

A Failing Grade:  
Ontario's treatment of post secondary education is  
falling behind its global competitors

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Post secondary education continues to face major challenges in Ontario. Despite an injection of much needed funding in 2005, Ontario universities remain chronically under funded. Inadequate support threatens the global competitiveness of Ontario universities and the provincial economy.

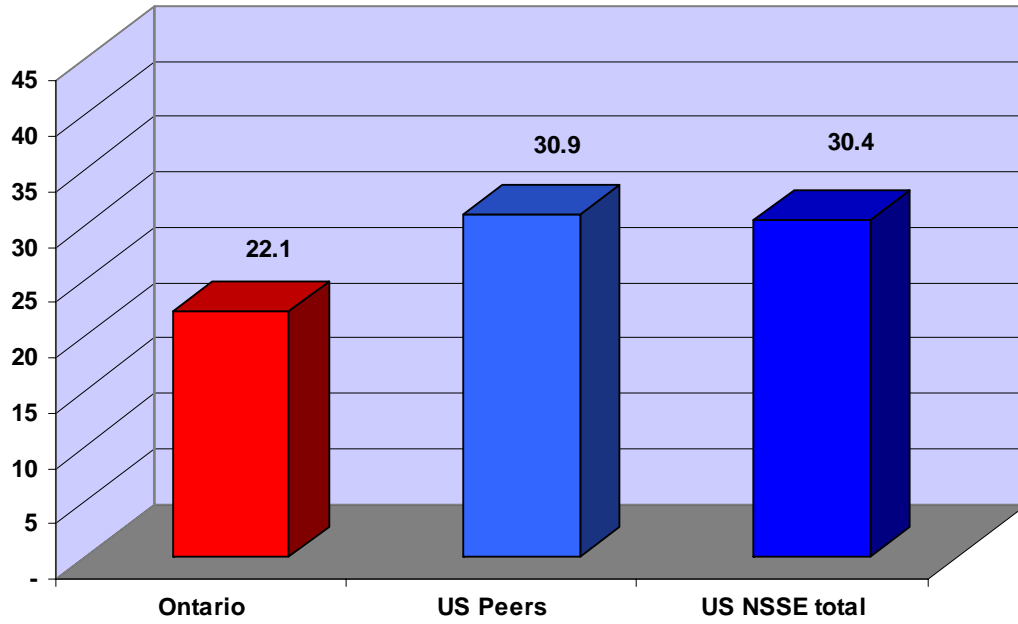
Three major indicators confirm that Ontario is falling behind its peers in terms of its treatment of post secondary education: per student funding, student faculty ratios and student interaction with faculty.

Ontario's per student funding has not recovered from the cuts of the 1990s. Per student funding levels for higher education are now 25 per cent below the Canadian average and 33 per cent below the average funding from American state governments.

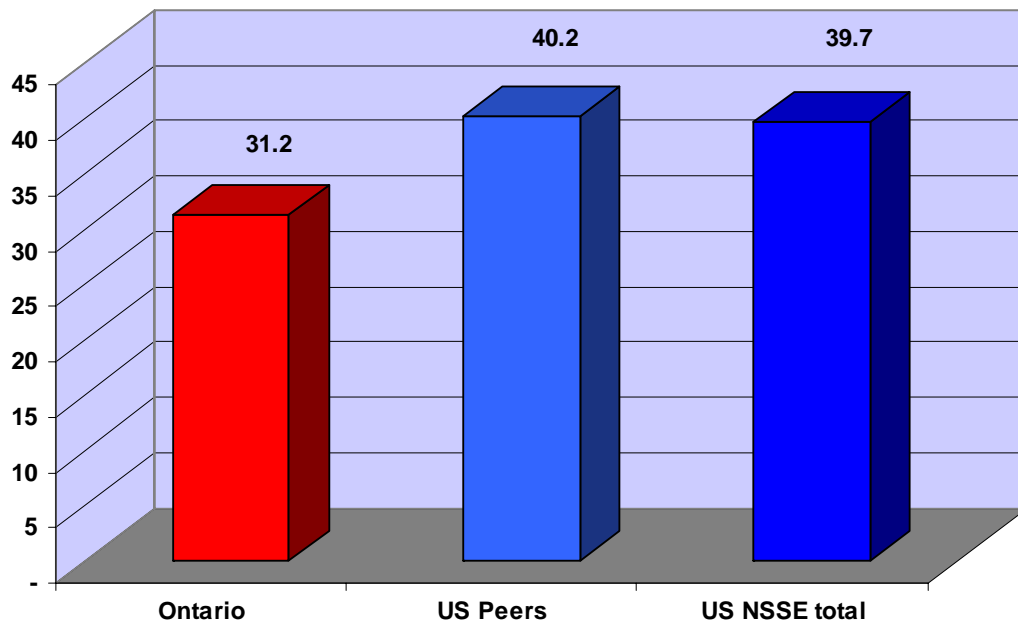
The most obvious consequence of this inadequate funding is Ontario's poor student faculty ratios. Ontario falls behind the rest of Canada *and* its American peer institutions in terms of student faculty ratios. Ontario has 27 students for every professor. This high ratio, which has dramatically deteriorated over the past decade, is the worst in Canada and is far behind the 15:1 ratio in American peer institutions. It means Ontario students are forced to deal with larger class sizes and much less interaction with faculty.

Evidence is emerging that poor student faculty ratios are affecting students. The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) measures student engagement at universities across North America. Last year's data reveals low rates of student-faculty interaction in Ontario. When asked about their interaction with faculty, Ontario students consistently report 28 percent lower interaction levels than students at peer institutions in the United States. Complete results for 2007 are not yet available.

**First Year Student-Faculty Interaction scores**



**Senior Year Student-Faculty Interaction scores**



The importance of student faculty interaction cannot be overstated. As the NSSE evaluations say: “Students learn firsthand how experts think about and solve practical problems by interacting with faculty members inside and outside the classroom. As a result, their teachers become role models, mentors, and guides for continuous, life-long learning.”

Ontario is simply not doing its part to ensure students are receiving the quality education they deserve. Ontario is not hiring the faculty it needs to meet high faculty retirement rates and growing university enrolments. In fact, according to the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC), universities all across Canada will have to replace 21,000 retiring faculty and create anywhere from 3,600 to 13,600 new positions to meet demand.

Currently Ontario universities are addressing their budget crunches by hiring a high proportion of faculty on short-term contracts – more than half of new faculty hires – who, in spite of their ability and dedication, cannot hope to give students the continuity, and the research opportunities, that tenure-stream faculty can.

The government must commit to raising Ontario’s support for universities to the national average. This means an additional one hundred and twenty five dollars per person per year in operating and capital investment or \$1.6 billion every year for the next three years.

This investment would allow Ontario to hire the 11,000 full-time professors that it needs by 2009-2010 to keep up with enrolment and ensure internationally competitive student-faculty ratios. Increasing the number of faculty would also reduce class sizes, and provide more student - faculty interaction.

Clearly the data that are available on per student funding, student faculty ratios and students' interaction with faculty show that Ontario has reason for concern. However, it is a mistake to assume these problems are irreversible. Greater investment in post secondary education will give students the quality education they deserve. Ontario must seize this opportunity to improve knowledge diversity, innovation and the learning environment at Ontario universities so that next year's student faculty ratios and student faculty interaction improve.