

Undergraduate Tuition Trends in Canada and Alberta

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Prepared by the Department of Research and Advocacy



Overview

This report reviews and analyzes tuition data from 1972-2022 collected by Statistics Canada. This briefing aims to provide the Students Union and associates with tuition trends in order to better advocate for student needs.

Definitions

The following are definitions of common terms based on their use in this briefing.

Tuition: University fees a full-time domestic student would pay per year (Two semesters)

Current Dollars: Refers to the dollar (\$) amount at a given time in history non-inflation-adjusted

Real/Constant dollars: Refers to the dollar (\$) amount at a given time in history inflation-adjusted to a specific year. (In this briefing, most dollar (\$) amounts have been adjusted from their current dollar to real/constant in order to create a clearer picture of trends)

Bachelors: A four-year undergraduate degree

Canada Tuition Trends

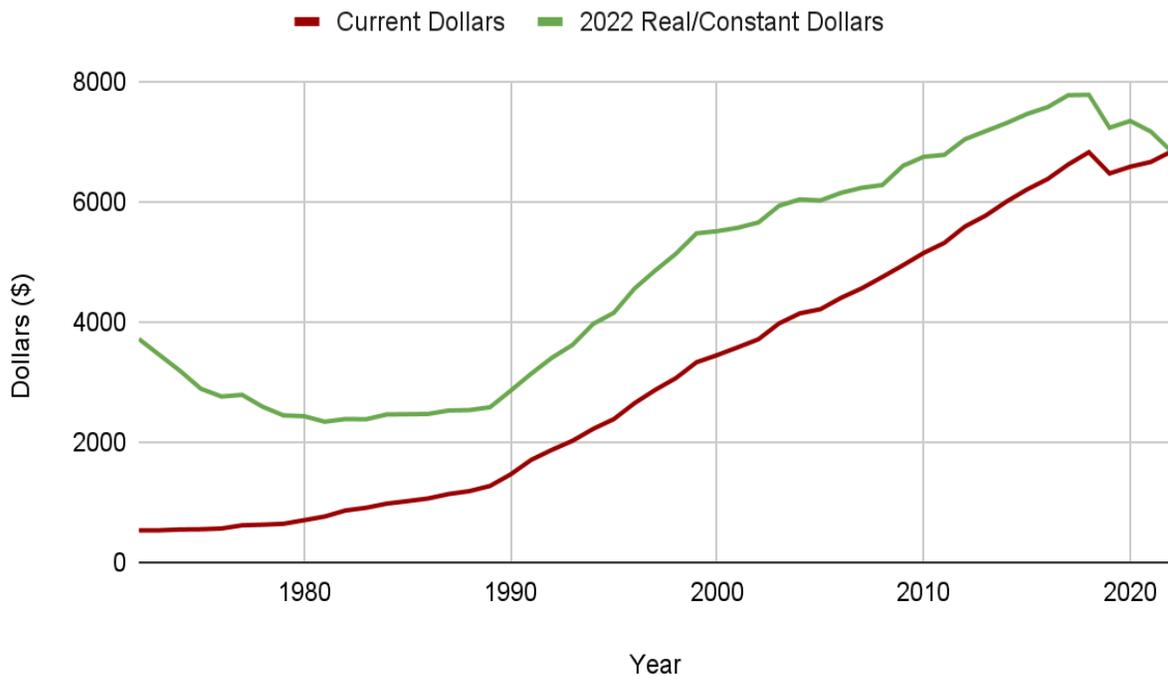
This section reviews tuition trends in the whole of Canada, including Alberta. It is meant to give a baseline understanding of tuition in our country.

Tuition in Canada Over the Years

The graph below depicts the increase in dollars (\$) in tuition since 1972.

In terms of real/constant dollars, there was a rather sudden decline in tuition between the years 1972 and 1980 before an overall steady increase. The lowest tuition reported was in 1981 at \$2,340 real/constant dollars, and the highest tuition reported was in 2018 at \$7,776 real/constant dollars. Today, Canadian tuition averages \$6,834 real/constant dollars.

Tuition for a Bachelors in Canada Over The Years



Inflation of Tuition in Canada Over the Years

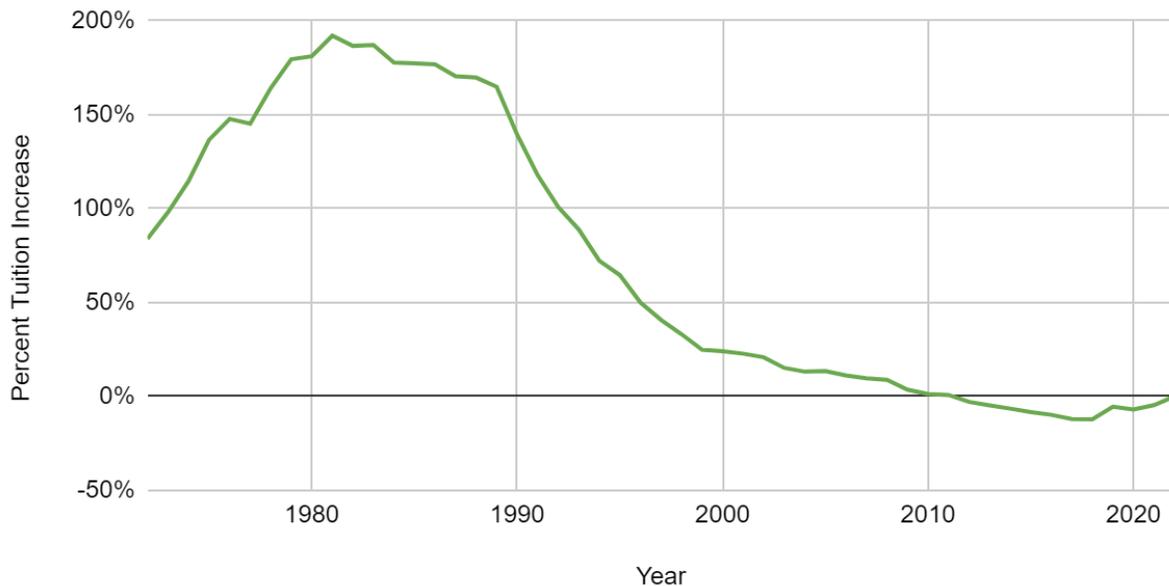
The graph below depicts, in real inflation-adjusted terms, how much tuition has increased. Tuition originally seems to increase drastically, by 200% to 290% a year, before steadily decreasing into the 2000s. There is a slight increase around 2015-2020 by 10-12% followed by a decrease.

The graphs depict a clear increase in Canadian undergraduate tuition with costs of \$3,716 real/constant (\$534 current) in 1972 and \$6,834 in 2022.

Highest Inflation (%): 270.69% in 1981

Lowest Inflation (%): -0.06% in 2011

How much has tuition in Canada (inflation-adjusted) increased since this year?



Note: The Y axis is not measured in dollars but in percent (%) inflation

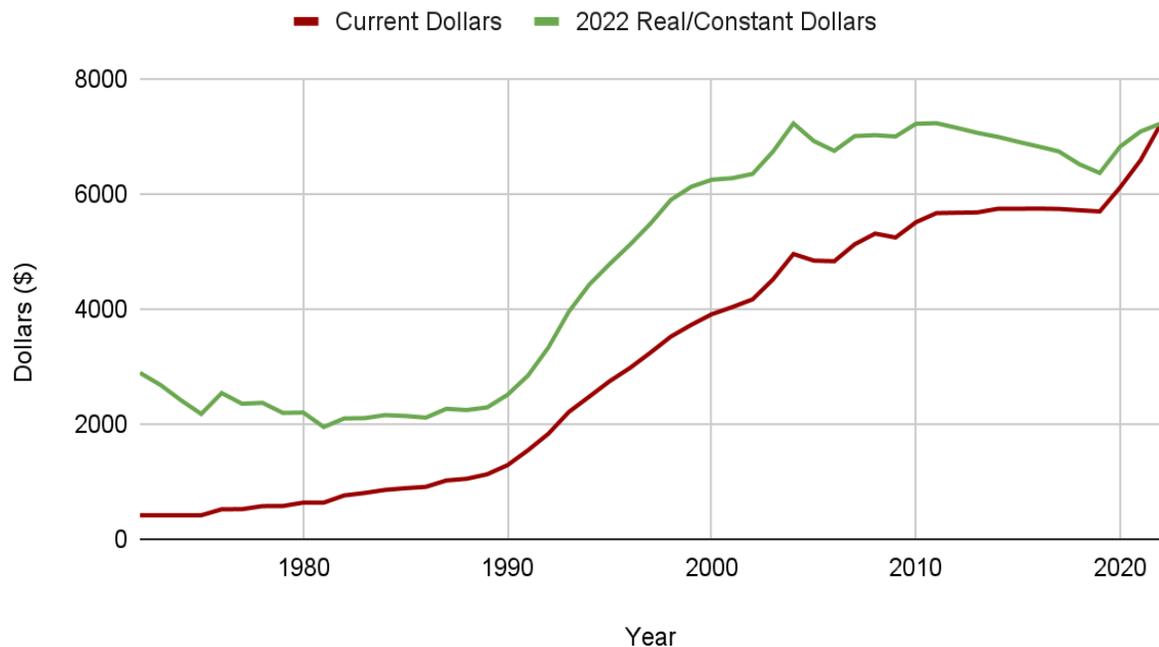
Alberta Tuition Trends

This section reviews, in detail, tuition trends for the province of Alberta. Factors analyzed include baseline tuition, as well as tuition for a bachelor of science and a bachelor of arts.

Tuition in Alberta Over the Years

The graph below shows the overall increase (In \$) in tuition for an undergraduate degree in Alberta over the years. Tuition appears to remain steady from 1972 to 1988 before increasing drastically from 1990 to 2010. Following 2010 tuition drops slightly before increasing to today's 2020 tuition. The lowest recorded cost was \$1,948 real/constant dollars in 1981, and the highest recorded cost was \$7,225 real/constant dollars in 2011.

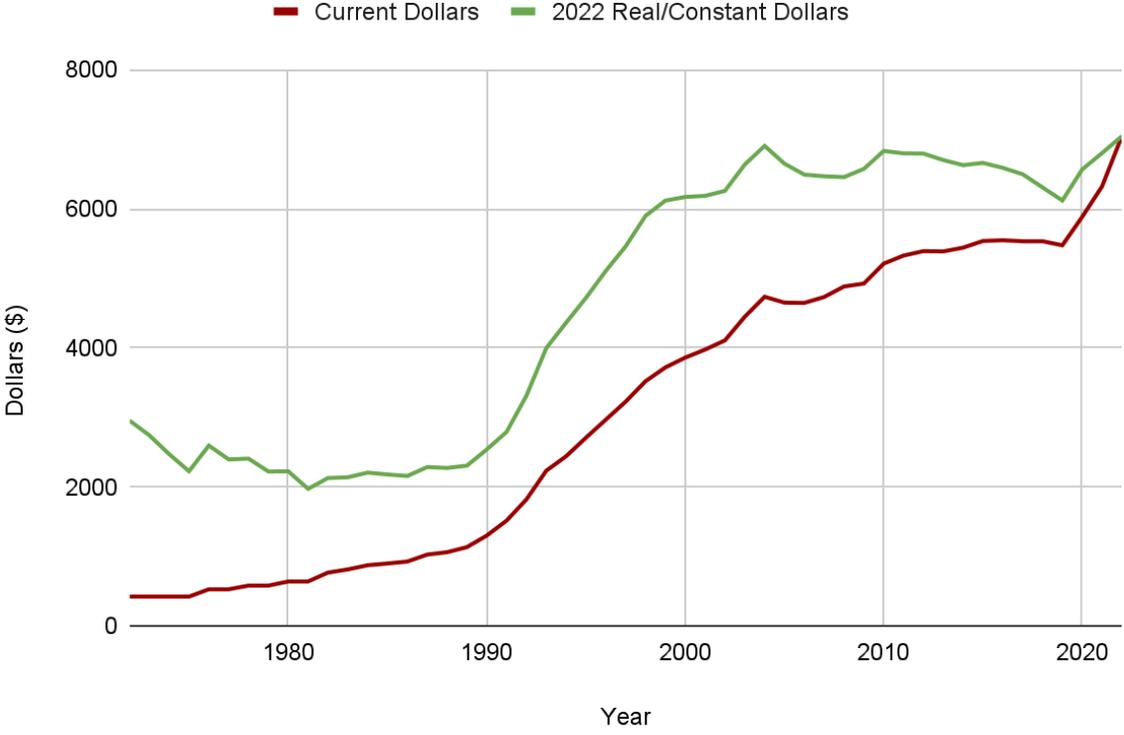
Tuition for a Bachelors in Alberta Over The Years



Tuition for a Bachelor of Science in Alberta Over the Years

The graph below shows the overall increase (In \$) of tuition for a Bachelor of Science in Alberta over the years. Tuition appears to remain steady from 1980 to 1988 before increasing drastically from 1990 to 2010. Following 2010 tuition drops slightly before increasing to today's 2020 tuition. The lowest recorded cost was \$1,975 real/constant dollars in 1981, and the highest recorded cost was \$7,045 real/constant dollars in 2022.

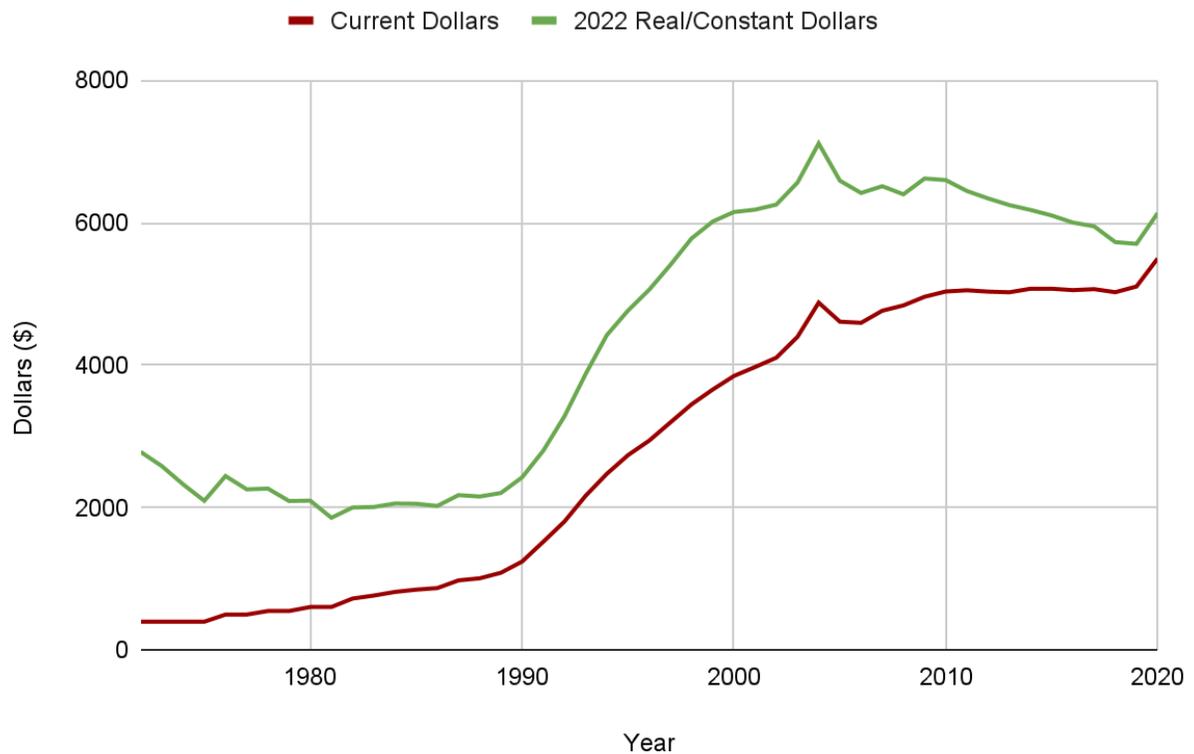
Tuition for a Bachelor of Science in Alberta Over The Years



Tuition for a Bachelor of Arts in Alberta Over the Years

The graph below shows the overall increase (In \$) of tuition for a Bachelor of Arts in Alberta over the years. Arts tuition, in contrast to the rest of Alberta and a BSc, seems to maintain steady tuition increases with minimal spontaneous changes. Tuition appears to remain steady from 1980 to 1990 before increasing steadily from 1990 to 2000. Following 2000 tuition drops slightly, leading to today's 2020 tuition. The lowest recorded cost was \$1,859 real/constant dollars in 1981, and the highest recorded cost is \$7,114 real/constant dollars in 2022.

Tuition for a Bachelor of Arts in Alberta Over The Years

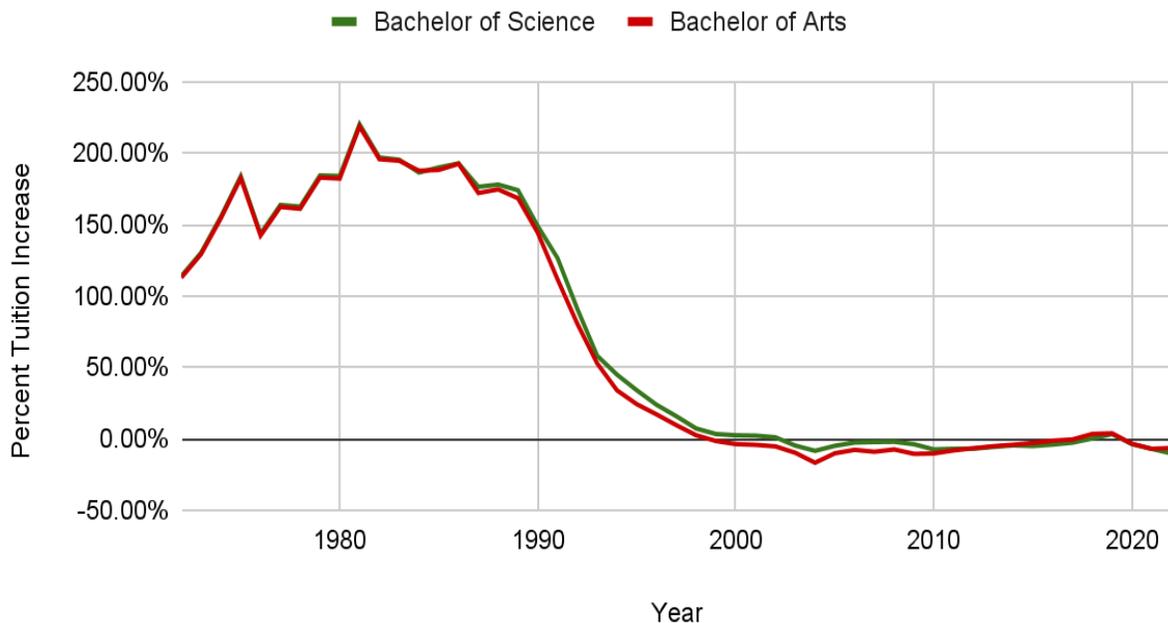


Tuition in Alberta, BSc Vs. BA

The graph below compares the inflation-adjusted tuition increase of a bachelor of arts in Alberta and a bachelor of science in Alberta. Both the BA and BSc follow variable increases and decreases from 1972 till 1987 when the BA increased. The remainder of the graph shows a steady decline in the negatives followed by a slight increase in the positives and yet another decrease in the negatives. Near the end of the graph, the BSc increases and overlaps the BA again.

The increases in tuition between 1974 and 1981 are likely due to the economic recession of the 1980s in which overall inflation rates grew.

How much as tuition in Alberta (inflation-adjusted) increased since this year?



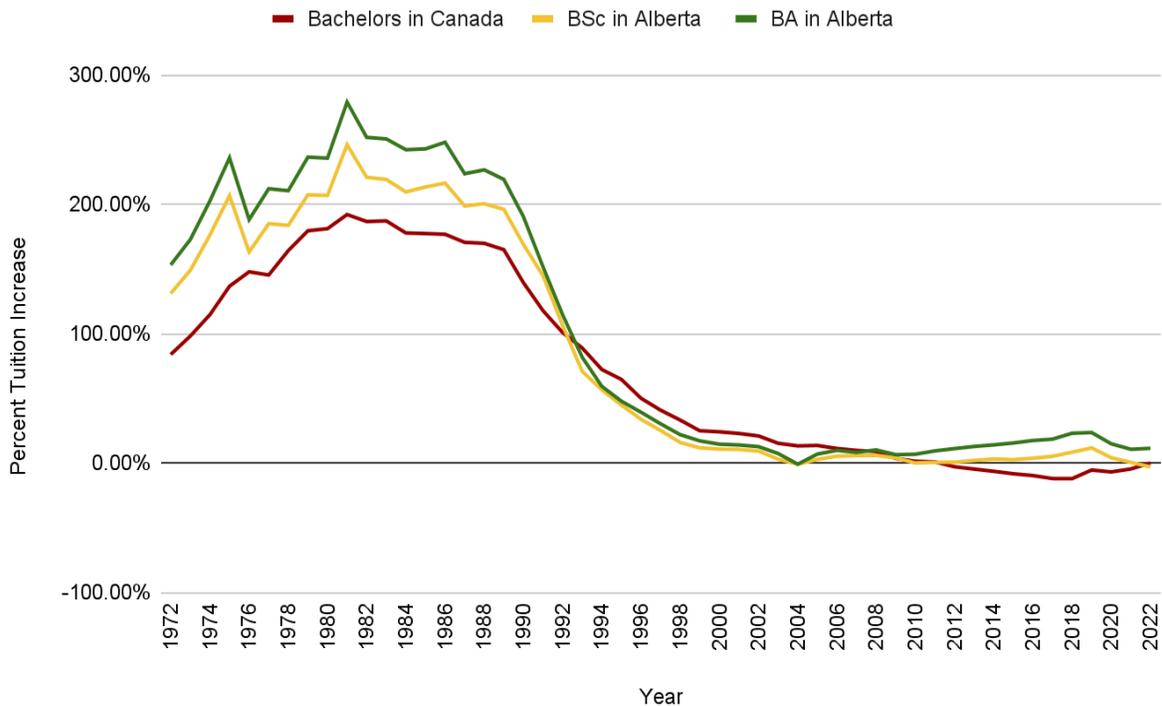
Note: The Y axis is not measured in dollars but in percent (%) inflation

Comparison: Canada and Alberta Tuition Trends

The graph below compares the percent (%) increase of tuition for a bachelor's in Canada, a BA, and a BSc in Alberta. Tuition increased from 1972 through 1982 before steadily declining in 1990. Both Canada and Alberta tuition appear to stabilize around 2000, increasing and decreasing by small amounts.

Coming into this comparison we expected the BSc and BA to have, overall, lower inflation rates than the whole of Canada. However, we were proven wrong, as both the BA and BSc in Alberta had higher inflation rates than Canada as a whole. In 1994 Alberta tuition dropped slightly lower than Canadian tuition before increasing again to be higher than Canada. Overall, the graph below shows the disproportionate tuition increases in Alberta compared to those in Canada, highlighting the disparity in tuition costs in the province.

Comparison of inflation-adjusted tuition between a bachelors in Canada, a BSc in Alberta and a BA in Alberta



Note: The Y axis is not measured in dollars but in percent (%) inflation

Closing

Citations

Statistics Canada, Canadian undergraduate tuition fees by field of study, 1972/1973 to 2006/2007. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=3710015001&pickMembers%5B0%5D=1.10&cubeTimeFrame.startYear=1972+%2F+1973&cubeTimeFrame.endYear=2006+%2F+2007&referencePeriods=19720101%2C20060101>

Statistics Canada, Canadian undergraduate tuition fees by field of study (Current Dollars). <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=3710000301&pickMembers%5B0%5D=1.1&cubeTimeFrame.startYear=2006+%2F+2007&cubeTimeFrame.endYear=2022+%2F+2023&referencePeriods=20060101%2C20220101>

Bank of Canada, Inflation Calculator. <https://www.bankofcanada.ca/rates/related/inflation-calculator/>