

# Impact of the Student Choice Initiative on Levy Groups at Trent University

## Abstract

Among many other changes, the 2019 Ontario Budget outlined the new Student Choice Initiative which categorized ancillary services as “essential” or “non-essential” (Ministry of Finance, 2019a, pg. 185). According to the Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Universities (2019), all compulsory ancillary fees must be approved by a governing body, announced prior to the collection of fees, and be collected for the purpose of providing an essential service. Compulsory fees may only be charged for services that are deemed as “essential.” All fees that are not included in these categories are considered non-essential services and as such, institutions must provide students with the option of opting out of paying the fees. Subsequently, the levy groups at Trent University are at risk of losing considerable amounts of their funding as a result of the Student Choice Initiative. This report outlines the specificities of the Student Choice Initiative, democratic changes affecting secondary education, as well as the perspectives of various groups affected by these changes. Finally, an in-depth budgetary analysis of these organizations was conducted in order to make strategic recommendations for the future.

## Introduction

Levy fees are specifically directed to student organizations or organizations which provide a service or benefit to Trent in connection with the university

According to the Student Choice Initiative, refundable levy fees are non-essential when not categorized as athletics and recreation, career services, student buildings, health and counselling, academic support, student ID cards, student achievement and records, financial aid offices, and campus safety programs.

Results in:

- Decreased supports for homeless in Peterborough community
- Decreased access to mental health services for students
- In combination with reduction in tuition fees, decreased available jobs
- Increase in food insecurity
- Interference in democratic right of students to determine essential service



the seasoned spoon



## Analysis

Mission Statement: “**OPIRG** works to create and sustain student and community-based engagement through research, education and action on social justice and environmental issues; challenging oppression in all its forms; and using consensus-based decision-making in a non-hierarchical and accessible setting.”

	Helpful to achieving the objective S	Harmful to achieve the objective W
Internal Origin attributes of the organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Program offerings: Free Market, Green Dishes, Disorientation</li> <li>• Strong board of directors</li> <li>• Grants, work-study programs, levy fees</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The capacity of the coordinator; only one full-time staff</li> <li>• Lack of institutional memory</li> <li>• Wide-reaching mandate makes it almost impossible to fulfill</li> </ul>
External Origin attributes of the environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Having a free market on campus</li> <li>• Another full-time staff member</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student Choice Initiative</li> <li>• Under-staffed</li> </ul>

Mission and mandate: **Seasoned Spoon** Mission Statement: to grow a regional food system that is sustainable, inclusive and just.

	Helpful to achieving the objective S	Harmful to achieve the objective W
Internal Origin attributes of the organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being a cooperative; being part of a not-for-profit community</li> <li>• Being in a institution; built-in support system</li> <li>• Hardworking, dedicated, passionate staff</li> <li>• Levy funding, Trent Work Study Program</li> <li>• Strong board of directors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Financial struggles Broader food system set up poorly for processing and distributing local food</li> </ul>
External Origin attributes of the environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More real estate for food offering on campus</li> <li>• Expand educational offerings</li> <li>• Engage in broader support for other groups</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing inexpensive and accessible local food Student Choice Initiative</li> <li>• More competition for grants</li> <li>• Creating a flexible budget</li> </ul>

## Discussion

Strategic constraints

- Recruitment and retention of students in quick turnover market
- Increasing access of these organizations on campus limited by space and funding

Financial constraints

- Mix of employees and volunteers
- Impact on cultural programming and learning opportunities

Uncertain funding as a result of the Student Choice Initiative may result in fewer resources for students and community members, reduced employment opportunities at these organizations, and increased likelihood of burnout for coordinators.

## Recommendations

- Conduct a longitudinal analysis entailing continued analysis of the levy groups at Trent University
- Assessment of other organizations including a comparison of refundable and non-refundable groups
- Enhanced partnership with the Trent Central Student Association (TCSA) to continue lobbying for funding to meet the needs of current and future students

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