks substance. Global citizenship is a neoliberal and individualistic ideology that ripples throughout the university and is taught to students, making them believe individuals are responsible for their own wellbeing and seldom encouraging them to collaborate and help others. The impact of this ideology contributes further to an entrepreneurial university climate that fosters individualism and competition rather than collaboration and learning (Aguilar et al., 2008).

The Importance of Accessibility

Such ideologies do not only operate at the institutional level - they also permeate society. Post-secondary education is no longer an investment society makes in the next generation, but an investment that students make in themselves, making discussions of accessibility particularly topical as post-secondary institutions continue to raise fees (Aguilar et al., 2008). If we aren't careful, universities will soon be filled with only those who have the privileged socioeconomic status to attend, and institutions will fully serve corporate interests and continue to perpetuate colonialism, thereby reproducing the entire system of privilege. It is imperative that institutions are accessible, accountable, and embody a non-partisan, decolonial approach to education – an education that all students can receive. I strongly believe addressing accessibility to post-secondary education is the starting point to ensuring universities do not reproduce a system of dominance and oppression. For UBC, an institution that is intrinsically linked to colonial dominance and has ties to various oppressive corporations, such accessibility is particularly imperative to dismantling the power hierarchy it is currently perpetuating.

The Current Financial System at UBC: The Problem

If we are to look at accessibility to post-secondary education at UBC, where do we begin? It is imperative to start by looking at what is already in place at UBC to provide accessibility to education, before discussing what needs to be done to improve it. As much as access to a UBC education is determined by other factors, at the end of the day, finances are one of the most significant burdens in accessing a post-secondary education (Kim et al., 2009; Simmons, 2011; Belley et al., 2014). In addition, finances are one of the domains of accessibility to education that UBC has control over to some extent, other than admissions policies. Thus, it is necessary to examine the current financial aspects of UBC and discuss improvements that can be made to the current system.

Tuition and Fees

The current structure of UBC tuition and fees disadvantages many students seeking a post-secondary education. All students that apply to UBC are required to pay a non-refundable application fee, which is currently \$69.25 for domestic students and \$116.25 for international students (The University of British Columbia, Undergraduate Programs and Admissions, 2018). Once students have been accepted to UBC, they are required to pay a non-refundable deposit, which also must be paid every year that students are enrolling in courses, with costs ranging from \$100 for continuing domestic students to \$3,000 for new international Vantage One program students (The University of British Columbia, Vancouver Academic Calendar, 2018). There are specific deadlines for tuition payments, and if students have not paid by these dates, they could be charged late fees, put on financial hold, and forced to pay interest, and they will not be allowed to register for future sessions until they pay the outstanding balance plus all interest (The University of British Columbia, Vancouver Academic Calendar, 2018). These

stringent policies penalize students that do not have their finances in order by these deadlines. There are many extenuating circumstances that could impact a students' potential to pay thousands of dollars in tuition and fees by the allotted deadline – and these amounts listed are only looking at tuition specifically, not taking into consideration the thousands of dollars that students will spend on housing, other school-related costs, and living costs.

The university sets tuition standards every year and they are reviewed annually by the Board of Governors, recently increasing at 2% every year for continuing domestic students and between 2% and 5% every year for continuing international students (The University of British Columbia, Student Services, 2018). The per-credit tuition amount for domestic students in 2017 was \$176.45, while for international students it was \$1256.33, bringing the total cost for a year of tuition based on a 30-credit course load to \$5,293.50 for domestic students and \$36,588.30 for international students (for a Bachelor of Arts). Tuition varies by program, with some of the most expensive programs including Engineering, Design, International Economics, Media Studies, and some Forestry programs, not taking into consideration specialty or doctoral programs such as Dentistry, Pharmacy, Education, Medicine or Law (The University of British Columbia, Student Services, 2018). Interestingly, these tuition fees are actually lower than the national average for tuition for domestic students, listed at \$6,838 in 2018 (Statistics Canada, 2018). This also means that tuition at UBC is cheaper than tuition at other top schools in the country: the average cost of first-year domestic tuition at the University of Toronto is \$6,780 and at McGill University it is \$7,632 (for students from Quebec, tuition is \$2,456 at McGill) (University of Toronto, Planning and Budget Office, 2018; McGill University, Undergraduate Admissions, 2018). However, just because UBC may have lower tuition than other institutions in Canada does not mean that the

amounts they charge is reasonable – expensive tuition fees still make post-secondary education inaccessible, and it’s an expensive total that is only continuing to rise.

Awards for Prospective Students

Despite UBC’s cost of attending, UBC claims it has a commitment to ease the burden of attending post-secondary by providing many scholarships and awards for excellent students. Awards for domestic students include the Presidential Scholars Award for top students, the Centennial Scholars Entrance Award for students with demonstrated financial need, and many other external awards (The University of British Columbia, Undergraduate Programs and Admissions, 2018). Aboriginal students are automatically considered for many scholarships and bursaries by noting their Aboriginal status on their UBC application, including Presidential Scholars Awards, Centennial Scholars Entrance Awards, and Musqueam First Nations Scholarships at the Vancouver campus (The University of British Columbia, Undergraduate Programs and Admissions, 2018). For international students, awards include International Major Entrance Scholarships for top students, Outstanding International Student Award for great students, and multiple awards under the International Scholars Program, including the International Leader of Tomorrow award and the Donald A. Wehrung International Student award, which are primarily based on merit and financial need (The University of British Columbia, Undergraduate Programs and Admissions, 2018). There are also separate awards for Vantage One students (at the Vancouver campus), including International Major Entrance Scholarships for Vantage One, the Excellence Award, and the Entrance Award (The University of British Columbia, Undergraduate Programs and Admissions, 2018).

UBC also offers housing grants at the Vancouver campus, including the Student Housing Supplement Grant for students in first year living in on campus-housing, whom must be

receiving full-time student loans to be eligible (The University of British Columbia, Student Services, 2018). The Student Housing Assistance Grant is also available for students with demonstrated financial need (The University of British Columbia, Student Services, 2018). Despite the claims on their website and seemingly generous support, these awards from UBC are extremely difficult to obtain and have vague criteria for students about how award recipients are chosen. Interestingly, international students pay over three times the amount of domestic student tuition, yet they have less financial support options available to them. These awards are only for students entering their first year of study at UBC, though some are renewable up to four years. UBC has additional awards for students that are continuing their studies, which I will now discuss further.

Awards for Continuing Students

UBC has a variety of options to support continuing students. Domestic students can receive financial support through continuing studies awards, faculty-based awards, and other merit-based awards for excellent students (The University of British Columbia, Student Services, 2018). International students can receive financial support through student memorial awards, faculty-recommended scholarships, continuing studies scholarships, and the International Community Achievement Awards for those that are demonstrated on-campus leaders (The University of British Columbia, Student Services, 2018). For some awards, students are automatically considered every year based on their academic performance, but generally, the standards are quite high for students to get an award. Students must meet a minimum number of enrolled credits counting for percentage towards their degree in order to maintain loan and award eligibility throughout their undergraduate degree (The University of British Columbia, Student Services, 2018). This means that students taking a lighter course load, which could very well be

due to mental health reasons or other personal concerns, are penalized because they will not be eligible for certain awards and scholarships.

UBC also has a Permanent Disability Program that states students can be eligible for up to \$3800 in grants, additional financial support for services and equipment, and approved for a 40% reduction in their course load; however, obtaining this application requires that students reach out to Access and Diversity only once they have begun attending university (The University of British Columbia, Student Services, 2018). Thus, the awards offered to continuing students are inaccessible to the vast majority of the population, and many of them have unclear guidelines for how to be obtained. Additionally, there are still more award options for continuing domestic students than international students. UBC therefore encourages students to fund their own studies through programs such as work learn, co-op, other on-campus jobs, and more (The University of British Columbia, Student Services, 2018). They also push students to apply for government student loans as another means of financing their education, an option that the university should not be pushing for as much as they are. Students should not be forced to have thousands of dollars of student loan debt when they graduate; rather, the university should be doing everything they can to make these awards and scholarships more accessible to a wider range of students.

UBC Bursary and Policy 72

UBC states that it is “committed to ensuring accessibility for students,” particularly for domestic students at their institution (The University of British Columbia, Student Services, 2018). They have a substantial general bursary program for students and many affiliation bursaries available as well, but these bursaries are only available to Canadian students, permanent residents, or refugees, and they must be receiving the maximum amount of full-time

student loans to be eligible (The University of British Columbia, Student Services, 2018). UBC therefore only fills the unmet need that has not been met by government loans; yet, these bursaries are generally not awarded until November or December of the academic year. Thus, although UBC can help fill the gap, students will not receive confirmation of this funding until their first semester is almost over – therefore, this funding would only be helpful for the second semester of their studies that year. This level of support is insufficient for students that need funding right away and cannot wait until November or December to receive more funding. Similar timelines are in place for those seeking bursary funding for only the second semester of the winter session, and the summer session (The University of British Columbia, Student Services, 2018).

Additionally, UBC has created a policy stating, “no eligible Canadian student will be prevented from attending UBC for financial reasons alone” (The University of British Columbia, Undergraduate Programs and Admissions, 2018). Policy 72 was created to “ensure that UBC is financially accessible to all domestic students and that domestic students are not prevented from starting or continuing their studies for financial reasons” (The University of British Columbia, Student Services, 2018). Though this policy sounds extremely beneficial for students, the website states that you must demonstrate financial need to access this policy – in the vaguest of terms. The website is not very clear on how you can access funding from Policy 72, and it seems that it is in the university’s hands to determine who is the most eligible for funding (The University of British Columbia, Student Services, 2018). As much as I am sure UBC would state that the responsibility is on students to find their own source of funding, if a student has already reached the maximum amount in their student loans, and if UBC is as committed to removing financial barriers to education as they say they are, then the onus should be on the university to

make this funding more accessible in a more timely manner to facilitate student access to education.

The Blue & Gold Campaign

UBC recently launched the Blue & Gold Campaign for Students with the goal of raising \$100 million in donor support for students over the next three years. To kick off the campaign, UBC is providing matching funds of up to \$5 million for “select Blue & Gold campaign priorities” (The University of British Columbia, Development and Alumni Engagement, 2018). This campaign is centred on removing financial barriers for talented students, and the purpose of the program is to gain more donor support. The campaign highlights how donors can provide financial support for three different awards: the Blue & Gold Bursary, the Centennial Scholars Entrance Award, and the Centennial Indigenous Scholars Entrance Award. They highlight the importance of donors to bring “talented” students to UBC, stating, “You can help make a UBC education possible for deserving students by supporting the Blue & Gold Bursary and the Centennial Scholars Awards” (The University of British Columbia, Development and Alumni Engagement, 2018).

The campaign also discusses recruiting “the best and brightest” students, further encouraging donors to provide financial support for the Presidential Scholars Award, UBC Graduate Fellowships, and the International Scholars Award. They state, “Your support gives promising students access to a life-changing education—and perhaps most importantly—invests in the future of our province and our global community” (The University of British Columbia, Development and Alumni Engagement, 2018). Though the discourse surrounding this campaign through these kinds of statements appears to be in the interest of students, the campaign directly emphasizes the role of donors in providing private funding to source a public education.

Continuing to gain scholarship funds through this manner could be detrimental to the integrity of the institution: UBC should be careful about who it involves in providing education to their students. Additionally, the push for recruiting only “the best and brightest” to attend UBC is also problematic – the institution should be focused on removing financial barriers for *all* students, not just the “talented” students. This is why accessibility is so important: having a financially accessible institution creates a more level playing field for all students.

Discussion: Potential Solutions

Unfortunately, the current financial policies in place at UBC continue to support a privileged system in which only certain students can access a post-secondary education. It is imperative to change the dimensions of the university population to alter the dynamics of our society and the types of knowledge that is generated, as a more diverse student population will generate new and different ideas to shape our world. Nothing will ever change if the same privileged people are allowed in to universities, allowed to generate new forms of knowledge, and allowed to obtain positions of power – that will only serve to continue to perpetuate the system in which the same privileged groups of people hold power and knowledge and make decisions, and the same vulnerable populations stay in those vulnerable positions. Additionally, it is necessary to decolonize the privileged space of university campuses that uphold current systems of power and seek to provide the space for Aboriginal students to thrive and take steps forward for reconciliation. In order to address this system of privilege, UBC must become a more financially-accessible institution to allow students from other backgrounds, specifically those from lower-class backgrounds, to attend UBC and contribute to a diverse student population and flow of ideas. UBC’s post-secondary education should be accessible to all

students, and this accessibility begins with lowering the costs of a UBC education and seeking real steps UBC can take to address these financial barriers.

Reducing Costs

Compared to the national average and its top competitors, UBC already has a lower tuition than most universities, and its tuition is not increasing at as high of a rate as they are at other institutions and on the national stage (Statistics Canada, 2018; University of Toronto, Planning and Budget Office, 2018; McGill University, Undergraduate Admissions, 2018). However, if UBC wants to make a bigger impact, they can consider reducing the amount by which tuition fees are increasing each year. Though I understand that tuition costs increase in accordance with access to new resources, I still do not believe it is necessary to be increasing costs at *that high* of a rate every single year, as this means students are exponentially paying more for the *same level of access* to education. Ideally, UBC should have a set tuition rate and stop raising the cost of tuition and fees entirely – but if that is not possible, then at the very least, they should drastically reduce the percentage at which they increase tuition and fees. In particular, UBC should seek to alleviate all UBC-related costs for Aboriginal students, as UBC continues to be complicit in the dispossession of Indigenous land and these students should not have to face the consequence of both losing their land *and* having to pay to access an education on their land. Such dimensions only further contribute to perpetuating a colonial institution, and UBC must seek to decolonize its institution through removing all of these financial aspects for Aboriginal students.

Yet, tuition is only one piece of the puzzle. Students also spend thousands of dollars on housing, school-related costs, and living costs (The University of British Columbia, Undergraduate Programs and Admissions, 2018), many aspects of which UBC can directly

influence. Though UBC's housing costs are on par with most universities across Canada, and they do have incredibly beautiful housing options for students, they should also be taking into consideration that this housing is being provided to students that are on a budget and requiring students to fork out thousands of dollars to pay for on-campus housing is unacceptable. UBC should be seeking to put in place more measures such as the Student Housing Supplement Grant and Student Housing Assistance Grant (The University of British Columbia, Student Services, 2018) to provide more assistance to students paying for on-campus housing, if not freezing the cost of housing or reducing it altogether. Another big expense for students is school-related costs, and as students are already paying astronomical amounts for tuition and other fees, other costs such as textbooks should not be something students need to pay for (The University of British Columbia, Undergraduate Programs and Admissions, 2018). All courses should provide free and accessible course materials to all students, including textbooks and other materials, and UBC should be at the forefront of this movement in pushing professors to do so.

Providing More Resources

If UBC truly cannot lower the costs of post-secondary education themselves, then steps should be taken to provide more resources to alleviate these costs, particularly for Aboriginal students in order to continually support them and seek to decolonize the institution. In terms of tuition and other fees, more scholarships and awards should be available that do not rely on criteria penalizing students who do not have a full course load (The University of British Columbia, Student Services, 2018). Additionally, bursaries should be allocated earlier in the school year to the students that need extra assistance in funding the most, rather than waiting to distribute bursary funding later in the semester (The University of British Columbia, Student Services, 2018). In terms of housing, UBC can create more grants and housing subsidies for

students to gain access to more affordable housing, as previously discussed (The University of British Columbia, Student Services, 2018). The mandatory meal plans that accompany many housing buildings at UBC should be removed, as these plans are often quite expensive, and students are not able to receive a full refund if they do not spend all of the money allocated to their meal plan (The University of British Columbia, Student Residence – Okanagan, 2018). UBC can easily change their policies to be more accommodating and provide a full refund for those that do not use their money, or alleviate mandatory meal plans altogether and make them optional.

UBC should also be taking steps to assist with other student-related costs, such as textbooks (The University of British Columbia, Undergraduate Programs and Admissions, 2018). If textbook costs cannot be alleviated by providing books as online documents, then UBC should make more textbook share programs available for students' use. There are so many small and effective changes that UBC can make to increase accessibility to these various aspects of student life, and UBC should be at the forefront of the movement to address the high costs of post-secondary. Furthermore, part of increasing accessibility is also making sure that students are aware of the various options that are available to them, and it is imperative that the university takes the necessary measures to inform all students of these options. Again, the university may argue that the responsibility is on students to find their own sources of funding to facilitate their own education, but the statements of the university's commitment to financial accessibility contradicts that. UBC must make these different options more accessible to students, and truly do everything that they can to minimize the financial burden on students obtaining a post-secondary education at their institution.

Making Entire Degrees Accessible

Perhaps one of the most important parts of accessibility to education is ensuring that students can access their entire education, not just part of it. UBC needs to ensure that cost-reducing measures are in place so that these students can not only get to UBC, but can actually make it through university and complete their degree. There is no use in getting students from different backgrounds to UBC if they are not going to be able to make it through their full degree – and we need them to. If UBC is committed to furthering education for all and the progression of our province, nation, and world, then they must fully commit to ensuring this accessibility for all students throughout their entire degree. If UBC is committed to decolonizing their institution, then they additionally need to ensure accessibility for Aboriginal students and provide exceptional resources for support throughout their degree.

Additionally, UBC should be at the front of the movement to address the extremely high costs of post-secondary and the rising student debt crisis. They should not be graduating generations of students that are drowning in debt. The amount of pressure students put on themselves to succeed is extreme, and having to worry about these financial burdens should not be one of them. If UBC is truly committed to not having finances be a barrier to education, they need to take more action to make such statements a reality. The future of the education of many generations of students, systems of privilege and oppression, our province, our nation, and our world all depend on it.

Conclusion

I have discussed many aspects related to accessibility to post-secondary education at UBC. Situating UBC within the wider framework of accessibility to post-secondary as a whole is important to understand how UBC as an institution fits in to the broader picture. Further situating UBC as a colonial and corporatized institution is imperative for recognizing how accessibility is

related to these dynamics of the institution. Working to improve accessibility can only be done by keeping these aspects of the institution in mind, and continually conceptualizing new ways to decolonize the institution and de-corporatize the institution's hands in other oppressive practices.

Surveying UBC's current financial system is necessary to examine how the current structure serves to benefit only a very limited amount of the student population – both those who are looking to get accepted to UBC, and those who are already UBC students. Accessibility is not only about getting students to UBC, but about supporting them throughout their entire degree to ensure they can graduate and contribute further to society. Improving accessibility to post-secondary at UBC will provide all students with a chance to do so. UBC therefore must seek to reduce the costs of attending, seek further ways to provide resources alleviating financial burdens, and provide support throughout students' entire time spent at UBC. I have discussed many of these dynamics, and it is important for UBC to recognize that there is much that can be done to improve accessibility to their institution.

However, I recognize I have not discussed everything. Accessibility to post-secondary education is a wide topic and there are many aspects that I could have discussed in more detail. My hope was to create a broad picture of what accessibility to UBC looks like and identify some of the ways it can be addressed and improved for the future. More research must be dedicated to various aspects of this discussion, such as the role particular scholarships and bursaries have in students' financial accessibility to the institution, the discrepancies in costs of post-secondary education for domestic and international students, differences in accessibility for undergraduate versus graduate students, further ways to improve accessibility for students with various disabilities, and more ways we can seek to decolonize the institution of UBC and the education it

perpetuates. Continuing to research and discuss these dimensions is imperative to improve the accessibility to post-secondary education for all students.

Furthermore, it is imperative to continue to interrogate what it means to promote accessibility to an institution that continually dispossesses Indigenous land and is complicit in many oppressive practices. Though wanting to improve accessibility for all students may seem like a noble goal, doing so still continues to dispossess the Indigenous land upon which UBC sits. It is not necessarily UBC's place to decide who gets to obtain a post-secondary education on this land, or who is able to be on this land at all in the first place. We must recognize that everyone who attends UBC is also complicit in UBC's oppressive practices, and we must situate ourselves in relation to these practices and push UBC to remain accountable for them. As one of the most prestigious public institutions in the country and the world, UBC should be at the forefront of decolonizing its institution and providing accessible post-secondary education. We must seek to disrupt the current system of privilege in place, by UBC and many other post-secondary institutions, through providing accessible education for all students – and it is time for UBC to take action to make this accessibility happen.

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