



OCAD University  
2022 Ontario Budget  
Pre-Budget Submission

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January 2022

Submitted to:

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### OCAD University—creatively driving economic recovery in Ontario

Established in 1876, the Ontario College of Art and Design University (OCAD U) is the provinces' only, and preeminent, art and design university training the next generation of critical, creative, design-driven professionals and innovators. OCAD U's programs focus on art, design, digital media, and comparable applications of these skills, into wider domains; this includes fields reliant on workers being able to creatively engage with, reimagine and lead Ontario's culture and tourism industries, recently decimated by COVID-19. OCAD U alumni are trained and educated to fuel entrepreneurship. Over 46 percent of our alumni are entrepreneurs or self-employed, while 81 percent operate their own businesses, at least once, during their careers. OCAD U's highly agile and entrepreneurial culture also supports faculty members, many of whom have run their own companies.

### COVID-19 and the future of Ontario

OCAD U, like all of Ontario's post-secondary institutions, has been profoundly impacted by the ongoing pandemic.

The institution's creative and collaborative approach to art and design education naturally extends to bolstering the social and economic recovery across the province, during the most significant life and livelihood disturbance of our generation.

COVID-19 and the rise of the Delta and Omicron variants are a continuing presence in Ontario and are forcing our society and economy to adapt to new realities. Since March 2020, we've not only witnessed the social and economic difficulties and barriers posed by the pandemic, but our general health and wellbeing as individuals, as well as sectors, have been significantly impacted.

This difficult time is not over.

Yet, OCAD U recognizes opportunities that would not otherwise exist arising alongside pandemic challenges and barriers such as perfecting and scaling virtual learning infrastructure and offerings, to enhance Ontario's leadership and reputation in the global marketplace of post-secondary education.

An institution built upon creating and rebuilding, OCAD U has met the pandemic head on. Cognizant of its preeminence as an institution focused on digital, creativity, complex and innovative problem-solving and collaborative skills development, OCAD U can play an even more central part in rebuilding Ontario's economy. Not only does the university's highly skilled talent pipeline feed all sectors of the economy, but it also prepares students with the tools for the jobs of tomorrow.

The future of Ontario work, especially post-pandemic, requires a savvy entrepreneurial spirit, coupled with agility and flexibility in action: With half of OCAD U's employed alumni identifying as entrepreneurs or small business owners, this community is ready for today's important work. The university furthers its commitment to produce the smart, proactive, innovative thinkers and doers the world needs for an economic recovery and more resilient future.

OCAD U is ready to help reanimate Ontario's lucrative creative industries and art, culture and tourism sectors—both in Toronto and from Windsor to Cornwall and Red Lake in our Province's Northwest. Whether Ontario remains in a pandemic, the crisis becomes an endemic or ultimately it subsides, OCAD U will do so safely, innovatively and in the entrepreneurial spirit that defines our province.

The university's mandate is to answer the most pressing questions of our times; OCAD U is positioned well and prepared not only to answer these questions, but also to steer the conversation, particularly about reanimating provincial culture industries and getting as many people as possible back into the workforce.

Never in its 146-year history have OCAD U's audacious and innovative approaches to real-world problems been more necessary than they are now.

To respond at a level in keeping with its historically innovative and proactive response to major challenges, the institution requests the province's help with the following in Budget 2022:

- Improve Financial Sustainability for Ontario's Universities
- Support Innovative Approaches to Post-Secondary Students' Mental Health
- Explore New Learning Models
- Fund and Leverage Universities' Infrastructure

These four recommendations will play a central and active role in rejuvenating this province's economic well-being.

#### **Recommendation #1: Improve Financial Sustainability for Ontario's Universities**

OCAD U, and Ontario universities, in general, continue to play a critical role in helping Ontario rebuild from the COVID-19 pandemic—developing a more competitive workforce for an increasingly global economy. Ontario's universities are an asset to the province attracting money and interests from around the world and our strengths come from the critical investments from the province.

Ontario's university sector has incurred many costs due to COVID-19 that include developing alternative modes of course and exam delivery, as well as mental health and wellness services; reconfiguring classrooms and residences to accommodate distancing protocols including the creation of quarantine spaces and ensuring access to appropriate personal protective equipment; and providing emergency relief funds for students.

These financial challenges have been further compounded by reduced revenue to the sector. According to the Council of Ontario Universities, since 2006-2007, universities saw a decline in inflation-adjusted operating grants per student by 21 percent. Since 2019, an ongoing tuition freeze and a 10 percent cut to domestic tuition has cost the sector \$1.2 billion. Each additional year of a tuition freeze means universities will lose \$740 million in foregone revenue, annually.

This pattern of reduced investment by government threatens universities' ability to address growing needs for modernized programs and learning environments; increased campus services in areas such as student mental health; and more cost-intensive resources to foster a culture of innovation. To ensure Ontario successfully recovers from the pandemic and meet the needs of a growing economy, the provincial government must work together with universities to expand postsecondary education in Ontario.

Reduced revenues caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, inflationary pressures and government limiting revenue sources are limiting the potential of Ontario's universities to build

the Ontario for tomorrow. Now is the time to make the investments and unleash the potential for Ontario's universities.

**OCAD U recommends that the Government of Ontario allow for flexibility in setting tuition fees, multi-year planning and budgeting, and allocating inflationary increases to operating grants.**

#### **Recommendation #2: Support Innovative Approaches to Post-Secondary Students' Mental Health**

OCAD U shares the provincial government's commitment to investing in youth mental health. We welcome the provinces' *Roadmap to Wellness* plan to ensure all Ontarians have access to high-quality, easily accessible mental health supports. Yet, OCAD U also believes more can be done to prioritize post-secondary student mental health.

As one of six guiding principles, OCAD U's 2017-2022 Academic Plan prioritizes the health and wellness of its students. The implementation of this priority area involves, the development of a comprehensive and integrated framework to promote campus mental health that focuses on fostering community and connectedness, building resilience and increasing help-seeking behaviour, support the development of life skills including financial management.

Our commitment to post-secondary student mental health has facilitated OCAD U's participation in the provincial working group advocating for additional resources in supporting the unique needs of mental health for young adults and postsecondary students

The OCAD U Student Wellness Centre had set out to integrate all student services providing education, awareness and support related to mental health issues into one distinct unit including accessibility services, counselling, sexual violence support and health, and health promotion services.

We are able to fund the mental health services primarily through two Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities Mental Health Grants renewed, approximately \$200,000.00 annually. These grants go directly to staff salaries.

During the pandemic, post-secondary students have suffered from the disruption brought about by enforced absence from campus and classroom. But few have been affected as severely as: art and design students, who have not only missed the social elements of post-secondary experience but have also experienced reduced access to studio resources, critical to their education; BIPOC students whose communities have been severely and disproportionately impacted by COVID-19; and first year, and International, students who completely missed the experience of campus life in 2019/20.

The effects of these post-secondary education interruptions will linger for some years, during which mental health promotion and mental illness prevention will be essential for Ontario's future leaders, thinkers, and professionals.

With two-thirds of our student population requesting support from OCAD U's Student Wellness Centre, during the pandemic and the move to online classes, we only expect that number to rise as in-person classes resume. To meet the unique mental health needs of postsecondary students—specifically at OCAD U—we need additional staffing resources to enhance awareness, training, and support.

In addition to provincial mental health grants, OCAD U seeks support for its innovative approach to student mental health offerings. For example, the Mindful Campus Initiative (MCI)—led by OCAD U—is an essential response to the mental health issues caused by COVID-19.

Implemented by a collaborative pan-Canadian network of post-secondary art and design schools and faculties, and in partnership with the Centre for Mindfulness Studies and OYA Media Group, MCI will lift the mental health and well-being of post-secondary students through a coherent set of health prevention and promotion programs. MCI is unified around a common theme that mindfulness training and practice give students the essential coping and resilience-building tools that will carry them through challenging emotional times, and prevent mental illness.

The focus of the MCI is two-fold: 1) to enhance students' coping and resilience skills; and 2) to create a supportive environment in which emerging creative artists and designers, including those from underrepresented communities, can flourish. These parallel components include a set of mindfulness-based interventions targeting resilience as well as a comprehensive set of mental health promotion materials linked to a peer support network, to support program recruitment and retention.

**OCAD U recommends that the Government of Ontario continues to support post-secondary education student mental health and expand funding to pay for innovative approaches to mental health including the Mindful Campus Initiative.**

### **Recommendation #3: Explore New Learning Models**

The pandemic required the expansion of hybrid and online learning at OCAD University and sped up plans already in place, internally, to transform the delivery of art and design courses. Building on funding from eCampusOntario, we were able to bolster the institutions capacity to rapidly expand digital learning spaces and capacities.

Despite our accomplishments, we still require additional instructional design and evaluation support to realize our immediate goals and build long-term capacity. OCAD U has limited permanent capacity for hybrid and online learning, and no dedicated administrative position exists to conduct multi-year data collection and analysis to inform evidence-based strategic directions for hybrid and online learning.

OCAD University is increasing its commitment to undergraduate, graduate, continuing education, reskilling, upskilling and micro-credentialling offerings to support provincial economic recovery.

OCAD U Continuing Studies facilitates a number of courses, micro-credentials and certificates designed to upskill and reskill art, culture, and tourism and hospitality sector workers. Additional provincial funding would enable OCAD U to develop additional continuing education programming to ensure more workers, in more sectors, can retrain quickly and re-enter the workforce.

Interactive digital media and video gaming are growing sectors—and this growth has been accelerated by the pandemic. OCAD U intends to increase its already substantial contributions to the digital, tourism, culture and creative industries, to drive pandemic recovery.

Interactive digital media and video game sectors are already situated to help Ontario's culture, creative and tourism sectors, both expand and enhance state-of-the-art online experiences for a wide variety of audiences and customers. OCAD U can ensure these sectors exceed their already huge growth potential.

During the past year, OCAD U has expanded its virtual and hybrid learning capacity with funding from MCU and eCampusOntario. Continued investment in these important grant programs will ensure that the university can continue to innovate and evolve its curriculum to meet both labour market and student learning needs.

**OCAD University recommends that the Government of Ontario continue investment in virtual and hybrid learning capacity through various government programs and eCampusOntario.**

#### **Recommendation #4: Fund and Leverage Universities' Infrastructure**

OCAD University occupies a unique space, straddling and linking the postsecondary education and culture sectors. Our location, in the heart of downtown Toronto, adjacent to the University of Toronto, Ryerson University and George Brown College as well as near the AGO, TIFF, National Film Board and Queen Street West Fashion Design District guarantees us proximity to the creative district. It also means, however, that space on campus is at a premium and limited.

OCAD U is grateful for the \$1.7 million in facilities renewal funding the Ontario government provided in 2022. While the university still has a major backlog of capital projects, with additional COVID-19-specific retrofits required, this government funding will positively impact the university's ability to continue preparing and advancing Ontario's future industry and sector leaders.

Further, as OCAD U looks to different models of space, including collaborating and sharing space with other culture sector partners like TIFF and Artscape, we would welcome more flexibility from the Ministry of Colleges and Universities with regards to how we use facilities renewal funds for rented and shared spaces.

In addition, in order to fully bolster and harness the OCAD U communities' incredible intelligence, resilience and creativity, we require a fully digital, physically upgraded infrastructure foundation.

Finally, OCAD University looks forward to further infrastructure program announcements as part of Ontario's pandemic recovery and economic stimulus package.

**OCAD U recommends that the Government of Ontario continues to invest in post-secondary infrastructure through existing programs including the Facilities Renewal Program as well as expanded support to include innovative approaches for space and the inclusion of digital infrastructure that bolster the cultural sector.**