

# Questions for Candidates

When asking a question at an all-candidates debate, there are two audiences for the question: the crowd and the candidate. The people present at a debate (and any media) need context for the question you are asking, and they also should be clear about what answer student representatives want to hear. In this sense, questions to candidates serve a public awareness tool for a given issue. Therefore, shape your questions to get a clear response from candidates, but also try to ensure that the crowd at the event can recognize a poor answer.

**Make detailed notes of candidates answers. Use the lines below if necessary.**

[illegible]

## FUNDING

According to the Canadian Association of University Teachers, Canadian universities are underfunded by \$1.5 billion annually compared to 1993-94 levels, and \$3.6 billion annually compared to historic levels of 0.5% of GDP.

*Considering this, will you commit to a dedicated transfer increased by \$3.6 billion a year to the provinces for post-secondary education?*

## NATIONAL GRANTS

Canadian financial aid measures currently concentrate aid in the form of loans rather than grants, leading to very high levels of debt for students from the poorest backgrounds. Average debt levels have tripled since 1990 and now stand at over \$25,000.

***Will your party create a national system of need-based grants to replace the current Canada Student Loan Program?***

**MILLENNIUM FOUNDATIONS**

In 1998, the Liberal government created the Millennium Scholarship Foundation. By every measurable standard, the scholarship has been a dismal failure, providing financial assistance to only 7% of Canadian students. Further, in three provinces, students get no benefit from the program at all.

***Will your party dismantle the Millennium Scholarship Foundation and replace it with a national system of need-based grants?***

## BANKRUPTCY PROHIBITION

Changes to the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act made it impossible for any graduate to declare bankruptcy for ten years following the completion of their studies, no matter how dire the circumstances.

*Only Canadians convicted of fraud face similar punishment. Will you amend the bankruptcy act to remove this prohibition?*

## FUNDING

With cuts to federal funding for post-secondary education in the 1990s, tuition fees skyrocketed by 125%. The average undergraduate tuition fees in Canada last year were higher than \$4,000, and much higher fees are charged for some professional programs.

*Will your government work with the provinces to reduce tuition fees? How?*

## INCOME CONTINGENT REPAYMENT SCHEMES

Income Contingent Repayment Loan (ICR) schemes have been discredited in Canada. In other countries where ICR schemes have been implemented, tuition fees have skyrocketed and total student debt has ballooned to unprecedented levels. High levels of student debt constitute a major financial burden on primarily young people, yet income contingent repayment loans continue to be discussed in some circles as a replacement for the Canada Student Loans Program.

*If Income Contingent Repayment Loan Schemes are introduced in Parliament, will you vote against their implementation? If your party does implement ICR schemes, will you resign your seat?*

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# 2004 Federal Election CAMPAIGN GUIDE

For the first time since 1988, the outcome of this year's federal election will not be certain until the votes are counted. The Canadian political landscape has changed dramatically since Jean Chretien was elected to a third term, four years ago. The Alliance and Tory parties have merged to form the Conservative Party under the leadership of former National Citizens Coalition head Stephen Harper. The NDP has a popular Toronto city councilor as its new leader. The Liberal Party has selected long serving federal Finance Minister Paul Martin to lead it into this election. And, after a brief period of weakness, the Bloc Quebecois are now near 50% in Quebec polls.

This competition for votes creates an exciting opportunity for students in Canada. As candidates work to earn votes, they will be more likely to make commitments that reflect the majority public opinion of the day. Research conducted for the Federation shows that Canadian voters overwhelmingly support the Federation's goals for public education. Student activists must use the campaign to turn that public support into candidate support.

Election timing and growing public cynicism will make that task more challenging. Low voter turnout and voter interest, particularly among young people, will make it easier for incumbent candidates to avoid making commitments on the Federation's priorities. It will also be more difficult to find and communicate to student voters. In the face of these challenges, student activists will have to work harder than ever. This election, that work will make a difference.

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# 2004 lection

# Campaign Overview

## Campaign Goals

The Federation's goal for the campaign is straight forward: to make accessible, high quality, public post-secondary education a vote-determining issue for the majority of Canadian voters. To succeed, the Federation and its member locals will have to:

- inform members and the general public about the national crisis in post-secondary education caused by years of federal underfunding;
- mobilise member participation in the campaign;
- demonstrate to candidates the overwhelming public support for an accessible, high quality system of public post-secondary education in Canada; and
- increase turnout among voters who support the Federation's goals.

## Campaign Policy Demands

1. Greater investment in post-secondary education:
  - Replace the Canada Social Transfer with a post-secondary education transfer. The transfer would be a federal cash transfer vehicle exclusively designated for colleges and universities.
  - Implement a post-secondary education agreement based on the five principles of medicare: public administration, public funding, accessibility, comprehensiveness in providing a complete array of public educational options and the transferability or portability of credits and assistance between institutions and provinces.
2. Student financial assistance that reduces student debt:
  - Cancel the Canada Education Savings Grant program, education tax credits, and the Millennium Scholarship Foundation to fund a national needs-based grants program.
  - Reject income contingent loan repayment schemes.

# Campaign Activities

national stories. Contribute your own opinion editorial pieces about:

- the federal parties' platforms and how they will affect your campus;
- student debt stories;
- the importance of voting for candidates who support post-secondary education;
- \* the need for many students to work full-time while attending school full-time; and
- any local issue of which students and community members should be aware when they vote.

## "Vote For A Change" Campaign (voteforachange.ca)

Two primary goals were set for the campaign: first, to provide a clearinghouse of materials and research for smaller, progressive organisations seeking to mobilise for the federal election and, second, to boost the voter turnout of marginalised Canadians.

Though the campaign is non-partisan, the coalition decided to focus on these underrepresented groups by crafting messages not espoused by the governing party. Ten slogans now adorn a series of postcards and stickers as well as a poster template.

The Federation placed a bulk order for materials that were distributed to member locals several weeks before the anticipated election call in late April 2004. Each member local received a

sample order of the materials and have the opportunity to order additional supplies.

A website, [www.voteforachange.ca](http://www.voteforachange.ca), was designed to communicate the messages. The site is a clearinghouse of research and analysis on government policy. In addition, it is also a virtual meeting place for activists to exchange ideas and strategies.

## voteEDUCATION.ca

The Federation has developed an online clearing house for up-to-the-minute information on the federal election. Members can download an analysis of the party platforms and the parties' response to a questionnaire about post-secondary education and research.

The site will also be a resource for issues, including but not limited to: federal funding, student debt, university research, Aboriginal support, and international students. Finally, voteEDUCATION.ca will provide detailed information about how to vote.

Member locals are strongly encouraged to include a prominent link to voteEDUCATION.ca on their own website for the duration of the election campaign.

# Campaign Activities

ORGANISE FOR CHANGE

## Attending All-candidates' Meetings in your Community

All-candidates' meetings are an excellent opportunity to clarify party positions on post-secondary education and secure commitments from those seeking office. If a candidate in your constituency makes a commitment on post-secondary education – positive or negative – please forward this information to the national office. In addition to holding politicians and parties accountable in the long-term, we can expose commitments that may harm students.

## Organising All-Candidates Forums on Campus

Hosting an all-candidates forum is one way to make your voice heard and ensure education becomes an election issue.

Your student union's Campaigns Committee (or External Affairs Committee or Student Action Committee) is the most effective organising tool on campus for Election 2004.

Be sure to:

- Consult with your local coalition partners.
- Send invitations and book facilities and equipment early.
- Produce posters and other materials to advertise events.

- Develop a strategy to earn media attention, both on campus and in your local community.
- Avoid conflicts with other events.
- Inform the national office about on-campus events.

## Mobilising Members at High Profile Events

The major media outlets will be accompanying the party leaders and other high-profile politicians on their campaign tour. Some events are being covered live on CBC Newsworld and CTV NewsNet. Some events are closed to the public, but campaign organisers cannot bar access to public space.

Asking questions of the leaders or holding placards with an education message are also a very effective strategy: the cameras will be there, so we should be there as well, with a strong visual presence to convey our message. The Parties are not providing detailed itineraries of their leaders ahead of time, but major media outlets list the party leaders' itineraries on their web sites, usually a day in advance. Local papers will often publicise when a leader is coming to town.

## Local Media Outreach

Campus papers and local media outlets are always looking for ways to localise

# Target Audiences

ORGANISE FOR CHANGE

## Youth and Students

While the age of our members is diverse, a significant proportion fall into the 18 to 24 year-old demographic. Voters in this age group have the lowest voter participation rate of any age category in federal elections.

These voters are directly and primarily affected by government decision making on post-secondary education. Tuition fees and student financial assistance are vote-determining issues for people in this age group. Though this group is difficult to motivate to vote, politicians do respond when they believe youth and students may become engaged.

## Parents

The average Canadian parent knows that their child will require some post-secondary education and training if they are to achieve their goals in life. These parents are concerned that rising tuition fees and student debt will keep their child from getting the education they need. More and more of these parents are still dealing with debt that they accumulated while in university or college. Many do not know the impact that federal government decisions have on these issues. However, voter participation is strong among this group and, as a group they pay attention to election issues.

## Candidates and Political Parties

A lot can happen in a month-long campaign. Candidates will adjust their positions based on their values and on their electability. Political parties will follow public opinion polling and media coverage closely. The tighter the race, the more likely the leading party will be to respond to public opinion. The Federation must ensure that candidates and their political parties are hearing the Federation's message not just through the media, but on the doorstep, at town hall meetings, in debates, and from their pollsters.

*\*Vote Determining – A term used to describe an issue that will affect how someone votes. There are many issues that people care about and support but don't sway their votes. These are not considered vote determining. There are two issues that are consistently vote determining – these are health care and taxes.*

# Campaign Issues

## The Public Policy Environment

During the election campaign, our analysis and tactics must resonate broadly, so Canadians choose an education agenda over a narrow tax cut agenda. Polls consistently show that Canadians, despite being bombarded with messages about tax cuts, are more concerned about investing in basic social programs like health and education.

For a number of years, the Federation and its coalition partners have been promoting shared values and equality of opportunity instead of an agenda of tax cuts that benefits the wealthiest Canadians and most profitable corporations at the expense of well-funded social programs. In recent provincial elections this work has paid off, with voters rejecting tax cuts in favor of restoring public services.

The powerful minority view pushing tax cuts must be undermined if we are to successfully make post-secondary education funding an issue in the election

## Main Issues in Election 2004

The main issues of our campaign are the effects of the federal funding cutbacks to post-secondary education, and the leadership role the federal government must play in Canada's system of higher education.

### TUITION FEES

In 1994, the federal Liberal government began cutting billions of dollars from post-secondary education funding to the provinces. Since then, tuition fees have increased on average by more than doubled. Although setting tuition fees is provincial jurisdiction, the federal government can exercise direct influence through transfer payments.

### STUDENT DEBT

Since 1990, student debt has tripled, and skyrocketing tuition fees are the primary cause. Stagnating wages for low income earners are a second cause. The federal government is responsible for the majority of student financial

aid and most student debt is owed to the federal government. Instead of taking action against student debt, the federal government has introduced gimmicky programs and targeted student debtors with vindictive legislation like the ten-year prohibition on bankruptcy.

### INCOME CONTINGENT LOAN REPAYMENT SCHEMES

In the face of skyrocketing student debt, some parties are looking to find ways to manage even more student debt instead of looking to reduce debt. One particularly insidious proposal is Income Contingent Repayment (ICR). In the many countries that have experimented with ICR, tuition fees have shot up over 500 percent and students from low and middle income families have remained in debt into their forties. It is projected that many, particularly women who took time off to have children, will carry their student loans until they retire.

### PRIVATISATION AND GLOBALISATION

The current model for globalisation does not promote the equitable redistribution of wealth and creates economic exclusion everywhere in the world. Not only does this phenomenon pose significant risks to public services, but it also raises issues related to working conditions and the environment.

Education, a sector once spared by trade globalization and liberalization, is now a top trade priority for powerful countries, including the United States. In the long term, the proliferation of private institutions demanding public subsidies will hasten the divestment from universities and colleges, since the State would not be able to effectively support all institutions. The withering of the public system would eliminate all semblance of accessible post-secondary education.

Parties committed to protecting public education will openly reject international trade in services.

For more information, see the Federation's 2004-2005 Campaigns and Government Relations Strategy, available from Federation member students' union offices.

## ANSWERS TO COMMON QUESTIONS

### Isn't post-secondary education a provincial responsibility?

Although a strict legal interpretation of Canada's constitution makes education a provincial jurisdiction, the federal government has had an important role in enhancing and protecting social programs for generations. Since the end of the Second World War, the federal government has had a major role in student financial assistance and core funding of colleges and universities.

Much like health care, post-secondary education is a shared responsibility between the federal and provincial governments.

### Doesn't post-secondary education benefit the individual, so shouldn't the student bear the financial responsibility?

Health care benefits the individual even more exclusively than education, yet Canadians share the cost of maintaining a healthy population.

The most equitable way to guarantee that the cost of higher education and training does not prevent access for those from low and middle income backgrounds, and that those with higher incomes contribute fairly to their education is to reduce upfront user fees and recover the cost through a system of progressive taxation.

### Students are calling for a national system of grants, but isn't that what the Millennium Scholarship Foundation is?

The Millennium Scholarship Foundation has proven to be more of a publicity stunt than a social program. The \$2.5 billion Millennium Scholarship Fund, represents only a fraction of the funding cut from higher education and "helps" less than seven percent of students collecting student financial assistance.

### But where does the money come from to pay for education? Can we really afford it?

The federal government could save over \$2 billion annually by converting programs like the Canada Education Savings Grant, education tax credits, and the useless Millennium Scholarship Foundation into a grants program that actually helps needy students.

# Myth Buster

### It's the provincial government's fault tuition fees are so high, right?

Both levels of government share the responsibility for making education accessible. Although the provincial government has the direct responsibility for setting tuition fees, a fair financial contribution from the federal government through transfer payments facilitates reducing tuition fees. Conversely, the federal government needs to seek more accountability for its financial contributions to the provinces so increased federal funding finds its way to contributing to tuition fee reductions.

### Isn't an income contingent repayment loan scheme a less painful way to repay student loans, a "flexible" solution to student debt?

The whole point of an ICR loan scheme is to cushion massive increases in tuition fees. ICR loans are not a new way to finance loans but rather a way to further individualise the cost of an education. ICR loan schemes almost always go hand in hand with higher fees and massive increases in student debt. Under ICR loan schemes, the loan would accumulate interest from the moment it is disbursed. Under many models, students would have to repay their income contingent loans for most of their lives.

### What options are there besides an ICR plan?

Rather than promoting income contingent loans and lifelong debt, there are more realistic and equitable measures to solve the student debt crisis.

The best federal policy to reduce student debt is for the federal government to replace the Canada Student Loans Program with a comprehensive system of need-based grants. Canada is in the indefensible position of being one of only three industrialised countries with no large-scale grants programs (together with Japan and South Korea).

The time has come to move beyond debt management and to implement measures to reduce and eliminate debt. The solution to the student debt crisis lies in policies that directly reduce debt, not drag out their repayment period.