



Carleton University
Academic Staff Association

March 16, 2026

Dr. Wisdom Tettey
President & Vice-Chancellor
Carleton University

Re. Public Trust in Universities

Dear Wisdom,

Thank you for sending the examples of the data and reports you consulted to corroborate the claims you made at the meeting of Senate in November 2025 about trends of declining trust in, and the support for, our sector. Our team at CUASA has studied them and would like to share our conclusions.

There is no quantifiable evidence to suggest that public confidence and trust in Canadian universities have decreased in the documents you cited.

- The latest Universities Canada/Abacus Data Polling ([2026](#)) shows nearly two-thirds, 61 percent, say *they trust universities to act in the public interest*. In [2025](#), the Universities Canada/Abacus Data Polling showed that 77 percent of Canadians have either *very positive or positive impression* of Canadian Universities.
- According to another recent CAUT/Léger poll ([Lavigne \(2024\)](#)), 52 percent of Canadians have *a fair amount of confidence*, and 15 percent have *a great deal of confidence* in Canadian universities.
- Even going back nearly a decade, Environics Communications ([CanTrust Index \(2017\)](#)) index showed that universities and colleges were among the very top of the most trusted institutions in Canada (60 percent) and command an even higher degree of trust among New Canadians (67 percent).

Across all the above-cited polls, only the Canadian Military and hospitals enjoy a similarly high level of trust as universities among public institutions. After a careful and thorough search, we could not identify any other publicly available polling data that specifically asks questions about confidence or trust in Canadian universities or tracks this topic over time.

The narrative about falling trust in universities either falsely attributes small declines in trust in non-academic institutions to universities; conflates trust with the value of education; incorrectly extrapolates from US surveys; or relies on unsupported statements in Op-Eds. Upon scrutiny, none of the following six cited examples show a decline in public trust in Canadian universities.

- Statistics Canada's [Confidence in Institutions](#) headline indicator includes the school system but does not include universities.
- The Fraser Institute Study/Léger Poll ([Mitchell and Zwaagstra \(2025\)](#)) shows percent of left- and right-leaning university students who agree or disagree with statements: *there is a "safe" point of view on controversial topics and you fear formal consequences from expressing honest opinions*. This study is not about public trust in Canadian universities.

- The Macdonald Laurier Institute (MLI)'s Volume 5 ([McKitrick \(2025a\)](#)) shows only US data on public confidence in higher education institutions but draws gratuitous extrapolations about Canada. This is especially problematic since the US has a large system of private universities and the nominal level of U.S. student loan debt has grown from the hundreds of billions in the 1990s to over \$1.7 trillion today, reflecting a profound shift in how higher education is financed and a major financial burden for millions of households.
- [McKitrick \(2025b\)](#) Op-Ed in the Financial Post offers no evidence to support that public confidence in Canadian universities has decreased. Instead, he refers to his own MLI note, which has only US data as noted above. He then goes on to lament about Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI): He writes: "*The academic calendar becomes a year-long celebration of not being a straight, white male. Liberals seem not to be bothered by this but it has contributed to the alienation conservatives feel in academia*".
- The Fraser Institute's Cision news release ([2025](#)) just repeats item under 2 above. The [CBC news](#) item on September 3, 2019 talks about how 44 percent consider scientists 'elitist' and many '*discount science that doesn't align with personal beliefs*'. Again, this news item is not about the Canadian public's trust in Canadian universities.

Problematic narratives about falling trust in Canadian universities, if left unchecked, encourage the very phenomenon they falsely claim to have uncovered. As academic staff, we are particularly cognizant of how discourses against intellectuals, science, and social justice are weaponized by politicians and pundits in efforts to interfere with public funding, free speech, and academic freedom – concerns we trust you share. It is because CUASA agrees with you that decisions should be anchored in facts and evidence that **we enjoin the senior leadership of Carleton University to refrain from participating in the unsubstantiated narrative of diminishing public trust in Canadian Universities.**

We understand that, as President, you take it as your public role to protect the very foundations of research and learning: the value of free speech, academic freedom, the quality of public education, as well as the importance of diverse methodologies and programming. This defense requires an active public discourse. Safeguarding the free speech and academic freedom of faculty at Carleton requires revoking Carleton's Impartiality Policy. Further, we urge you to take up the cause of students who require affordable tuition and accessible grants and loans and deserve protection from the consequences of the recent restructuring of OSAP. Finally, the integrity and purpose of the institution requires a response to political narratives which purposefully and fundamentally promote misunderstanding of our work including last month's derisive comments about [Carleton's "basketweaving" course](#) by Premier Ford.

Universities should endeavor to contribute to positive and long lasting social, economic and political reform. Our respective participation in public discourses on the role of universities in Ontario matters.

Thank you for your consideration,

Dominique Marshall

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President
Carleton University Academic Staff Association

CC: Jaye Horton, Executive Director, CUASA