

Association of Universities
and Colleges of Canada



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**Citizens of the World:
The Right Education for Changing Times**

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I am delighted to be here with you tonight, in this very welcoming and convivial group of university-educated women. Before I begin, let me applaud the very important work of the Canadian Federation of University Women.

AUCC has a special personal connection with your federation. Some years ago, one of your chapters provided a university scholarship to a young woman headed to the University of Western Ontario. That young woman is today AUCC's vice-president for international relations, and that first university scholarship has continued to inspire and motivate her throughout her studies and career.

You can see how your mission to promote education and the pursuit of knowledge can really make a lifelong difference.

Creating a lifelong impact is what universities are all about. And your group is part of the process in our society that encourages young people, especially women, to consider the benefits of higher education and to gain the advantages of a university degree.

I'm happy to report to you that more and more women in Canada are gaining those advantages. Women now make up close to 60 percent of Canadian university undergraduates. Even in fields where we were previously under-represented a few decades ago – like medicine and law -- women students now outnumber men.

The growing number of women in our classrooms represents just one way our universities are responding to provide the right education for the changing times we live in.

I know that all of you understand how very important a university degree can be – not just for young people interested in finding a good job, but for anyone who wants to know more about the world around them, and to better understand the challenges we face.

Today, in these changing times, postsecondary education is more important than ever – to our future, to our children's future, and to the future of our country.

Canada's prosperity depends on being competitive in a globalized world – on having new ideas, innovative products and more efficient processes. We must make sure that our work force is highly-qualified, highly-educated, skilled, flexible and motivated.

Let me give you just a few examples of the ways universities bring benefits to Canadians:

- Canadian universities conduct an estimated \$9 billion worth of research for our country – that's more than one-third of Canada's annual research effort.
- Our universities are creating new partnerships in response to changing needs. For example, universities are working more closely with community colleges, providing new programs that combine the benefits of university and college experiences. Here in Ottawa, for example, students can enrol in interactive media or network technology programs, and can graduate in just four years, equipped with an Algonquin College diploma and a Carleton University bachelor's degree in information technology.
- And even more universities across the country are offering co-op programs to provide that strong link between hands-on experience and theoretical knowledge. You'll find thousands of increasingly popular co-op programs at universities in fields as diverse as Chinese studies, aerospace engineering, biotechnology, international business, sports management, and even philosophy.
- Finally, let me say a few words about an area I think is central to the new kind of university education our students require to thrive in today's world –one that brings benefits both to the individual students and to the country -- and that's international education.

Many baby boomer parents who graduated from university in the 1960s or 1970s certainly benefited from an international experience. I spent that traditional summer traveling around Europe after graduation, with a backpack and a copy of *Europe on \$5 a day*, and although I learned a lot, the experience really wasn't integral to my studies.

But when my son Regan finished his second year of biology studies at McGill, he arrived home with his bags packed, complete with a French dictionary and his biology textbooks. He spent his third year in Grenoble, not only improving his French, but learning far more about

a different way of understanding science and the world. (I suspect that being located near a ski hill was not exactly a negative in his view either!)

As he and his friends gathered over the holidays, I was struck by the nonchalance with which these relatively newly minted university graduates (originally all high school graduates from Fredericton, New Brunswick) were making their mark on the international stage: one living in Los Angeles but operating globally with a world wide conservation NGO; another doing development work in Afghanistan; yet another working primarily in the U.S. but based in Ottawa. They are truly citizens of the world.

Our children are experiencing the world in ways we never dreamt of – and never had the courage to do. It's a different world for them, international education experiences like study abroad programs, exchanges, or international research projects provide them with an essential knowledge and understanding of other cultures and other ways of looking at the world.

Those cross-cultural skills are increasingly vital in today's globalized labour market and in our multicultural country. In fact, in a recent Ekos Research study, 85 percent of Canadians said that knowledge of other cultures and an understanding of the world are increasingly important qualities for today's employees.

Many of you can probably recount stories like that of my son – you likely all have a neighbour whose son volunteered on an international development project, a colleague whose daughter is teaching English overseas, or a niece who's been chosen to take part in a Canada Corps governance project.

But those kinds of international experiences are not available to all students equally, and it is vitally important for our country's future to make sure that more students can gain those very important benefits.

Canadian universities have more than 3,500 active international exchange agreements in place, but less than one percent of Canadian university students currently participate in international education opportunities. And the main barrier – the single most

important barrier -- is funding. That's hardly surprising. Canada spends only 70 cents per capita to provide international experiences for our university and college students -- far less than countries like Australia, the United States, and European countries.

International education experiences are just one part of what we call a "university degree for the 21st century", and we think it is crucial that more young Canadians -- from all family backgrounds, cultures, economic groups and regions -- gain access to the benefits that a high quality 21st century university education brings.

Our association knows how important higher education is to Canada's future. And I'm convinced that you, in this room, understand its importance as well.

But what about those who will lead Canada into the future? How will our political leaders ensure that Canadian universities can respond to the challenges of the global race for talent and ideas?

In the very important federal election now under way -- an election when Canadians will choose a path for future generations -- we think it is vital that everyone knows and understands what the leaders of the four major political parties believe about the critical issues that confront us. And so, on December 9th, Canada's universities sent an open letter to Paul Martin, Stephen Harper, Jack Layton and Gilles Duceppe, asking them to respond to eight important questions, all of them focused on critical aspects of higher education and research.

Today, we have released their answers to the media, have posted the responses on our AUCC Web site, and are sharing them widely with universities, community leaders and other groups across the country, in an effort to ensure that the views of all parties on these very important issues of postsecondary education and research reach as many voters as possible.

We hope that Canadians will take these views into account when they make their choices on January 23rd at the ballot box.

I have some copies of the responses with me, and you can also consult our website, www.aucc.ca, for the full version. But let me now

give you a preview of just a few of the questions, and tell you more about why we think it is so important for Canadians to know the views of our national leaders on these issues.

We asked the party leaders to comment on a range of key issues, including investing in graduate studies and research and investing in international education opportunities. Our very first question related to investments in university capacity and quality.

In the last decade, Canadian universities have awarded 1.8 million degrees, including about 235,000 master's degrees and almost 40,000 PhDs. There is growing demand for a university education these days. Young people – and their parents – understand the advantages, and are enrolling in universities in record numbers. In fact, since 2001 an additional 150,000 students enrolled at universities across the country – a 24 percent increase.

It's clear why students are choosing a university education. Over the past decade, the fastest growing occupations – those in management, finance, and the natural, social and health sciences – are the same ones that require the most education. Between 1990 and 2004, more than 1.5 million jobs were created for university graduates in Canada. Conversely, over that same period, 1.2 million jobs were lost for those who hadn't finished high school.

We know that university graduates gain better paying jobs. But you may not know that they earn, on average, \$1 million more over their careers than do high school graduates. And they're more likely to be in jobs with benefit plans, with pensions and ongoing professional development. University graduates are less likely to be unemployed, and the jobs they do get are far more fulfilling.

But do our graduates really receive the kind of education at our universities we know they'll need? Are we doing as much as we can for the next generation of students?

If you look to our nearest neighbour to the south, you'll know the answer. In constant dollars, per student funding from all levels of government for university operating costs is at a record low for Canadian universities. In the United States, governments invest

\$5,000 more for each student in four-year public universities and colleges than do Canadian governments.

That's \$5,000 more, per student. And those are important dollars. In fact, that difference in funding, between governments in the U.S. and in Canada, has created a "quality gap".

Simply put, U.S. universities have more money to educate their students. In 2004-05, government funding of public four-year colleges and universities in the U.S. was 25 percent higher in real terms per student than in 1980. In Canada, meanwhile, that funding had dropped by 20 percent.

One difference you'll see right away in the United States is in terms of faculty numbers. In the U.S., where enrolments have been going up just as they have in Canada, the growth in faculty has matched enrolment growth. But in Canada, since 1987, there are almost 50 percent more students in our university classrooms. Faculty numbers, on the other hand, have grown by only seven percent.

That difference means Canadian students have less access to faculty expertise. Our classes are larger. Canadian students can't always find a professor to provide that extra bit of help when they're struggling to understand a complex issue. Too often, they can't rely on professors to provide them with the academic or career mentoring they need. And when it comes time to find a professor to give the kind of personal recommendation students need to get into graduate school, or into teacher's college or to find that first job – too many Canadian students simply don't know a professor well enough to make that request.

The extra money that American public universities receive from governments is going straight to where it counts: U.S. universities are spending more money on quality -- on student instruction, on services to ensure students graduate, more on research, more on libraries and learning resources, and more on scholarships to make sure that all qualified students can gain the benefits of a quality higher education.

The federal government has a key role to play in providing universities with the resources they need. They can choose two

distinct – but not incompatible – paths for funding: targeted investments in areas of traditional federal involvement such as research or student assistance, or providing funds to the provinces through a transfer or a trust fund arrangement.

And so we asked all party leaders in our open letter:

“If your party forms the next government, will you work with the provinces to negotiate a dedicated transfer for postsecondary education?”

Our second question related to a specific targeted federal investment – provide a little-known federal initiative called the Indirect Costs program, which reimburses a portion of the costs of research that universities incur to conduct federally-funded research.

Now I realize that most Canadians don’t know what indirect costs are. It sounds pretty esoteric, and it’s probably not clear to you how something called indirect costs could have an impact on the educational experience that your children and grandchildren are getting at university. Let me explain.

Indirect costs of research include such much-needed activities associated with research as operating labs, libraries and computer networks, managing the intellectual property that results from university research, and making sure that researchers comply with health and safety regulations, and that ethical and environmental assessments are carried out. These costs are an essential part of the research endeavour.

The federal government does have a program to reimburse the indirect costs – currently at an average rate of 26 percent of direct costs of research. But in fact, universities incur at least 40 cents in essential expenditures for every research dollar they attract. So, with an average reimbursement rate far less than that, they need to find the difference somewhere – and that means is that they find the remainder – some \$250 million dollars every year -- in their general operating budgets.

In November, the government proposed to bring the reimbursement rate for indirect costs to a minimum of 40 percent in 2006-07 – and

that was very welcome news for universities. But that commitment has not yet become law, and so we asked party leaders this second question:

“Will you ensure that the Indirect Costs program provides reimbursement of a minimum rate of 40 percent of the direct costs of federally sponsored research, so that universities will cover fewer of these costs from their general operating budgets?”

You may be wondering at this point why we believe it is so important that federal government invest in university capacity, why we need to ensure that we close that “quality gap” with U.S. universities and why we need more funding for the indirect costs of research.

Let me give you just one example of how U.S. universities, with their additional government funding, are able to improve the educational experience for students. In the United States, more and more universities are providing students with a new type of educational experience called “service learning”.

Service learning combines students’ community volunteer activities with their academic course work, in a way that gives them a meaningful learning experience in a formal, structured way. It’s more than simply spending volunteer hours in the community. Through service learning, students make the link between what they learn in the classroom and in the community – between theory and practice.

In the United States, hundreds of universities offer service learning opportunities to enhance their students’ educational experience.

In Canada, too, some universities have begun introducing service learning into their curriculum, and the results are remarkable. Take the University of British Columbia’s Learning Exchange, for example. It’s a community outreach centre located in the heart of Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside, a low-income neighbourhood struggling with an influx of problems such as prostitution, crime, lack of adequate housing, and high unemployment.

That Downtown Eastside neighbourhood is worlds away from UBC's beautiful main campus, located in an affluent and leafy suburb on the edge of the Pacific Ocean.

But each year, dozens of UBC students make the trip to the Downtown Eastside to take part in the Learning Exchange. They spend their time handing out hot lunches in elementary schools, distributing food to food banks, helping teenagers with their homework, reading to elementary school students, or working in shelters for people with mental health problems.

For many of the UBC students, they're learning about a new and very different world.

One student, who works six hours a week distributing hot lunches to people who desperately need them, found that the program let her see the "human aspects" of poverty for the first time. As she said, "You see that it's not the bad stereotypes, but that people in the Downtown Eastside are just like you and me."

This particular student is now thinking about volunteering again at a local hospice, and is also thinking more deeply about how this experience will shape her future career choice. She knows more today about how theories turn into reality, and about how all of us living in a community are interconnected. She's increased her understanding of health, social, economic and political issues and gained some valuable life lessons through a unique academic experience.

It brings to mind a lovely passage from John Banville's recent Booker Prize winning novel "The Sea": "It was so much then a matter simply of accumulation, of taking things – new experiences, new emotions – and applying them like so many polished tiles to what would someday be the marvelously finished pavilion of the self."

Opening horizons for students, making sure their university education transforms their thinking – these are the real and concrete benefits of governments investing more in higher education.

It's vital that more students – indeed, that every qualified student – have access to these kinds of experiences. This brings me to the next set of questions we've put to Canada's political leaders – on affordability, outreach and support.

Access to higher education is so important in these changing times. Canada is often cited as a world leader in postsecondary access. By 2001, however, our **university** participation rate stood at only 21 percent of the population, and we sit squarely in the middle of the pack of OECD countries. Countries like Switzerland, Denmark, Germany, Sweden, Austria and Norway are winning the access race. And countries like India and China are making new and massive investments in higher education.

It's vital that Canada ensure that as many qualified students as possible can gain access to the benefits of higher education. Our economy has changed, from one that took advantage of our wealth in natural resources, to one based on knowledge and ideas. Whatever their family income or background, students who qualify for university or college, and who want to go, should be able to do so.

So we asked the party leaders:

“What will you do to ensure that money invested in student financial aid is going to those students in most need and that it is sufficient to meet the need?”

And we also asked them how they'll encourage under-represented groups such as Aboriginal Canadians or immigrants to enrol in university, and how they'll ensure that these students have the support systems they need in order to graduate. Many universities already have remarkable programs under way to support and encourage more Aboriginal students to attend university, and we need to make sure more such programs are funded.

Lakehead University, for example, runs a successful Native Access Program, an academic transition program for Aboriginal people who have been out of school for two or more years. Because the university knows how important it is to make Aboriginal students feel supported and at home on campus, the university provides a range of cultural services, including connecting students with Elders; setting

up traditional ceremonies at the university such as sweat lodges or student pow-wows; and organizing feasts and special events in liaison with the community – all efforts designed to encourage Aboriginal students to continue and complete their studies.

Our universities need more such innovative academic and support programs to ensure we can fully develop the potential skills, knowledge and creativity of all segments of Canadian society, and to ensure that Canada and Canadians can truly benefit from the abundant opportunities offered by our higher education institutions.

Opportunity, in fact, is an interesting word at this juncture. You have an opportunity as you vote in the upcoming election to make sure that the representatives you choose truly understand the values and priorities you hold dear. One of those priorities should be – **must be** – investments in our universities.

There can be no prosperity without new ideas and knowledge. That is what our universities deliver. We do not have to leave our future to chance.

Concrete measures that bolster higher education and research represent a sure-fire strategy for success. I invite all of you to visit AUCC's website, at www.aucc.ca/election, to see how the four major federal parties responded to our questions on research.

And then consider the options, and make sure the government you choose is one that makes higher education a top priority for Canada.

With the groundbreaking research and innovation taking place in our universities, with the right education for the changing times we live in, we can assure for ourselves, for our children, and for their children, the kind of future we would all wish for – and the kind of future our country needs and deserves.

Thank you.