

What Exactly Does 'Free' Tuition Mean?

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No doubt most of you have heard, seen or read about the promise from the Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development (MAESD) to increase grant funding under the Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP) to provide affordable postsecondary options for low income families. The Ministry's 'free tuition' announcement got a lot of attention in the early days, but has since quieted down, perhaps because there has been some acknowledgement that students and parents may not necessarily understand the difference between tuition and the full program costs, including ancillary and program fees.

Nonetheless, we have been working on a number of process changes to accommodate this new initiative and thought it was time to explain a little more about what students will be provided.

All postsecondary students across the province can now apply for OSAP as early as ten (10) months before the start of their college or university program. They can access the OSAP application at the same time they are applying for college through the Ontario College Application Service, or university through the Ontario University Application Service.

Once the student has submitted their OSAP application and a general financial assessment has been done, the student will receive a "net offer" from the Ministry (March/April) outlining the tuition and any scholarships and bursaries they may be entitled to for all the postsecondary program application choices they have made or confirmed to by that point. This letter will provide a comparison of tuition costs and funding options for each choice.

The intent is to show students and families that with the increased OSAP support for low income families, "tuition" costs will be covered. The ability to show eligibility for scholarships and bursaries may be helpful in assisting students with confirming their choice. As a result, we have built a new process to allow students to apply for scholarships and bursaries much earlier in the application process. The intent is to have the approvals done to be included in the Net Offer Letter for all students who have applied and/or confirmed to Seneca.

All postsecondary institutions have also been required to develop a detailed student account view that displays grant, loan, and bursary details compared to actual program costs. This new view will be implemented this summer for all students attending Seneca in the 2018/19 academic year.

We will be sharing more information on this initiative throughout the term and over the summer to inform students, faculty, and staff of the changes. If you have questions from students, feel free to direct them to the Financial Aid Office or visit this website for more details: <http://www.senecacollege.ca/registrar/financialaid/finaidfaq-osap.html>.

View the [March 2018 issue of the Academic Newsletter](#).

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