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The Planet Is Burning but It's Still Business as Usual at UWaterloo

September 25, 2023

Dear University of Waterloo Senior Leadership Team and other campus stakeholders,

The University of Waterloo (UW) Climate Justice Ecosystem is a coalition of undergraduate and graduate students united for climate justice. We draw connections between the fight for a livable planet and parallel struggles for economic and social justice. We are building and mobilizing student power for an intersectional grassroots movement towards a **sustainable, resilient, and just UW for everyone**.

Before our **Climate Justice Rally** on **September 28th**, we have united with our peers, alumni, and extended community to create a focused list of demands. Our goal is to urge the University of Waterloo to address not only the climate crisis but also the range of interrelated systemic challenges that students face every day, including affordability, housing, hunger, lack of safety, and oppression. We need you to place your students, staff, and faculty above profits! This commitment must be reflected at all levels of governance and operation at the University of Waterloo. The solutions exist: what is required is the will, determination, and resources to implement them.

We demand immediate action on the following:

1. Accelerated and decisive action on the climate crisis

- Accelerate progress towards carbon neutrality to meet our 2025 targets.
- Sell off any material positions in fossil fuel exploration and extraction companies by 2025.
- Hire more staff to increase the capacity of the Sustainability Office to implement the recommendations of the Environmental Sustainability Strategy.
- Immediate action to adopt climate adaptation measures on campus by 2025.
- Incorporate mandatory climate competencies into all areas of study and work-integrated learning opportunities by 2025.

2. Secure, safe, unionized jobs with livable wages

- Become a living wage employer.
- Bargain in good faith with existing unions on campus and not retaliate against the formation of new unions.
- Advocate forcefully alongside its workers and students for policy changes when provincial or federal policies are hostile to workers.
- Stop clawbacks of internal funding when students receive external funding.

3. Affordable and accessible housing

- Increase scrutiny on landlords and property management companies in provision of quality housing.
- Increase support and collaboration with local government for co-operatives and non-profit housing.
- Ensure any new housing is designed to be carbon neutral.
- Facilitate more robust tenant rights education for all students.

4. Universal and comprehensive mental and physical healthcare

- Address long wait times for counselling and increase capacity to offer more same-day, walk-in counselling.
- Streamline the process for submitting accommodation requests and not putting the onus on the student to “prove” their disability or need.
- Provide trans equity and 2SLGBTQIA+ competency training to all practitioners and employees at UW Health Services.
- Hire additional staff members and practitioners that specialize in providing healthcare to equity-deserving groups.

5. Fair tuition and equal opportunities for international and out-of-province students

- Institute a tuition freeze for international and out-of-province students.
- Offer more scholarships and remove barriers to access funding for international students.
- Increase on-campus student support for PGWP applications and post-grad career paths by adding specialized staff capacity to faculties.
- Increase full- and part-time paid work opportunities for international and out-of-province students across all disciplines.

6. End hunger on campus

- Expand existing food support programs on campus.
- Implement a cap on prices in Food Services outlets.
- Implement a campus-wide community garden and community fridge program.
- Promote awareness about available resources and financial aid options that can help students facing food insecurity.

7. Indigenous sovereignty and land back

- Increase the capacity of the Office of Indigenous Relations and the Waterloo Indigenous Student Centre.
- Meet and exceed all goals and subgoals of the 2023-2028 Indigenous Strategic Plan and the Federation of Students’ 2017 Education and Reconciliation report.
- Decolonize and Indigenize all UW curricula, policies, best practices, strategies and operations.
- Advocate for the decentralized and Indigenous-led Land Back movement on Turtle Island.

8. Investments in transparent community-led safety initiatives instead of policing.

- Offer de-escalation training.
- Offer overdose/drug poisoning training.
- Promote the use of non-police alternatives like the IMPACT team in all communications with students, instead of defaulting to Special Constable Services.
- Establish a Walk Safe Program*.

9. Liberation, equality, and inclusion for all by dismantling all systems of oppression (such as homophobia, transphobia, ableism, sexism, and racism)

- Release a comprehensive P.A.R.T. Report update and host a community forum to allow for real-time engagement.
- Increase the paid capacity of WUSA services to advocate for their communities.
- Conduct an extensive review of UW policies, communications, and online spaces, including the r/uwaterloo subreddit, to address the pervasive violence that exists there.

10. Reliable and convenient public transit to and from Waterloo

- Increase Fed Bus service targeting peak times and days of the week. Enact regular service that is more affordable to be a competitive substitute to GO service.
- Implement a free, emergency shuttle system to and from campus in the event of a GRT bus strike.
- Work with the provincial government to advocate for all-day, two-way GO train service between KW and Toronto and increase GO bus service in correlation with student enrollment numbers.

The climate crisis is undeniably upon us and will affect every aspect of our lives. While the climate crisis will hit vulnerable populations first and worst (e.g., lower-income, precariously housed, and disabled folks), none of us can escape its impacts, from wildfires to heat domes to flooding. We have seen firsthand the rising fear and anxiety our peers experience regarding the present realities and future of our communities and the planet.

UW's 2020-25 [Strategic Plan](#) sets out as one of its key priorities to "Strengthen Sustainable and Diverse Communities", recognizing "that accelerating climate change will magnify existing societal issues, with marginalized communities being among the most affected". The plan goes on to state that students, employees, partners, and stakeholders around the world will be looking to Waterloo to be a leader that can demonstrate to all how to take transformative action as we work for a sustainable future.

In 2021, UW made a praiseworthy and necessary commitment to achieve [carbon neutrality](#) in both its pension and endowment fund by 2040. UW hosts the [United Nations' Sustainable Development Solutions Network](#) (UW SDSN), which helps to spread awareness and act on the 17 [Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\)](#). Over 360 faculty members are conducting research that addresses the SDGs, students are learning about the SDGs in over 680 courses, and UW is making progress on achieving our sustainability strategy objectives. The progress UW has made thus far is testament to the world class education for which the institution is [globally recognized](#).

We are students, but we are people first and foremost. Many of us are international students, refugees, or immigrants whose family, home, and ancestral lands are in the Global South. For us, climate change is not an abstract issue: it is already directly impacting us and our loved ones. When we graduate from UW, we need to be prepared for a world of climate disasters. We also need to be equipped with the knowledge and skills to contribute to climate action and a just transition. As we prepare to become more responsible global citizens, we hope that UW will also mirror these values in its operations and actions.

As paying students at this institution and its largest stakeholder body, we believe that UW has a responsibility to prioritize our safety and wellbeing. This includes taking action on the climate crisis, as well as the host of other issues students grapple with. However, UW has failed to step up when and where it is most needed. The June 28 attack was a poignant example of how all levels of governance at UW have failed time and again in meeting the needs of students.

Just as UW has shown insufficient care for student wellbeing in its response to the hate-motivated attack, it has similarly failed to take the pace and scale of action we so desperately need to address the climate crisis. We also know that the climate crisis is not an isolated threat: it is deeply intertwined with all other social and economic issues that we face.

[Climate justice](#) is the framework that we use to radically imagine a future in which we are given the safety and space to study, work, and live at UW in a way that allows us to flourish. As a coalition of concerned students, we demand that the UW administration deliver meaningful action on the following demands.

1. Accelerated and decisive action on the climate crisis

2023 has been a year of climate disasters: July was the [hottest month on record](#) and from coast to coast, we have faced devastating [wildfires](#) and [floods](#). UW has a huge environmental footprint, interacts directly with tens of thousands of people, and is a global leader in teaching and research. As a large educational institution, UW has a responsibility to advance climate mitigation and adaptation.

In [Waterloo at 100](#), the University stated that “the global climate emergency is the greatest threat to our collective future”. Yet, we are woefully behind on our 2025 carbon emissions reductions and waste diversion targets, and a world away from achieving carbon neutrality by 2050. Waterloo continues to accept millions of dollars in donations from oil and gas funders like RBC, which was [the largest global funder of fossil fuels](#) in 2022, for the Sustainable Financial Management program - this is hypocrisy and greenwashing.

Despite declaring a [climate emergency](#) and [committing to a carbon-neutral portfolio](#) in 2021, UW still holds nearly [\\$66 million](#) in the energy sector, much of which is equity in fossil fuel companies, which risk becoming [stranded assets](#). As a world-renowned institution, UW’s investments in and continued collaboration with the fossil fuel industry provides its funders with the social license to continue destroying our communities and planet.

We implore **senior administration, Faculty Deans, Plant Operations, and the Sustainability Office** to heed the many appeals for increased climate action from your own staff and students. That includes the following calls to action:

- Accelerate progress towards carbon neutrality through increasing clean energy generation, energy efficiency projects, and building retrofits to meet our 2025 targets.
- Sell off any material positions in fossil fuel exploration and extraction companies by 2025, speeding up UW’s 2040 commitment in correlation with the urgency of the climate crisis.
- Hire more staff to increase the capacity of the Sustainability Office to implement the recommendations of the Environmental Sustainability Strategy.
- Immediate action to adopt climate adaptation measures on campus, such as installing AC units in all residences by 2025.
- Incorporate mandatory climate competencies (e.g., knowledge of climate justice) into all areas of study and work-integrated learning opportunities by 2025, following the lead of the [Integrating Sustainability into Curriculum project](#).

2. Secure, safe, unionized jobs with livable wages

Secure, safe, unionized jobs with liveable wages are a critical part of climate action as the climate crisis calls us to re-imagine work in an infinite growth economy and the inadequacy of social safety nets. Unions provide a space to fairly work out the distributional impacts of climate action and involve more stakeholders in the process of building sustainable communities. Further, research and experience around the world (including the French [gilets jaunes](#) and [Dutch farmer protests](#)) have shown the way climate action is politically unsustainable if the costs and disruptions are

borne primarily by poor, working class, and precarious segments of society even while economic inequality continues to rise.

As the employer of over [5000 people](#), and as an international centre of technological development and deployment, the University of Waterloo has a major opportunity and responsibility to contribute to a just transition in the Waterloo region. Currently, Waterloo's strategic plan neglects to even mention "labor" or "workers" or talk about jobs and working conditions under a different name.

[President Vivek Goel](#) acknowledged in a recent editorial directed towards the federal government, "To future-proof Canadian society we need globally competitive universities that can offer... research assistant roles for graduate and postgraduate students that pay enough to meet the rising cost of living." WUSA's [2023 advocacy survey](#) of over 500 undergraduates found that 67% of participants' mental health was negatively impacted by concerns about affording their education, while 56% are concerned about having enough money to complete their education.

In the midst of a cost of living crisis, UW does not do enough to protect students in work-integrated learning opportunities nor guarantee a living wage for its own employees. Anecdotally, we know of many students who have faced exploitation or unsafe working conditions in co-op or in [on-campus jobs](#). On campus, a living wage is not guaranteed: wages for entry-level positions with Food Services [start at \\$15.50/hour](#) (the living wage in Waterloo Region is [\\$19.95/hour](#)).

We implore the **senior administration, Student Success Office, and Co-operative and Experiential Education** to:

- Become a [living wage employer](#).
- Bargain in good faith with existing unions on campus and not retaliate against the formation of new unions.
- Advocate forcefully alongside its workers and students for policy changes when provincial or federal policies are hostile to workers. The conditions of all workers on campus are also our learning and research conditions.
- Stop clawbacks of internal funding when students receive external funding (e.g., OSAP).

3. Affordable and accessible housing

Affordable and accessible student housing has been a perennial issue in Waterloo. Despite what our [Provost of Students says](#), we believe that supporting students in accessing housing should be a responsibility of UW. Housing is not only critical to keep students safe and well while studying and/or working on campus, it is also a climate solution, as [housing protects people from climate impacts and other risks](#) (e.g., extreme heat and cold).

In 2020, homes accounted for [18.4% of total emissions](#) in Waterloo Region. Thus, there is also a significant opportunity for UW to take action on both the housing and climate crises by supporting the actions of the [TransformWR strategy](#). The strategy outlines goals for housing in 2050, including ensuring that homes no longer use fossil fuels for heating and cooling.

[Articles abound](#) every fall showing the depth of the housing crisis: students are increasingly unable to find suitable accommodation and forced to commute excessive distances. A recent [Waterloo Region Record article](#) stated that Waterloo is short of nearly 5000 beds and two thirds of students are finding it difficult to secure housing. The article also found that rent costs have also skyrocketed to an average of \$950 per month including utilities and internet.

WUSA's 2021 reports paint a dire picture of the student housing situation, and this problem has only intensified with the full return back to campus. Their [December 2021 survey](#) found that 10.22% of respondents lived in below-standard accommodations, and 13.56% reported taking on debt or loans to pay for housing. In their [May 2021 survey](#), 80% of respondents said they had at least one major maintenance issue per term and 35% spent between 51-80% of their monthly budget on housing. The Statistics Canada level of "[housing hardship](#)" is set at 30% shelter cost-income ratio (i.e., spending more than 30% of income on housing).

While we recognize the work of WUSA and the University of Waterloo in advocating for stronger protections for renters and the creation of new student housing, the [significant year-over-year increases in rental costs](#) continues to pose a threat to student learning and wellbeing.

We implore **senior administration, WUSA, GSA, and Campus Housing** to redouble their efforts and contributions to providing safe, accessible, sustainable, and affordable housing for students through the following recommendations:

- Increase scrutiny on landlords and property management companies in provision of quality housing.
 - Direct formal complaints to the Region of Waterloo to impose sanctions on predatory and/or negligent landlords and property management companies.
- Increase support and collaboration with local government for co-operatives and non-profit housing, including but not limited to expanding the [BuildNowWR model](#) and supporting densification, lower-cost acquisitions, and conversions.
- Ensure any new housing (such as the new residence building) is designed to be carbon neutral, in accordance with [TransformWR](#) principles.
- Facilitate more robust tenant rights education for all students in partnership with the WUSA [legal protections program team](#), to ensure students are empowered to self-advocate.

4. Universal and comprehensive mental and physical healthcare

The University of Waterloo has developed a reputation for the poor mental health of its students. This was affirmed in 2017 by the [President's Advisory Committee on Student Mental Health](#) (PAC-SMH) report. Conducted after the tragic suicide of a UW student, the [report found](#) that in the last 12 months 44% of students felt so depressed it was difficult to function, 60% had experienced overwhelming anxiety, and 14% had seriously considered suicide.

These damning results lead PAC-SMH to propose [36 recommendations](#). According to the University in 2022, [the majority of these recommendations](#) have been implemented. However, six years on from that report, it is clear that they were not sufficient. Canada faces a [mental health crisis](#) and UW's programs are not fit to support the number of students impacted by it. According to

student testimonies, the wait time for a counsellor through Counselling Services can be as long as several months. This far exceeds this University's [stated standard of 3-5 weeks](#) for an initial appointment. For students struggling with mental health issues, this is far too long a wait.

Students also report having difficulties with submitting accommodations through AccessAbility Services, such as having to pay several times for documentation and liaise back and forth between their health practitioner and AccessAbility services. The current structure is not streamlined enough to meet the needs of many students experiencing temporary or permanent disabilities. Additionally, many of the accommodations offered are not sufficient to provide the support that students need from the University. [The Ontario Human Rights Code](#) states students who require accommodations because of their disabilities be accommodated to the point of undue hardship. UW is not accomplishing this basic requirement.

Healthcare for trans and gender diverse folks is also not sufficiently provided by UW. Currently, there is only one trans healthcare specialist at UW Health Services. She has been attentive and caring regarding transgender care. However, other practitioners at health services do not provide the same level of care nor have an adequate background in gender affirming care. The lack of knowledge and understanding of how to adequately engage with 2SLGBTQIA+ patients at large can lead to malpractice and harm to trans students. This must be addressed by the University.

The Region is struggling under [the volume of mental health calls](#) they receive. They will not be able to fill the gap left by the University's neglect of the physical and mental health of its students. UW urgently needs to increase its capacity to address student concerns onsite.

We urge **senior administration, Counselling Services, AccessAbility Services, and Health Services** to take responsibility and improve its mental and physical healthcare support by completing the following:

- Address long wait times for counselling and increase capacity to offer more same-day, walk-in counselling.
- Streamline the process for submitting accommodation requests and not putting the onus on the student to “prove” their disability or need.
- Provide trans equity and 2SLGBTQIA+ competency training to all practitioners and employees at UW Health Services (including front desk staff).
 - Allocate funding and resources towards gender affirming care and trans-specific community support.
- Hire additional staff members and practitioners that specialize in providing healthcare to equity-deserving groups.

5. Fair tuition and equal opportunities for international and out-of-province students

About 600,000 international students enter Canada annually for undergraduate and postgraduate studies. These young, hardworking, resilient students replenish Canada's talent pool and contribute over [\\$22.3 billion CAD per year](#) to the economy. For 2022/23, 41% of graduate students and 19% of undergraduate students had [international student status](#) at the University of Waterloo.

The highest proportion of new international [undergraduate and graduate students](#) come from regions most impacted by climate impacts: namely China, India, Iran, Nigeria, Vietnam, and Pakistan. As the climate crisis continues, many international students and out-of-province students also shoulder the burden of being intimately aware of the catastrophic impacts of climate disasters on their homes and families. Each one of them leaves their family and community to face significant financial burdens abroad, along with other cultural and language barriers.

International students pay approximately [six times more for tuition than domestic students](#). Additionally, out-of-province students have to pay an additional several hundred dollars per term. New research showed that Ontario undergraduate students paid more than [\\$40,000 for the academic year 2022-2023](#), which is true for the University of Waterloo as well.

This sum is even higher for graduate studies. This fact stands in contrast to President Vivek Goel's [recent op-ed](#), in which he urges the Federal government to increase funding for graduate education. While awaiting federal action, the University of Waterloo has a responsibility to address this issue, especially given its recognition of the ongoing problem.

Coupled with [the rising cost of living](#), this places undue mental and financial stress on international and out-of-province students. This results in international students being forced to [work part-time jobs for over 20 hours](#) a week which threatens their mental health, academic performance, and student status.

In order to obtain permanent residency (PR) status in Canada, students usually need to secure at least one year of work experience through the post-graduation work permit (PGWP) to be eligible for the Express Entry pathway. International students were disproportionately at a disadvantage under this program because the attainment of the permit varies at different levels of study. In the 2010-2016 cohort, only [15-20% of Bachelor's degree holders and under 50% of Master's degree holders](#) were able to transition to PR status. Additionally, under Canada's Provincial Nominee Programs only [34% of all international students transitioned to PR](#) because provinces tended "to nominate people with in-demand skills or provincial connections that could lead to long-term retention" while only allocating a limited number of nomination slots for international students.

International students enrolled in the University of Waterloo's co-op program are required to find employment but do not have nearly as many opportunities as domestic students. Many jobs are government-funded and require citizen, PR, or refugee status to be eligible. There are insufficient resources for students to apply to these limited jobs and have to seek platforms other than WaterlooWorks. This often results in scams targeting [international students](#) who are desperate for employment and/or unpaid work, which increases their financial burden as these jobs require 37-40 hours per week. UW has failed to act on this inequity.

We implore **the senior administration, Faculty Deans, UW Legal and Immigration services, and Co-operative and Experiential Education** to commit to the following:

- Institute a tuition freeze for international and out-of-province students. While a [province-wide tuition freeze](#) has been in place for domestic students, international students are charged [10-15% more each year](#).
- Offer more scholarships and remove barriers to access funding for international students.
- Increase on-campus student support for PGWP applications and post-grad career paths by adding specialized staff capacity to faculties.
- Increase full- and part-time paid work opportunities for international and out-of-province students across all disciplines, not solely relying on work-integrated learning programs. These students should have the opportunity to work full-time barrier-free in the same way domestic students are able to, especially as UW targets international and out-of-province students in recruitment.

6. End hunger on campus

The [marked increase in food prices](#) in Canada, driven by [corporate greed](#), has significant negative impacts on UW students. This surge in costs has led to a pronounced scarcity of affordable and culturally appropriate food options, leaving many students grappling with hunger. [Climate change will exacerbate food insecurity](#) due to changing weather and precipitation patterns. Food insecurity also [disproportionately affects vulnerable populations](#), such as racialized, Indigenous, and low-income people.

A 2021 survey across 13 Canadian post-secondary institutions found that approximately [40% of students faced food insecurity](#). A [recent local survey](#) revealed that 47% of university and college students in Waterloo struggle to afford basic necessities, including food. A worrying 13% resorted to using food banks due to the soaring cost of housing in the area.

WUSA Food Support distributed 445 food hampers during the Winter 2023 term and [577 food hampers](#) to students during the Spring 2023 term, a tangible indicator of the immense level of hunger on campus. Notably, [75% of the food hampers](#) distributed in the Spring of 2023 went to international students, a majority of whom are graduate students, who pay exorbitant tuition fees.

Further, a GEOG 391 student project surveyed 111 UW students from all faculties during Spring 2023, and found that 32% of respondents experienced some form of food insecurity and 11% experienced severe hunger. Due to rising food prices, students reported having to increasingly opt for instant or microwaveable meals, buy frozen or canned vegetables instead of fresh produce, and cut back or stop eating meat. This emphasizes the urgency of addressing this concern and finding sustainable solutions that cater to the diverse needs of the student body.

We urge UW to pay attention to the numerous appeals for stronger action on food security. We urge UW to commit to ensuring food security for all students on campus, particularly those with intersecting marginalized identities. Immediate-term band aid solutions can temporarily reduce students' hunger on campus, but there are also proactive measures UW should take in order to improve access to food on campus.

We compel **senior administration, WUSA, and Food Services** to:

- Expand existing food support programs on campus, such as the emergency food bank with WUSA Food Support Service and other meal assistance initiatives.
- Implement a cap on prices in Food Services outlets, with a particular push to make healthier and plant-based options financially accessible for all students.
- Implement a campus-wide community garden and [community fridge program](#) (similar to [Community Fridge KW](#)) to provide unrestricted access to healthy and culturally-appropriate food barrier-free, without regulation of participants' use.
- Promote awareness about available resources and financial aid options that can help students facing food insecurity.

7. Indigenous sovereignty and land back

The University of Waterloo is situated on the traditional and ancestral territory of the Attawandaron (Neutral), Anishinaabeg, and Haudenosaunee peoples. The University of Waterloo main campus is [1,000 acres](#) and is managed privately by the institution. Indigenous peoples have been the caretakers and custodians of the land, water, and air since time immemorial, and continue to protect these sacred life-granting gifts to this day. Indigenous peoples also [disproportionately face climate impacts](#) which threaten their way of life and very survival, an injustice rooted in colonialism and extractivism.

First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples face a multitude of systemic barriers and experience compounding forms of oppression across Turtle Island. They continue to grapple with the intergenerational impacts of colonialism, residential school, the Sixties Scoop, modern day residential schools - through the child welfare system, cultural genocide, the epidemic of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and Two-Spirit Peoples (MMIWGT2S), and many other horrific acts of injustice rooted in white supremacy and imperialism. All of which is ongoing and continues to this day. While Indigenous folks only make up about 5% of Canada's population, they are disproportionately represented in the criminal "justice" system - making up about [30%](#) of admissions to provincial/territorial custody. Indigenous peoples are also about 3 times more likely to [die by suicide](#), account for 20-50% of Canada's [urban houseless population](#), are 6 times more likely to [drop out of high school](#), earn an [average income](#) of up to \$20,500 lower than the non-Indigenous working class, and have a [life expectancy](#) 9 years shorter.

While the University of Waterloo has made some strides towards reconciliation, these efforts are far too little and too late. At UW, we estimate that Indigenous peoples made up about [0.53%](#) of full time undergraduate students in 2017 and [1%](#) in 2021 according to the UW Equity Survey. However, there is a paucity of recent, detailed, accessible data on the challenges faced by Indigenous students at UW. No further figures could be found regarding the dropout rates, employment rates, unique mental and physical health needs, levels of poverty, houselessness, hunger, etc. for Indigenous students at UW. We cannot collectively work towards a more prosperous future for Indigenous students without first investing time, energy, and resources into understanding the complex and dynamic makeup and needs of the community.

As of now, the Climate Justice Ecosystem does not include any core organizers who self identify as Indigenous to Turtle Island. This is largely due to the lack of capacity the Indigenous peers we

have reached out to currently have. As a result of our collective positionality, we feel that acting in solidarity with our Indigenous peers and community members means amplifying the calls to action already expressed by local Indigenous community members.

We call on **senior administration, Faculty Deans, and the Office of Indigenous Relations** to act on the following:

- Increase the capacity of the Office of Indigenous Relations and the Waterloo Indigenous Student Centre by hiring more Indigenous staff, increasing funding, and allocating additional community space.
- Meet and exceed all goals and subgoals of the [2023-2028 Indigenous Strategic Plan](#) and the Federation of Students' 2017 [Education and Reconciliation](#) report.
- Decolonize and Indigenize all UW curricula, policies, best practices, strategies and operations. Pursue this process under the guidance of Indigenous leadership.
- Advocate for the decentralized and Indigenous-led [Land Back](#) movement on Turtle Island.
 - Use UW's privilege and leverage to support and advance O:se Kenhionhata:tie's (also known as Land Back Camp) [four demands](#) for the Region of Waterloo to fulfill.
 - Physically give land rights and ownership back to Indigenous groups and organizations such as [White Owl Native Ancestry Associated](#), that is dedicated to pursuing land-based food sovereignty and creating spaces of healing for Indigenous folks.

8. Investments in transparent community-led safety initiatives instead of policing.

In the summer of 2020, the world was forced to reckon with its deeply embedded anti-Blackness. In KW, a [thousands-strong protest](#) drew attention to police brutality and police forces' [antagonistic relationship with marginalized people](#) - particularly 2SLGBTQIA+, Black, and Indigenous people.

In Canada, policing is also inextricably connected to the climate crisis. The [RCMP was created as a paramilitary force](#) to clear the Prairies of Indigenous communities following Prime Minister MacDonald's purchase of the land from the Hudson Bay Company in 1870. The [recent dispute between the Wet'suwet'en Nation and the RCMP](#) - wherein the Wet'suwet'en were defending their unceded land against the construction of the Coastal GasLink pipeline - shows how the RCMP are complicit in furthering corporate interests to the detriment of Indigenous rights and climate action. While the RCMP do not operate on the UW campus, we firmly believe that [police only exist to serve the interests of capitalism](#), not the public, and often harm vulnerable people in the process.

The UW Special Constable services are [mandated to conduct policing](#) according to the agreement with the Waterloo Regional Police Service Board and therein lie our concerns. Since 2016, the Waterloo Regional Police Service (the same Police Service that handles the more serious safety complaints from students) has continuously proven ineffective, and oftentimes actively harmful, in crime prevention. Despite an overall increase in the policing budget between 2016-2021, there was [a drastic spike in the crime severity index and a decrease in clearance rates](#) in the Region of Waterloo, having the lowest clearance rates of similar Ontario police services. In relation to instances of use-of-force, WRPS's [new system found the disparity ratio](#) between the Black and white populations is 0.20, compared to 3.13 disparity ratio above if census data were used. A 2022

report showed that women in the Waterloo region were [1.75 times more likely](#) to be strip-searched (meaning removing clothing down to undergarments) than men. In addition, people of colour, specifically Black and Middle Eastern residents, are [2.34 and 2.33 times more likely](#) to be searched while in custody.

In the wake of the June 28th attack, many students - particularly queer and trans students - [raised concerns](#) about their safety, most vocally during the [post-attack community forum](#). All students deserve to study, work, and live at UW safely. Very real and violent forces of homophobia, transphobia, and misogyny threaten our peers' safety and wellbeing.

However, we fundamentally do not believe that more policing is the answer. 2SLGBTIA+ people have [historically been targeted by and continue to be targets of police](#). The sudden presence of armed police forces on campus that day - without real-time safety warnings - increased the level of anxiety and danger for students. The University put us at further risk by failing to provide immediate notice about the situation, depriving us of the chance to shelter in place. The lack of clear communication was further compounded as heavily armed police officers swarmed the campus. This poorly managed situation could have easily escalated into a greater disaster, especially given that both UW Special Constable Services and the Waterloo Regional Police Service have a troubling history of posing safety risks to racialized and marginalized students.

Effective community safety must mean safety **for all**, something that policing institutions do not ensure for marginalized people. Our proposed solutions to community safety require the transformation of conditions at UW that produce violence, as opposed to punitive methods that are only reactive to violence.

Training is one of our primary asks, which should be regularly offered through a non-police service. Training programs should include a statement in support of said training and financial support in establishing and operating the training. Sessions should be required for all staff who interact with students. They should also be open to all interested community members, have a low barrier to access, and focus on the skills required for attendees to respond appropriately to the situation.

We ask for the full and public support of **senior administration, Special Constable Services, WUSA, and GSA** on these proposed solutions:

- Offer de-escalation training.
- Offer overdose/drug poisoning training.
- Promote the use of non-police alternatives like the [IMPACT team](#) in all communications with students, instead of defaulting to Special Constable Services.
- Establish a Walk Safe Program*.

*A Walk Safe program refers to a service that students, faculty, and staff can access where a pair of people will walk them to and from locations that are on or off campus. Universities and colleges in the region have similar programs. Wilfrid Laurier University has Foot Patrol, Conestoga College has Walk Safe, and the University of Guelph has SafeWalk. We further propose that there be adequate student representation on a Walk Safe program, and that workers at the proposed Walk

Safe program be compensated for their time and labour. Workers at a Walk Safe program should also be provided training on de-escalation and responding to overdose/drug poisoning.

9. Liberation, equality, and inclusion for all by dismantling all systems of oppression (such as homophobia, transphobia, ableism, sexism, and racism)

“We all belong” is a sentiment that has been echoed across all University-wide communications, including the [2020-2025 Strategic Plan](#). However, many students have seen and experienced that we do not, in fact, all belong. UW has consistently failed to ensure the safety and wellbeing of racialized and marginalized students from all levels of governance.

Over the last four years, UW has created a number of reports, committees, working groups, and task forces. These were all created to respond to the public spotlighting of its failures to address anti-racism, mental health, and sustainability issues on campus. These actions were often the result of tireless advocacy done by student leaders and the community, who experience these inequities on a daily basis. [Students have always been sounding the alarm](#) on the need to address the systemic violence and exclusion on campus that is often invisibilized through a culture of complacency and silence.

Following the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement in [June 2020](#), former President and Vice-Chancellor Feridun Hamdullahpur made a “[public commitment to address systemic racism across UW's campuses](#)”. The commitment was followed with the creation of the [President's Anti-Racism Task Force \(PART\)](#), with a guiding vision of “an equitable institution where all faculty, students and staff can learn, grow, and thrive.” However, as the student coalition [Equity for Who](#) brought to attention in July 2020, the creation of PART [did not include adequate consultation and involvement of campus community members](#). The Equity for Who Campaign successfully and importantly [outlined the hypocrisy](#) that exists at the University with regards to the “the violation and suppression of Black, Indigenous and racialized people on this campus.”

Three years later, despite a comprehensive [PART report](#), 88 recommendations, and reconstruction of critical offices, not all students belong and the silence continues. **What will it take for the University to make serious strides in unequivocally ensuring the safety, wellbeing and prosperity of all its students, namely Black, Indigenous, racialized, immigrant, queer and trans and the many students living at the intersections?** We are acutely aware that we do not all belong at UW. We are devastatingly aware that the University will choose a well written report and ‘representative’ committee over the meaningful, sustained wellbeing and safety of students.

As students, our first recourse for action has always been WUSA, the elected student voice. However, WUSA has been complicit in [hindering the ability of different equity services to advocate for marginalized students on campus](#). Instead of receiving support, capacity, and resources, students are constantly forced to fight for their basic right to have a voice and advocate for themselves. Equity student services such as the Glow Centre, Women's Centre, and RAISE are in a unique position to learn about problems on campus directly from students and push different parts of the University to address these issues, regardless of the goals that the WUSA board and staff have in mind for their position. Current and former service coordinators have long raised

concerns about being overworked or ignored by WUSA council and staff. Student leaders have been desperate for change: the very survival of students depends on critical work.

The June 28th attack came as a shock to UW leadership, but was hardly surprising to students who have been urging action against homophobia and transphobia for years. The advocacy work that the Glow Centre does should be completed by full-time staff working for the University. The lack of long-term planning, funding, and experience all hinder Glow's ability to make significant changes at an institutional level, but they are the only organization actually trying to make these changes. The University should, at the very least, support a formal liaison in the form of a trained full-time staff member to coordinate on queer and trans issues with both the university and WUSA.

The University's negligence extends beyond this incident. It has allowed an environment of [hostility to fester](#), evidenced by [anti-2SLGBTQI+ posters](#) on campus and the [doxxing of Black student organizers online](#). This also includes the circulation of transphobic and anti-Black memes in first-year chats, Zoom-bombings featuring racist and white supremacist content, and harassment aimed at student leaders advocating for trans-inclusive healthcare. All of this occurs while the University condones hate speech under the cover of [academic freedom](#) and '[political diversity](#)'.

In 2020, President and Vice-Chancellor Vivek Goel acknowledged that [academic freedom should not be an excuse for hate speech](#) and committed to "defend academic freedom" while also "uphold[ing] academic responsibility". The University's [Policy 8: Freedom of Speech](#) and [Policy 33: Ethical Behaviour](#) have been used to quell any student concerns. As a result, students have needed to continuously advocate for themselves and each other through open ethics complaints against instructors who have created hostile learning environments. Therefore for many students, staff, faculty, and alumni, the June 28th attack was [a clear manifestation of the University's acceptance of racism, transphobia, and anti-2SLGBTQ+ sentiments](#) in online spaces transforming into physical violence. [Statements from senior leadership](#) like, "the June 28th Hagey Hall attack [was a reminder that we are] lucky to live and work in a part of Canada where our day-to-day life is normally safe" in response to attendees' palpable fear and grief serve as reminder to marginalized students that the severity of the harm we face will continue to be ignored. According to UW officials, the threat of violence we live with is "rare".

We need UW to make a true and material commitment towards anti-oppression and the dismantling of systemic barriers. These impede the learning, longevity, and wellbeing of Black, Indigenous, racialized, and 2SLGBTQIA+ students, and those of us living at the intersections of these multiple marginalized identities. We need immediate action for our survival.

It is imperative that **senior administration, EDI-R Office, SVPRO, WUSA, and GSA** take action to address the systemic oppression and violence that permeates the University. We call upon them to take action on the following:

- Release a comprehensive P.A.R.T. Report update and host a community forum to allow for real-time engagement.
- Increase the paid capacity of WUSA services to advocate for their communities without the current censorship they encounter when outlining systemic issues on campus. These services are often the first to respond to student concerns, filling the gap left by the lack of paid staff capacity.
 - Immediately hire and retain multiple Black, Indigenous, racialized, and 2SLGBTQI+ counselors that jointly support Student Services, providing a safer space for students to turn to when in need.
 - Work in coordination with WUSA and the equity services to create an advocacy pathway with transparent timelines and accountability measures to ensure that silos are broken at the various levels of governance.
 - Hire a formal liaison in the form of a trained full-time staff member to coordinate on queer and trans issues between UW, WUSA, and GSA.
- Conduct an extensive review of UW policies, communications, and online spaces, including the r/uwaterloo subreddit, to address the pervasive violence that exists there.
 - Develop an action plan to be implemented by the next school year (2024/25).
 - Aggregate all existing survey data and reports of violence to inform this action plan, and create open channels for those who have not yet reported to add their experiences and insights.
 - Additionally, work on reducing barriers for reporting microaggressions and other forms of systemic violence, and establish transparent mechanisms for holding the administration, students, and faculty accountable.

10. Reliable and convenient public transit to and from Waterloo

In 2020, transport accounted for [47.1% of total emissions](#) in Waterloo Region, the majority of which were from personal vehicles and for [trips less than 5 km](#). Public transit is both a social and environmental solution, as it can provide a sustainable, convenient, affordable, and efficient way for UW students to travel to and from campus.

However, there is still no [all-day, two-way GO train service](#) between KW and Toronto, even after a decade of calls to the province. Insufficient seats leads to [dangerous travel conditions](#) such as standing in the aisle during a highway journey or being left behind having to wait an hour for the next bus. GRT bus strikes [leave students scrambling for options](#), with a particularly damaging impact on [commuters with mobility issues](#).

While we applaud the construction of the [new transit hub](#), there are still many significant issues with public transit options for UW students, especially those who live outside of the Greater Toronto Area and/or in smaller towns with little access to bus and train routes. [Fed Bus service](#) is extremely limited: it only runs twice a week, only stops at a limited number of destinations, and does not allow for luggage beyond anything that can fit under the seat or on the lap.

Students who were not able to secure housing in KW are [forced to commute for hours and significant cost](#) from cities such as Markham, Thornhill, and Hamilton, as many GO buses only

transfer through Mississauga. We know that housing is a major issue in Waterloo, and the lack of reliable and convenient inter-region public transit only exacerbates the problem.

While we recognise that transit is a provincial issue, we know how much influence UW can have on local government. UW is one of the largest stakeholders in the City of Waterloo by population. In addition, UW leadership have representation on Waterloo's [Town and Gown committee](#).

Therefore, we call on **senior administration, WUSA, and GSA** to:

- Increase Fed Bus service targeting peak times and days of the week. Enact regular service that is more affordable to be a competitive substitute to GO service.
- Implement a free, emergency shuttle system to and from campus in the event of a GRT bus strike.
- Work with the provincial government to advocate for all-day, two-way GO train service between KW and Toronto and increase GO bus service in correlation with student enrollment numbers.

We, your students and largest group of stakeholders, need UW to **start prioritizing people over profits**, and our wellbeing over good public relations. We have come together to urgently demand immediate action on the aforementioned issues, which all have **existential and material impacts** on students. In an increasingly precarious world, we continually invest our trust, time, and scarce financial resources into the University. It is imperative that all levels of governance at this university proactively engage with students and contribute to a safe, sustainable, and justice-centred UW.

Signed,

The UW Climate Justice Ecosystem & staff, student, and faculty allies

- Fossil Free UW
- O:se Kenhionhata:tie (Land Back Camp)
- Former WUSA Sustainability Commissioners
- UW Campus Compost
- Environment, Resources, and Sustainability Student Society (ERSSA)
- Environment Students' Society (ESS)
- Waterloo Region Climate Initiatives
- Waterloo Environment and Business Society



