

## PUBLIC INVESTMENT WILL BE HANDSOMELY REPAID

**D**uring this series the phenomenon of university participation in low- and middle-income groups falling in lockstep with rising tuition costs, while overall demand for already-scarce university places continues, nevertheless, to rise in unprecedented numbers, has been examined. Perhaps it is time, then, for a discussion of why the topic of university accessibility merits so much ink.

According to the 2001 Census the odds are that, if you are a university graduate, you are going to earn an extra \$1 million by the time you have completed your working life.

University graduates represent only 15 per cent of the population over the age of 18, but they contribute almost 35 per cent of all the income taxes paid into the Canadian economy. On the basis of the percentage of the population they represent, this is more than twice their share.

Those numbers alone may justify widespread public interest in ensuring that a university place is available for every qualified Canadian who seeks one. However, it doesn't stop there.

Don't forget, a maximum of only around 50 percent of the extra million dollars in lifetime earnings is going to be paid in income taxes. Eventually, the rest will trickle down into the general economy, thereby further contributing to the public purse; directly through sales taxes and, in turn, indirectly through the taxes paid from the profits of the owners, and from the salaries of the employees, of the businesses in which the bulk of it will be spent – and so on.

Also, there is a direct relationship, which benefits all of us, between level of education and reliance on social programmes. University graduates consume only eight per cent of all government assistance (of the nature, for example, of employment insurance and welfare payments). This, though – again on a percentage-of-population basis - is only half their share.

As the knowledge economy has grown by leaps and bounds, there has been a steadily increasing demand for the products of our universities, and it continues to grow at a mind-numbing rate.

The Association of University and Colleges of Canada predicted in 2002 that university enrolments were likely to increase by between 20 and 30 per cent by 2011. They actually increased by 15 per cent in only the first two years of that period.

The AUCC also anticipates that, over the same period, there will be corresponding demand for 40,000 new faculty members: 20,000 to replace those who, by 2011, will have retired or left the system for other reasons; 10,000 to accommodate the enlarged student body; and 10,000 to “meet the growing demand for university research and to improve the quality of the educational and research experiences of those who will attend university in the coming years”

The research presently being performed in Canadian universities is valued by AUCC at \$6.8 Billion annually, with more than half of that tab alone being picked up by the universities in the form of the allocation to research of faculty time and other in-house resources.

In the face of all this, the recent history of government operating support, which fell from 83 per cent in 1980 to only marginally more than 60 per cent in the Fall of 2003, is risible.

For a large number of Canadians to be able, in the new millennium, to develop and contribute their capabilities fully to society, all levels of government must take imminent, meaningful steps on a massive scale to bring the accessibility of our universities in line with the growing demand for their output.

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