



## Insights: Higher Education in Canada and in the U.S.

	Canada	U.S.
Form of Government	Both are federations.	
	 Nat'l gov't + 10 provinces, 3 territories	 Nat'l gov't + 50 states
National Census Population	37 million	331.5 million
OECD 2024 World Ranking for Adult Education Level	#1	#9
Higher Education System	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>400+ universities + public colleges</li> <li>most are public</li> <li>less student mobility</li> <li>less stratified</li> <li>technical + vocational colleges</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6,000+ universities + colleges</li> <li>public/private mix</li> <li>more student mobility</li> <li>more stratified</li> <li>degree granting community colleges</li> </ul>
Regulating Level of Government	More decentralized <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Primarily Provincial Responsibility</li> <li>Limited Federal Regulation</li> </ul>	Less decentralized <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Primarily State Responsibility</li> <li>More Federal Regulation</li> </ul>
Government Financial Aid to Students for Higher Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Largely provincially funded with some federal funding</li> <li>Tuition Regulation</li> </ul> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Largely federally funded with some state funding</li> <li>Tuition Deregulation common</li> </ul> 
Accountability Mechanisms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Deferred to institutions</li> <li>No national standard nor accreditation system</li> </ul>	Congress created "the triad" <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>State Authorization (consumer protection)</li> <li>Accrediting Agency (Academic Quality)</li> <li>U.S. Dept. Of Ed Cert. (Title IV Eligibility)</li> </ul>
Government Funding for Higher Education Institutions	More generous 	Less generous

“Canada’s system looks good in comparative terms [whereas] the U.S. has seen gradual encroachment of its federal government in higher ed....Canada appears to have a set of provincial systems which are coherent, stable, [and] well-funded and where both levels of government more or less stay in their lane.”

Alex Usher, 2019

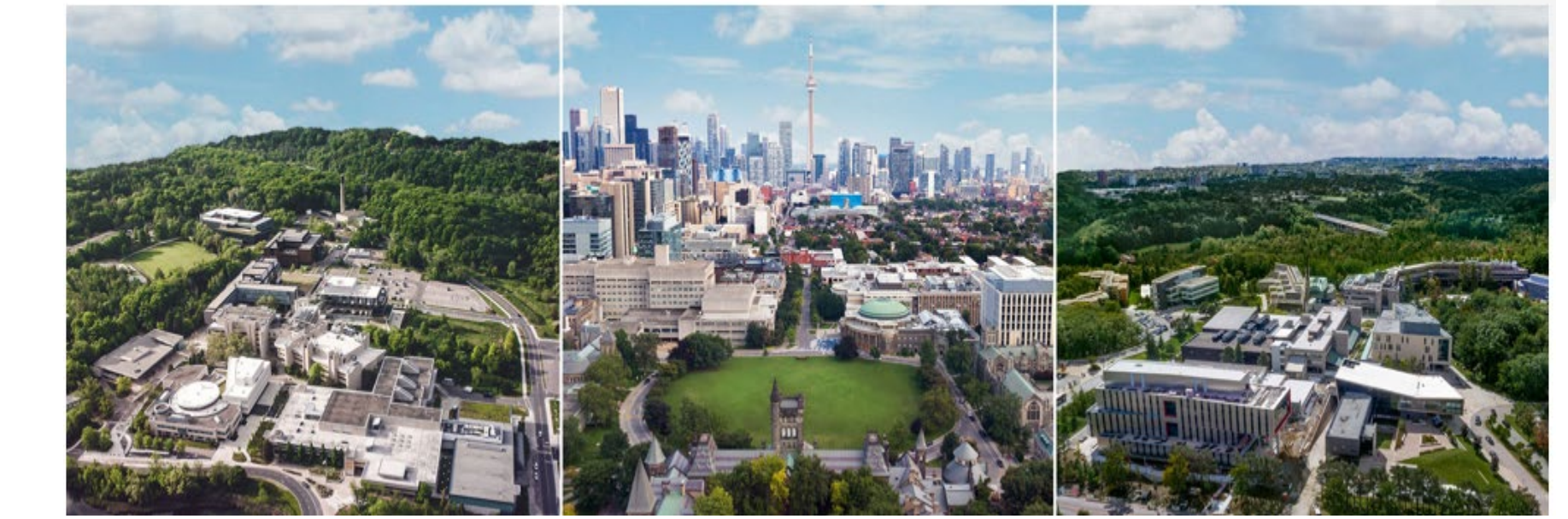
“If enough [U.S.] states are unable to remedy threats to access on their own, a federal solution may be initiated [to create] a safety net to prop up the system....the federal government will be in a unique position under these conditions and, if acted upon, may signify a new approach to federal policy.”

Anthony Lising Antonio, Martin Carnoy and C. Rose Nelson, 2018

## Strategies & Interventions: Higher Education Access and Pathway Development – Insights from Federalist Systems

Key features: Decentralized vs. Centralized systems	
<b>Decentralized:</b> Primarily Provincial/Territorial Responsibility Limited Federal Regulation	<b>Centralized:</b> Primarily State Responsibility More Federal Regulation
<b>Priorities:</b> negotiated by member-based networks and lobby groups such as higher education associations led by students, institutions, faculty, labour unions and industry associations.	<b>Priorities:</b> set by the province, state or federal government or government agencies with a focus on system coordination, setting academic minimum standards.
<b>Policies:</b> based on academic autonomy; regional and local social and economic needs as driven by industry and workforce development projections. E.g., <i>Ontario's Differentiation Policy Framework</i> includes bilateral agreements for funding publicly-assisted colleges and universities based on macro-economic conditions and the competitive advantages of each college and university in Ontario.	<b>Policies:</b> based on constitutional framework (i.e. rights/entitlements of special status groups such as Indigenous peoples <i>Indians, Inuit</i> and <i>Métis</i> ; and Francophone Canadians; focus on internationalization and interacts with citizenship and immigration mandates. Focus on system standardization, uniformity and economies of scale; resource sharing and cost-efficiency.
Funding frameworks	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Student tuition and fees:</b> Publicly-assisted institutions rely on domestic and international tuition to offset costs. To increase access, states/provinces use tuition subsidy/grants as a lever (e.g. Quebec tuition is highly subsidized by the provincial government for domestic students)</li> <li><b>Decentralization increases competition</b> for funding: in Canada, this results in high international student intake (with over 50% in Ontario), which inadvertently affects access for domestic students.</li> <li><b>Performance-based funding</b> i.e., in Ontario, <i>Strategic Mandate Agreements</i> (SMAs, est. 2014) links public funding to 10-performance metrics to incentivize differentiation and system transparency of funding and student outcomes. In 2022, British Columbia introduced, “block funding”, also linking funding to specific programs and student seats, rather than based on the previous year’s grants.</li> <li><b>Requires greater harmonization</b> between state/provincial policies and national policies and frameworks; increasing provincial and federal collaboration could help mitigate the negative effects of decentralization; ensuring more equitable access to higher education across the country</li> <li><b>Decentralization may contribute to inequities</b> in student outcomes between states/provinces, including high debt levels, and reduced consumer protections for borrowers in some cases.</li> <li><b>Changeable and Adaptive:</b> Beholden to provincial political landscape and market conditions: subject to change at least every 4 years, aligning with political cycles.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Student tuition and fees:</b> federal tuition funding for special and protected groups. In Canada, Indigenous students' access to higher education is facilitated through <i>Post-Secondary Student Support Program</i> (PSSSP). In the US, <i>Minority Serving Institutions</i>; <i>Federal Financial Aid Programs (Pell Grants)</i>, <i>G.I. Bill</i> and <i>Anti-Discrimination Enforcement</i> are federally funded. Certain states have recently overturned Affirmative Action for race-based admissions.</li> <li><b>Centralization mitigates/manages competition</b> for funding through regulation, i.e. Canada has recently introduced federal regulation: a two-year cap on international student study permits; decrease of 35%.</li> <li><b>Principle-based and/or benchmark funding</b> based on constitutional rights framework and government mandates. In the US, <i>TRIO programs</i> are funded and administered by the U.S. Department of Education under Title IV of the Higher Education Act of 1965. The <i>Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation</i> (CMSF) was a federal program (Est. 1998-2008) through an act of Parliament to provide financial assistance (\$325 million annually) and research to support access to post-secondary education in Canada.</li> <li><b>Requires greater harmonization</b> between state/provincial policies and national policies and frameworks; increasing inter-jurisdictional collaboration may help mitigate the standardizing effects of centralization to avoid “one-size-fits-all” perspectives.</li> <li><b>Centralization may correct historic inequities</b> in access and student outcomes between states/provinces through introduction of tuition regulation and other rights-based legislation.</li> <li><b>Fixed:</b> set by constitutional framework, judicial precedent and/or historic legislation; more difficult to change. Government mandates are beholden to political cycles.</li> </ul>

## The University of Toronto and its Commitment to Access



U of T is a world-leading university with three campuses in the Greater Toronto Area. U of T’s fundamental commitment to inclusive excellence — the idea that every member of our community should thrive in an environment of belonging — is infused into everything we do.

Since 1998, the University’s policy on student financial support has been that **no student admitted to a program at U of T “should be unable to enter or complete it due to lack of financial means.”**

This commitment to inclusive excellence sets us apart from other elite universities and creates an incredibly rich environment for research, teaching, innovation, and social impact.

## Presenter Biographies

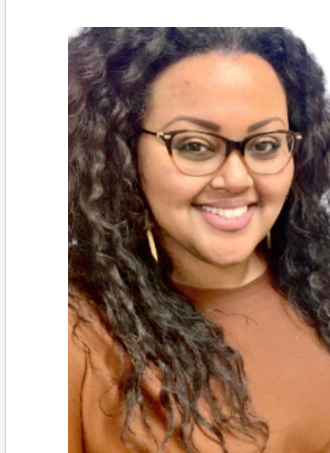


**Maria Jimena Rivera**  
Director, University Admissions

Maria is a licensed lawyer in Canada and in the U.S. She has more than 20 years of administrative and legal experience in higher education working at Canadian and American universities as well as the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, Yale University’s Office of the General Counsel, and the Texas Office of the Attorney General. Maria received her J.D. from Harvard Law School and her Bachelor of Arts from Texas A&M University.



Office of the Vice-Provost  
Strategic Enrolment Management



**Helen Tewolde**  
Director, Access Strategy & Partnerships Office

Helen Tewolde has 15 years of administrative experience designing, developing and delivering evidence-based and data-informed public programs, policy responses and systemic change innovations in higher education including the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO). She attended McMaster University for her Hons. B.A., OISE/UT for an MA and Osgoode Hall Law School, York University for an LLM in Constitutional Law.



Access Strategy & Partnerships Office, Office of the Vice-Provost, Students