



Falling Short in Calgarian Transit: An Environmental Scan on the U-Pass

Outlining the Universal Transit Pass programs in Alberta, British Columbia, Nova Scotia and Ontario, this report compares SAIT's U-Pass program with those around the four select provinces to determine its current benefit to the student population at SAIT

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I. MESSAGE FROM THE RESEARCHER

I am grateful for a variety of resources and supports for this project. First and foremost, without the insights and guidance of Saitsa President Liam Hunter this project would not have been possible.

I owe a debt of gratitude to the developers of institution websites who put significant effort into providing visitors to their websites with useful tools and ease-of-use that greatly aided in this project. I am also grateful for the efforts of universities, colleges, and polytechnics in archiving their information for the use of researchers like myself.

Lastly, I would like to thank those who participated in formally and informally discussing the U-Pass with me. Without your insights, this project would not have come to fruition.

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The views expressed in this document are the views of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of SAIT Student's Association.

II. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

This report highlights the U-Pass programs in Alberta, British Columbia, Nova Scotia, and Ontario utilizing an environmental scan. The purpose of this project was to not only compare SAIT's U-Pass contract's details with similarly sized institutions and cities across Canada, but to understand whether or not student consultation and involvement in the U-Pass program was the standard in the four provinces surveyed. In accordance with the research project's scope and purpose, the researcher was tasked with collecting, recording, and analyzing U-Pass contract details of other institutions and their student representation (e.g., student societies, unions and/or associations). This environmental scan involved understanding the; cost, exemptions, eligibility, student consultation and involvement in the U-Pass contract. In order to retrieve the majority of the information with the details of the U-Pass program at a specific institution, the researcher designed a research methodology that was focused on being comprehensive without being exhaustive.

Methodology

As a result of data collection over the months of March and April 2021, the researcher was able to collect and analyze 40 institutions in 25 Canadian cities utilizing a meticulous search method. This search method utilized comprehensive inclusion and exclusion criteria that included institutions with a student population of over 4500 students and cities with a population of over 100,000 residents. Additionally, slight deviations were allowed for institutions or cities that were teetering on the cusp of meeting this criterion to be formally included in the environmental scan. Furthermore, to supplement the inclusion criteria, multiple exclusion criteria were produced that excluded smaller institutions. For example, institutions whose curricula and structure did not line up with SAIT's, such as military, international, theological and arts colleges, as well as private and professional schools, were excluded from the scan. The results of this environmental scan would be hoped to inform Saitsa advocacy and policy decisions on the U-Pass program for years to come.

Results

U-Pass programs across Canada were observed to have partnerships between the regional transit authority and the student body's representation in order to offer heavily discounted passes for eligible full-time students. In Alberta, only the city of Edmonton had widespread student involvement on the contract, as had recently been negotiated between a "federation" of four student associations who combined their voices at the bargaining table. The trend of student associations on the contract continued for much of Ontario and especially British Columbia, where a large swath of student associations either had control of the U-Pass program or were heavily involved with the institution in its operation. In fact, out of the eight student's associations who were surveyed by the researcher in BC, all 8 either had control over the program or were partnered with the institution in some way (e.g., consultation or signatory on the contract). Nova Scotia

was the only other province who largely had institutions fully run the U-Pass, yet these institutions had managed to negotiate far more attractive contracts than SAIT, with better exemptions and eligibilities for their students.

Recommendations

Overall, Calgarian institutions should look to the jurisdictions outlined in this environmental scan for inspiration in negotiating future U-Pass agreements. Smaller and larger institutions than SAIT, UofC and MRU have negotiated fairer and more accessible contracts with transit. SAIT, UofC and MRU stand to gain additional opt-out clauses and more eligible students if these three institutions came under one U-Pass contract in Calgary. Not only would this allow the students to become a signatory on the U-Pass agreement, but it would put them firmly in a key stakeholder position. Despite an inevitable rise in the U-Pass fee per semester, this would allow all U-Pass programs in the aforementioned institutions to become not only more reasonable for students, but more accessible. This strategy has been effective for associations across Canada and has resulted in some of the most fair and accessible U-Pass programs.

INTRODUCTION

The Universal Transit Pass, hereafter referred to as the “U-Pass”, is a cost sharing transit fare program that provides participating post-secondary students unlimited access to local transit for a semesterly or yearly fee (Edmonton Transit Service, n.d; SAIT, n.d). This U-Pass program is funded by participating students through mandatory fees, which usually provides a significant discount for students compared to adult passes (University of Alberta, n.d). Not only does the U-Pass provide an affordable way to access transit for students, but it acts as a modicum for students to transit to areas of their municipality that are not easily accessible by walking or biking, allowing them to contribute to the local economy by making purchases at businesses. The program also furthers institutions and transit’s goal of sustainable transportation on and off campus, and is theorized to reduce institution’s carbon footprint through the use of more environmentally friendly transport (Rocchi & Noxon, 2013; University of Toronto, 2013; University of Saskatchewan, n.d). Despite the additional costs for students at SAIT, the U-Pass program is universally adored by students for these aforementioned reasons, indicated in an overwhelming support for the program in SAIT Students Association’s (Saitsa) annual survey (Valencerina, 2021; De Melo, 2021).

However, the U-Pass program is not universal across Canada. As observed through an environmental scan of Alberta, British Columbia, Ontario and Nova Scotia, the administration of the U-Pass varies by province, and even more so by transit authority and institution. This is observed when you consider certain aspects of the U-Pass program, such as the cost, availability to opt-out/in and whether or not there is a formal mechanism to address student concerns with the U-Pass, such as when the institution or the transit service proposes significant changes (cost increase, cancellation, exemptions, etc)¹. Additionally, the most significant difference to the U-Pass programs by institution is whether or not student associations are the signatories on the contract and involved in contract negotiations. This factor showcases whether or not student voices are being directly heard in key changes to the U-Pass program, such with the program’s cost, exemptions, and opt-ins.

This report queries these differences through the use of an environmental scan across four provinces in Canada. The scan is aimed to directly compare the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology’s (SAIT) U-Pass situation with other Canadian institutions and their local transit services. It is theorized that SAIT’s U-Pass contract lacks the same attractiveness as other institutions, due to a deficiency in; opt-out clauses, consultation with student leaders and Saitsa engagement in contract negotiations. Whether or not this is the case will be outlined in the subsequent sections. Before relaying and discussing the results of this environmental scan, the following methodological section will outline some of the research methods utilized in aid of conducting this scan.

1 I use opt-out and exemption synonymously in this report.

METHODOLOGY

Target Audience

This U-Pass report is intended for a variety of stakeholders. First and foremost, the U-Pass is and should always be considered a student service. Thus, the report should be abundantly relevant to students and their student leaders. In addition, the report is of particular relevance to post-secondary administrators, transit officials, as well as decision-makers at the municipal level.

Research Question

One research question was developed to act as a guide for this project:

1. How does the U-Pass, as currently administered by the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology, compare to other institutions from around Canada?

The following are criteria that was specifically sought out in the environmental scan:

1. Cost of the U-Pass program.
2. Signatories on the U-Pass contract.
3. Whether or not significant student consultation took place in implementing changes to the U-Pass program.
4. Whether or not there was a mechanism for handling student concerns.
5. U-Pass opt-out and opt-in clauses.
6. Eligibility for full-time students.

Inclusion Criteria

Most public universities, colleges, and polytechnics in the select provinces were surveyed in some way for this project. In order for these institutions to be included, the institution and the city had to meet the following two criteria: the institution had to have over 4500 students, and the city had to have a population of over 100,000 residents. Both of these criteria had no hard cap enforced through data collection, although the majority of the institutions (and their cities) presented in this report are of similar size to SAIT as well as Calgary. Some deviation was allowed to take place for the purposes of surveying institutions or cities teetering on the cusp of the aforementioned criteria (e.g., an institution or city had 4400 students or 99,000 residents²). Overall, 40 institutions were officially surveyed, representing 4 provinces and approximately 25 cities.

Exclusion Criteria

A variety of exclusion criteria was crafted to not only aid in the collection of data, but also to narrow the scope of this study to allow for more nuanced analysis. First and foremost, the environmental scan was focused on four province-wide jurisdictions,

² Mount Saint Vincent University in Halifax is a good example of an institution that was included, but only had a student population of around 4,400 students.

namely Alberta, British Columbia, Ontario, and Nova Scotia. Institutions from outside these four provinces were not surveyed for their U-Pass programs. These provinces were chosen because they represented 90% of all post-secondary U-Pass programs in Canada, which qualifies them as a representative sample. Secondly, the study focused only on post-secondary U-Pass programs. No where in this report will one find discussion about the U-Pass programs that exist for secondary school students. Thirdly, institutions and/or student associations that made no mention of the following keywords on their respective websites were assumed to not have a U-Pass program:

- U-Pass
- Upass
- Universal Transit Pass
- Buss Pass

This aforementioned criterion was included to avoid having to contact each institution and their student association to confirm that they did not have a U-Pass program. This expediated completion of the data collection process by many weeks. Lastly, all private, international, theology, military (military college), professional school (e.g massage therapy) and fine arts institutions were excluded from being surveyed. These institutions did not represent the current range of curriculum being provided by SAIT, making comparison difficult to justify. For example, the Alberta University of the Arts in Calgary was excluded from being surveyed due to its curricula differences with SAIT.

SAIT itself is a large institution with approximately 15,000 full-time, part-time, apprenticeship and continuing education students, located in the heart of the City of Calgary, which has 1.3 million residents (SAIT, 2020; City of Calgary, 2019). Thus, it would be prudent on a practical level to focus most sustained analysis not only on institutions of similar size, but cities as well. All cities/townships that did not meet the minimum population of 100,000 were excluded. Data was not formally recorded for these cities/townships. In addition, institutions with a student population of less than 4,500 were excluded from discussion in this report, although data from these excluded institutions may have been collected and stored for future use. Both of these population sizes were confirmed through census or enrollment data provided by the cities/institutions before exclusion.

Search Methods

A meticulous search on institution and student association websites was conducted to locate relevant news articles, publications, and webpages. This was aided in part by provincial government websites that listed every public post-secondary institution within their jurisdiction. Where possible, website archives were accessed through the institution and/or through the Wayback Machine to retrieve information prior to the cancellation of the U-Pass across Canada due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition to accessing information through websites and the Wayback Machine, transit websites proved instrumental in quickly outlining specific U-Pass costs and what institutions were participating in the U-Pass. Apart from these aforementioned search methods, correspondence was also shared with a variety of student leaders and their support staff through email to answer lingering questions, or to access information that was not available online (e.g., contract information, student consultation process, etc).

Several follow-up emails were drafted and sent out to institutions that did not respond within a certain amount of time (1-3 weeks).

Limitations

While every effort was made to ensure a comprehensive environmental scan, this report is in no way a definitive or exhaustive overview of the selected provinces. Due to time constraints, insufficient French language proficiency, limited resources and their allocation, the project could not survey every province and territory in Canada, as had been hoped by the research team. This is a significant barrier to reports of this type, and can be mitigated through effective sampling techniques as described in the previous sub-sections.

Another major limitation to this report was the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic had on the recency of information that could be found on student associations and their institution's websites. Often times the cost of U-Pass and opt-out clauses were not given in lieu of information regarding the program's cancellation. While the utilization of internet archives helped significantly mitigate this issue, it was a methodological problem that affected the reliability of the information gathered. However, this limitation was further mitigated by following up with U-Pass information for the institutions discussed in this report months after it was originally obtained. This was done in order to doubly confirm that the information outlined in this report was up-to-date and accurate.

RESULTS

Multiple key trends and themes emerged out of the environmental scan on the four provinces that were surveyed. In order to keep the results focused on comparing SAIT's U-Pass program to other institutions, the discussion will start with a brief summary of SAIT and SAIT Student's Association U-Pass. Afterwards, the results from other cities/provinces will be organized in the order they were scanned and will focus on the key findings that were observed, such as the U-Pass's cost and opt-out clauses. At no point will a critique of the U-Pass programs occur in this section. This has been done purposely to avoid marring the results with bias, thus ensuring a *prima facie* reading of the U-Pass program at SAIT and at other institutions across Canada.

Southern Alberta Institute of Technology

The Southern Alberta Institute of Technology, hereafter referred to as "SAIT", is a polytechnic institute located in the heart of Calgary. Students at SAIT, such as those taking at least 9 credit hours, attending 15 consecutive weeks of classes on campus (e.g., Fall, Winter, Spring semester) and who have paid tuition in full, are eligible to receive the U-Pass (SAIT, n.d). Practicum and continuing education students are not currently eligible to receive the U-Pass at SAIT (SAIT, n.d). In addition, the U-Pass is a \$151 semesterly fee that is mandatory for all students (SAIT, n.d). As such, no opt-out clauses, such as for those residing outside of the Calgary Metropolitan Region, exist or are publicly advertised for students.

SAIT currently administers and collects the fee for the U-Pass program. At one point in time, Saitsa had collected the fee for the U-Pass program, and presumably was a signatory on the contract with Calgary Transit. Through research and by talking with stakeholders, it is unclear when SAIT took over collecting the fee for the U-Pass or what the reasons were for this take over. Despite this uncertainty with the contract take-over, Saitsa is not a signatory on the contract and is not involved in contract negotiations with the transit authority. Due to SAIT's administration of the U-Pass program as a "middleman", there is no formal mechanism for conflict resolution between Saitsa and Calgary Transit. Apart from student referendums regarding the adoption and cancellation of the U-Pass at SAIT, students appear to have little say in the details of the contract that are most important to them (cost, opt-out clauses, availability for most full-time students).

Contracts in Calgary: Results of other Calgarian Institutions

There are two universities in Calgary that were surveyed for this report, namely the University of Calgary and Mount Royal University. An overview of results from these Calgarian institutions will begin with the University of Calgary (UofC). UofC students supported the introduction of the U-Pass program in a 2002 referendum (University of Calgary, 2020a). Like SAIT's U-Pass program, the UofC U-Pass is a mandatory semesterly fee. Before the cancellation of the program in 2020, eligible UofC students were charged \$155 per semester. To be considered an eligible student for the U-Pass program, students had to be:

- A full-time undergraduate student
- A full-time graduate student
- Registered in three courses for the Fall or Winter semester with at least one on-campus course
- Registered for two courses in the Summer semester with at least one on-campus course

There are two key differences between the University of Calgary's U-Pass program to the one at SAIT. Firstly, co-operative education, internship and distance education students were able to "opt-in" for the U-Pass by contacting Enrolment Services to have this fee added to their account. After a period of 24-48 hours to allow the fee to post to their account, these students were then able to pick up their U-Pass at the applicable centre (University of Calgary, 2020b). Secondly, the University of Calgary Student's Union (UCSU) is consulted and actively engaged for feedback by Calgary Transit and the UofC. This is accomplished through meetings with the Ancillary Services department to discuss any possible updates and/or changes to the U-Pass program. For example, the UCSU were consulted when the Ancillary Services department were working on implementing the Spring/Summer U-Pass MyFare app pilot program in early 2021. While the UCSU does not have an official vote on administering the U-Pass program, a result of not being a signatory on the contract, the student union is continually consulted and kept apprised during contract negotiations as well as changes to the program.

Mount Royal University (MRU) is another Calgarian institution that administers and runs

the U-Pass program while consulting with the applicable student association on any major changes to the U-Pass³. MRU students, specifically the Student's Association of Mount Royal University (SAMRU), introduced the U-Pass via referendum in 2005. The U-Pass at MRU runs from the Fall to Winter semesters, with no availability for the months of May to August. Conflicting information about the cost of the U-Pass program has the price range from \$151 to \$160 for eligible students (Mount Royal University, 2021; Mount Royal University, n.d). Eligible students at MRU include full-time credit students (9 or more credits per semester) in the Fall and Winter semesters.

There was a plethora of different populations of students that were not eligible for the U-Pass program at MRU. Like SAIT and the UofC, this includes part-time students⁴. In addition to part-time students, the U-Pass program at MRU excludes non-credits students, academic upgrading, diploma programs, ESL programs, co-op programs, and all continuing education programs, including full-time certificate programs such as Massage Therapy (Mount Royal University, n.db). Likely at the cost of these wide-ranging exclusions, MRU is the only institution surveyed in Calgary that offers opt-out conditions, which encompass 6 eligible groups:

1. Students who are physically disabled and who use the Handi-Bus or Access Calgary,
2. Students who are legally blind and receive a CNIB bus pass,
3. Students who are taking a directed field studies course which requires them to move from Calgary to participate in this program,
4. Outbound exchange students who are studying abroad,
5. Senior citizens who have purchased a senior citizens' bus pass,
6. Calgary Transit employees who can ride transit for free as part of their Collective Bargaining Agreement (Mount Royal University, n.d).

The U-Pass in Edmonton, Alberta

The U-Pass for institutions in Edmonton offers a distinct comparison to the Calgarian institutions and their student associations. While surveying the student associations themselves, the researcher discovered two key findings. Firstly, the signatory on the U-Pass contract changed in 2021, from the institutions, such as the University of Alberta (UofA) and Norquest College (NC), to the student associations and unions, including the graduate associations. Through discussions with a student leader from the UofA Graduate Student's Association, the researcher discovered that this was accomplished through a collaborative effort between the student's associations of Northern Alberta Institute of Technology (NAIT), MacEwan University (MU), NC, and the UofA. This allowed the aforementioned student associations to each receive their own agreement, with the exception of the undergraduate student unions and graduate student unions of these institutions, who would be on the same contract together. The publicly available details of UofA's contract are outlined below:

- Eligible students were students who were registered for at least one-for-credit course at the University of Alberta's Edmonton campuses (University of Alberta,

3 MRU is the signatory on the contract. While the student association is not a signatory, SAMRU is consulted on any major changes to the U-Pass.

4 The ineligibility of part-time students for the U-Pass is a trend throughout Canada.

- n.d).
- The U-Pass was available for these eligible students between the Fall, Winter and/or Spring/Term semesters (University of Alberta, n.d).
- Ineligible students included:
 - Students at Augustana Campus (UofA),
 - Students enrolled only in the Executive MBA program,
 - Graduate students designated as Off-campus Thesis students,
 - Faculty of Extension Students (including those in the English Language Program) (University of Alberta, n.d).
- Opt-outs available include, but are not limited to:
 - An employee of one of the participating transit systems,
 - A student with a valid disabled transit registration,
 - A student with a valid CNIB registration card,
 - A student also registered at either NAIT, MacEwan University, NorQuest, or
 - A thesis student conducting research out of the transit service area for more than 2 months of the term (you must provide a letter from your supervisor confirming this with your application) (University of Alberta, n.d).
- Opt-ins were available for:
 - Co-op or practicum students via service request form (University of Alberta, n.d).
- \$180 per semester for UofA, NAIT, MU and NC students (University of Alberta, n.d; NAITSA, 2021).

Secondly, as a result of replacing the institution as the key party in contract negotiations, the student associations were not only able to become the signatory on the contract, but were all able to effectively take control of the U-Pass. While the opt-out clauses and eligible students differ slightly between all four institutions, the majority of the contract as outlined above, is the same. Only a handful of the student population is ineligible for opting into or receiving the U-Pass at NAIT, UofA, MU and NC. Compared to SAIT's U-Pass program, the student associations in Edmonton have created a truly universal transit pass for their membership. They have been able to create a robust and affordable transit pass that includes opt-ins and opt-out clauses that are student-centric and in-line with the "average" U-Pass program in Canada⁵.

The U-Pass in Halifax, Nova Scotia

In total, four institutions from Halifax were officially surveyed: Saint Mary's University, Nova Scotia Community College, Mount Saint Vincent University and Dalhousie University. All but one of these aforementioned institution's engaged in this project to provide insights into how their U-Pass contract and program is administrated, with the exception of Dalhousie University. Despite a concerted effort to contact the applicable student unions (both undergraduate and graduate) at Dalhousie University, the researcher failed to secure correspondence with stakeholders at these unions. As a result of this, Dalhousie University will be excluded from discussion, as key

⁵ The average U-Pass program is one that has student centric exemptions and eligibilities, while being administered either by the institution and/or the student body.

information about the contract, contract negotiations and student cooperation in the U-Pass program was not available. Nonetheless, an overview of the U-Pass in Halifax is still possible.

Multiple similarities were observed between Halifax's and Edmonton's institutions, although there was a difference in who was the signatory on the contract with the regional transit authority. Saint Mary's University (SMU) was an example of an institution that was not on the U-Pass agreement, as the U-Pass program is administered by the student association (SMUSA). However, this is where student representation on the contract ended in Halifax, as both the Nova Scotia Community College (NSCC) and Mount Saint Vincent University (MSVU) student's association were not a signatory on the U-Pass contract⁶. Additionally, the student associations for MSVU and NSCC were not observed to be overly involved in the U-Pass program at their institutions, other than to refer those on their website to information from the institution, or in the case of the MSVU student union, made no mention of the U-Pass on their website. As a result, it was inferred that there was no substantial consultation between the institutions and the student associations with the U-Pass program.

Another similarity between Edmonton's and Halifax's U-Pass program is the availability of opt-in and opt-out clauses, which do not exist at SAIT in the current U-Pass contract. For example, MSVU full-time students have a variety of opt-out and opt-in clauses as outlined below;

- You officially withdraw from the University, or change from full-time to part-time status before the academic ADD/DROP date for the term as defined by Mount Saint Vincent University,
- You use the Access-a-Bus system, or have a CNIB pass, and provide proof of registration before the deadline,
- You are taking all your classes at MSVU remotely and do not regularly travel to campus for at least eight weeks of the term,
- You are completing a co-operative education work-term, internship, or practicum for the fall or winter term and do not travel to campus for at least eight weeks of the term,
- You are participating in an exchange program for the semester and will not be attending classes at MSVU (Mount Saint Vincent University, n.d).

Co-op, internship, and practicum students at MSVU also have the option to opt-out of the U-Pass program, so long as these students are not on-campus for a minimum eight weeks of a semester (Mount Saint Vincent University, n.d). Similar opt-outs and opt-ins were observed for full-time SMU and NSCC students, although there are three important aspects of these clauses that are important to note. Firstly, part-time students at SMU may opt-into the U-Pass program to be assessed the fee and have full access to the program. Secondly, NSCC students who are studying through online delivery had the option to opt into the U-Pass. Lastly, while the cost for the U-Pass program varied significantly between Halifax institutions, by as much as \$183 a semester at NSCC

⁶ This was confirmed through personal communication with SMUSU's GM and through a director with NSCC. SMUSU's GM stated that SMUSU was the only student union in Halifax that was on the contract. Considering that the other student associations surveyed made no mention of the U-Pass on their websites – or were outright confirmed to not be on the contract at NSCC – SMUSU's GM's claim appears to be correct.

to as little as \$82.25 at SMU⁷, the U-Pass programs were similar in all aspects. From opt-out clauses, opt-in clauses, too the availability of the U-Pass for most students, the Nova Scotian institutions appeared to offer yet another strong U-Pass program for their students compared to SAIT.

British Columbia: Strong Student Representation in the U-Pass program

The transit situation in British Columbia is unique, compared to the other provinces, due to the fact that the service in a majority of the province is overseen by BC Transit, a crown corporation⁸. This has likely directly contributed to the trend of student associations administering the U-Pass program in lieu of the institution in BC. Out of the 8 BC institutions who engaged in this project during the environmental scan, all 8 either had the student association as the contract holder or the association was heavily involved in the U-Pass program⁹, such as through consultation. The discussion in this section will focus on three institutions in order to condense the results. These three institutions are Douglas College, British Columbia Institute of Technology, and Simon Fraser University¹⁰.

Eligible students at Douglas College (DC), such as students registered for a minimum of three credits and who are paying the Douglas College Student Union fees, have access to the U-Pass (Douglas College, n.d). This would exclude non-credit students, students taking online courses only and field school/outgoing exchange students from the U-Pass program (Douglas College, n.d). The U-Pass currently costs DC students \$43.35 per month, which varies by program length, and raises every year as per the U-Pass agreement (Douglas College, n.d). Although there are two ways students can opt-out of the U-Pass program at DC, these opt-out conditions are only available for those with medical conditions or if a student already has a transit pass “valid for the duration of the U-Pass BC Program”, such as a U-Pass from another institution (Douglas College, n.d). Otherwise, the U-Pass program is mandatory for all students.

By discussing the contract with a member of the DC student union (DCSU), the researcher was able to glean that the DCSU was a signatory on the contract, alongside the institution and Translink, the regional transit system. As was to become a trend of British Columbian colleges, universities, and their student associations, the DCSU was consulted in changes to the program through meetings with Translink and DC. Additionally, any major change to the program had to be approved by the students through a referendum. This represented the majority of the U-Pass BC Program, where a partnership between student associations, institutions and transit was emphasized and enshrined in agreements between all three parties.

7 This is likely due to differences in student population and institution sizes.

8 A crown corporation is a company owned by the provincial or federal government in Canada.

9 While 10 BC institutions were surveyed in this report, only 8 were able to offer insights into their U-Pass contract. The researcher was unable to engage Kwantlen Polytechnic University (KPU) in offering insights into their U-Pass program, as no correspondence was shared with KPU and the contract information was not publicly available. Regrettably, the researcher was unable to follow through on U-Pass discussions with Vancouver Community College's GM due to time constraints.

10 The five BC institutions not discussed were the University of British Columbia, Royal Roads University, University of Victoria, University of the Fraser Valley, and Thompson Rivers University.

BCIT, better known as the British Columbia Institute of Technology, is another example of an institution in BC that has this aforementioned partnership. It appears that the BCIT Student's Association and the institution has delegated certain administrative aspects of the program to each other¹¹. For example, BCITSA handles the opt-out requests from students living outside of BCIT's service area, while BCIT handles requests from students via a U-Pass administrator on-campus (BCIT, 2021; BCIT, n.d). Additionally, the institution has the same opt-out exemptions as DC, with additional exemptions for clinical and co-op students based on location. In fact, the U-Pass programs at DC and BCIT are almost identical, as eligibility and cost are the same, with only limited differences.

The U-Pass BC Program at Simon Fraser University (SFU) is yet another partnership between the student's society, transit and the institution that offers universal access to transit for eligible students (full-time students with at least one course on campus) (Simon Fraser University, n.d.a). Despite the fact that the U-Pass is administered by the institution rather than the student society at SFU, there appears to be several attractive qualities. For example, students at the SFU appear to have some of the strongest exemption categories thus far:

- I have a documented physical or psychological condition that prevents me from using public transit and I am registered with SFU's Centre for Accessible Learning,
- I have a valid, non-transferable TransLink employee, government, or disability Compass Card (includes CNIB cards),
- I have a valid, non-transferable U-Pass BC from another post-secondary institution loaded onto my Compass Card,
- I live outside Metro Vancouver, and I am registered in courses being taught remotely,
- I have a requirement for access to a vehicle for a dependent's medical reason,
- I live in Metro Vancouver and my one-way transit travel time is more than 2 hours between home and my course(s) (Simon Fraser University, n.d.b).

When considering that the cost of this program (\$173) is nearly identical to BCIT and DC, one begins to realize how universal the transit pass program actually is in British Columbia (Simon Fraser University, n.d.c; Douglas College, n.d; BCIT, 2021). Compared to Alberta, where the cost, eligibility, clauses, and student representation vary so significantly by city and institution, the U-Pass BC program has managed to "centralize" the program, despite varying institutional structures, student population sizes and student bodies. Thus far, the U-Pass BC program has appeared to be the most fair and coordinated program in Canada, where a student does not have to worry about being charged the U-Pass fee twice if they attend multiple institutions with the U-Pass. They also can trust in the partnership between the student body, institution, and transit authority to have their best interests in mind, considering the not so insignificant quality of life improvements that the U-Pass program has compared to Calgarian institutions.

¹¹ The BCITSA held a referendum in 2019 to vote on whether the student association should administer the U-Pass program. They voted in favour of BCIT instead (BCIT, 2021).

Waterloo, Mississauga, and London: The U-Pass in Ontario

The last province I surveyed in the sample of the U-Pass program in Canada was Ontario, the largest province. Ontario's sample alone had 17 institutions with the U-Pass or equivalent semesterly or monthly buss pass that was offered to eligible students, making up 42.5% of all the U-Pass programs in the environmental scan. In order to condense these results to provide a short overview of the program in Ontario, the focus will remain on larger institutions in cities. For this section, three institutions, the University of Waterloo, University of Toronto Mississauga Campus, and Durham College will be outlined. These three institutions provide a unique overview of the larger U-Pass program in Ontario, starting with the University of Waterloo's publicly available U-Pass contract.

The U-Pass at the University of Waterloo is entirely administered by the Waterloo Undergraduate Student Association (WUSA) and the graduate student association. The University of Waterloo (UW) is not mentioned nor a signatory on the contract (WUSA, 2020). For a \$113 semesterly fee, eligible students have the U-Pass for the Fall, Winter and Spring semester, so long as their status remains full-time, and they are not apart of the Stratford campus (WUSA, 2020; Umholtz, 2020). These eligible students include co-op students and students who are between two full-time study terms (Umholtz, 2020). This means that if a student takes off 1 semester, called an "off-term", they can still use the U-Pass so long as they are returning to full-time study (Umholtz, 2020).

Like many of the student association and/or institutional contracts discussed in this report, WUSA has secured a plethora of opt-out clauses for their students. In this case, the U-Pass agreement designates opt-outs as "refunds", stating those who are blind, use an accessible parking permit and are registered with UW, can request a refund from WUSA (WUSA, 2020; Umholtz, 2020). In addition, students who take the majority of their classes outside of the Waterloo Region, including academic placement that is not apart of co-operative education, and any other exceptional circumstances can also present information to WUSA as well as the transit authority for refund (WUSA, 2020; Umholtz, 2020). This not only continues the accessibility trend seen from other student associations across Canada, but showcases how substantial opt-out clauses, exemptions or refunds are commonplace amongst U-Pass programs in Canada.

How does this focus on accessibility and fairness change as the results shift to the largest metropolitan area in Canada? Apart from the Torontonians colleges and universities that do not have a U-Pass program, the University of Toronto Mississauga's (UTM) student union offers a Fall to Summer U-Pass for their students. The UTM and its student union appear to jointly deliver the U-Pass program, as both the institution and student union are involved in disseminating information, delivering the U-Pass and handling concerns of the students. However, the program is mandatory for all students and does not advertise their exemptions publicly. This lack of information is extended to the actual cost of the UTM program, where it was either hidden or based on outdated information (e.g., the cost from 2017).

Finally, Durham College is a good representation of a handful of Ontarian institutions that had full control of the U-Pass. Because Durham's student association was primarily

focused on student services, there was no indication that the association was trying to gain more say in the U-Pass program through advocacy, as had been observed elsewhere in Canada. Durham provided a rare example, other than SAIT, of another institution that seemed to offer a completely mandatory U-Pass, with no advertised exemptions. It is also unclear how students are consulted in this process, as a cursory search of the minutes of the student association provides no mention or motion on the U-Pass program in the last year. If the association were at all engaged on the U-Pass, it would have been mentioned in the last year due to the pandemic's effects on U-Pass programs across Canada.

DISCUSSION

The environmental scan results showcase how institutions and their student representation have crafted varying degrees of U-Pass programs across the four provinces surveyed. While a U-Pass program would have very student friendly clauses in one location, say Edmonton for example, it was unlikely that this would transfer over to another location, such as Calgary. Additionally, institutions and student unions may very well have acted in partnerships or in good faith with each other in one place, but this was not always the case in all jurisdictions. For example, SAIT student leaders continue to believe that they are not properly consulted on issues relating to the U-Pass by SAIT's administration. They feel that SAIT is the sore thumb in Calgary, where the other institutions or their student unions have been able to negotiate far more attractive contracts, such as with cost, opt-out conditions, and the availability of the U-Pass for most full-time students.

Likely compounded by SAIT's refusal to share the contract with SAIT Student Association stakeholders due to alleged confidentiality issues, student leaders have felt that the program lacks transparency¹². It is also unclear how SAIT has ended up administering the U-Pass program in the first place, as the environmental scan has shown that this was the exception to the rule. The scan continually showcased evidence that student associations were the ones primarily responsible for the administration of the program, which varied on a spectrum of how much cooperation there was between the institution and student association. In some places, such as Waterloo, Edmonton, and in British Columbia, the associations were entirely responsible for the U-Pass, while in others the university/college held the contract and controlled most aspects of the program.

However, this is not specifically a SAIT or Saitsa problem, as the UofC and MRU stand to gain additional opt-out clauses and more eligible students if these three institutions came under one U-Pass contract in Calgary. Not only would this allow the associations to become a signatory on the U-Pass agreement, but it would put them firmly in a key stakeholder position, rather than simply being consulted, or lack thereof. Despite an inevitable rise in the U-Pass fee per semester, this would allow all U-Pass programs in the aforementioned institutions to become not only more reasonable for students, but more accessible. This strategy has been effective for associations across Canada and has resulted in some of the most accessible and fair U-Pass programs.

¹² It is unclear who is on the same U-Pass contract as SAIT, as all the other Calgarian institutions have different U-Pass programs. The only other Calgarian institution that has a similar pay structure to SAIT's is the Alberta University of the Arts.

During an Association of Managers in Canadian College University and Student Centres (AMICCUS-C) roundtable discussion, I was able to glean more information about the U-Pass in Edmonton from NAITSA's Advocacy Director, Jason Roth. During a period of discussion about the transition to the online learning environment, Roth had mentioned how they felt that the student associations of Edmonton were able to get such an attractive U-Pass contract because they not only negotiated as a collective, but required in-person meetings (Roth, 2021). As a result of this, the student associations were able to effectively take over control of the U-Pass program at their respective colleges and universities in 2021 because they combined their voices for a stronger bargaining position¹³.

The success of the strategy of combining voices is not specific to Edmonton. In fact, this is seen across Canada, especially in British Columbia and some areas in Ontario (Kitchener-Waterloo). For example, WUSA's U-Pass agreement has other institutions/associations on it as well, most notably Wilfred Laurier University (WLU) Student Union, the graduate student association of both WLU and UW, as well as the administration of WLU and Renison University College. In addition, the BC U-Pass program standardizes the program across the province, with the only real differences in cost and U-Pass exemptions. These factors appear to be attributed to the size of the student population and the location of the institution, as the location of these institutions, such as whether or not they are in Vancouver or Victoria, would affect the cost and exemptions for eligible students.

Nova Scotia (Halifax) appears to be the only other province surveyed in the environmental scan that does not have widespread student representation on the contract, via their unions or associations. Despite this, the institutions have negotiated better contracts with their transit system than SAIT has with Calgary Transit. MSVU and NSCC both had opt-out conditions and more eligibility for their full-time students, including practicum and placement students. MSVU specifically had opt-out conditions for students learning remotely, allowing those who wanted to use transit the option to not opt-out and continue benefiting from the U-Pass. NSCC did the opposite for their online students, allowing them to opt-in to the U-Pass, so long as they were full-time students. SAIT had neither of these as options for their online students, and it showed during the COVID-19 pandemic, as the U-Pass was cancelled for everyone in consultation with Saitsa.

CONCLUSION

Regrettably, the environmental scan showcased that the U-Pass program as currently negotiated by SAIT is one of the few lone outliers in the four provinces that does not have opt-out conditions, strong eligibility lists, or widespread student consultations. SAIT has also not always been transparent about the U-Pass, especially with their U-Pass agreement with Saitsa, despite the openness of Ontarian institutions in sharing their agreements on their websites. Regardless of SAIT administration's reasons for their hesitation on sharing the contract privately with Saitsa, it is unfortunate to compare SAIT's U-Pass program with other institutions and observe the burgeoning partnerships

13 I was able to obtain this information through email correspondence with Jason Roth, Advocacy Director at NAITSA.

other associations, the transit authorities and institutions appear to have with one another. It is also disappointing to note that other Calgarian institutions have not gone unscathed by the U-Pass program in Calgary, as certain exemptions, eligibilities, and student union's signatures on the contract are still missing.

Calgarian institutions and Calgary Transit should look to the jurisdictions outlined in this environmental scan and take note. Smaller and larger transit services than Calgary Transit have been willing to negotiate these U-Pass agreements with institutions. Students at SAIT, the UofC and MRU should not have to pay for a service that is ostensibly worse than in other U-Pass programs in similar transit capacities, say the Greater Toronto Area, Kitchener-Waterloo Region, and the Greater Vancouver Area. Exemptions allow the programs to be fairer and more accessible not only for the student population, but for students with disabilities, students who are outside of Calgary Transit's service area and students who are learning remotely, but may want access to the U-Pass. Lastly, sustained student involvement in the U-Pass agreements and contract negotiations allow student concerns to be heard at the bargaining table and be fully implemented into the contract. SAIT's U-Pass program, as currently administered by SAIT, is not including this voice.

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