ACADEMIC COUNCIL
Minutes of the Meeting of November 26, 2024
2:31 – 4:25 p.m. videoconference

Present:

Steven Murphy (Chair)	Nawal Elshamiy	Carol Rodgers
Asifa Aamir	Shanti Fernando	Robyn Ruttenberg-Rozen
JoAnne Arcand	Jessica Hogue	Denina Simmons
Robert Bailey	Mehdi Hossein Nejad	Gillian Slade
Ahmad Barari	Brenda Jacobs	Peter Stoett
Mary Bluechardt	Les Jacobs	Joe Stokes
Toba Bryant	Hossam Kishawy	Jemma Tam
Amanda Cooper	Lori Livingston	Dwight Thompson
Nicola Crow	Breanne Mcalpin	Oghenetega (Tega) Ubor
Catherine Davidson	Janet McCabe	Shannon Vettor
Ana Duff	Carolyn McGregor	Ken Wilson
Mikael Eklund	Fedor Naumkin	
	Scott Nokleby	

Staff & Guests:

Kirstie Ayotte (Secretary)	Peter Lewis	Amy Neill
Chelsea Bauer	Clarissa Livingston	Niall O'Halloran
Jamie Bruno	Jennifer MacInnis	Melissa Ramirez
Stephanie Callahan	Brad MacIsaac	Jen Rinaldi
Mitch Fraser	Kimberley McCartney	Sarah Thrush
Krista Hester	Christine McLaughlin	Lisa Townsend
Andrea Kassaris		Shelly Windsor

Regrets:
Scott Aquanno
Wendy Barber
Mihai Beligan
Krystina Clarke
Sayyeed Ali Hossseini

1. **Call to Order**
   The Chair called the meeting to order at 2:31 p.m. R. Ruttenberg-Rozen began with a thoughtful Land Acknowledgement, sharing her personal reflection and then reading the University's Land Acknowledgement.

2. **Agenda**
   A member requested to add to Item 10. Policy Consultation.

   Upon a motion duly made by R. Bailey and seconded by M. Hossein Nejad, the November 26, 2024 Agenda and the Consent Agenda were approved as amended.

3. **Chair's Remarks**
   The Chair reflected on the semester's accomplishments, commending the faculty, staff, and students for their dedication. He highlighted Pierre Cote's Lab's designation as a World Health Organization (WHO) Collaborating Centre for Rehabilitation Research, a milestone for the University and Canadian research. The Chair also celebrated the Men's soccer team's success winning the Ontario University Athletics (OUA) title and the University hosting the National Championship.

   Addressing challenges, the Chair emphasized the need for universities to align with government priorities in areas like education, healthcare, and energy to enhance public trust and secure funding, urging Academic Council members to focus on demonstrating the University's relevance and impact.

4. **Inquiries and Communications**
   a) **COU Academic Colleague Report**
   M. Eklund summarized key updates from the Council of Ontario Universities (COU) meetings. Topics included an escalating advocacy strategy focused on highlighting Universities' role in workforce development, job readiness, and economic growth. He also discussed SMA4 negotiations and challenges with international student permit caps, noting potential impacts on enrollment and institutional funding.

5. **Provost's Remarks**
   L. Livingston shared that the University applied for and successfully received the full $500,000 from the one-time provincial Efficiency and Accountability Fund (EAF), aimed at addressing financial challenges in higher education. She noted that the funds are designated for process reviews to identify cost-saving measures and improve outcomes for students and the community, and that the funds must be used as specified, with no discretion in their allocation.

   a) **Senior Academic Administrator Search Update**
   L. Livingston provided updates on the Senior Academic Administrator searches and renewals. She reminded members that Dean Carol Rodgers has requested a second

term, and that the membership of the Renewal Advisory Committee was announced the previous week. Additionally, she reported that the search for a new Dean of the School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies is progressing, with the call for committee members now closed and membership being finalized. Both processes are expected to move forward in the New Year.

L. Livingston re-confirmed that the Dean of Engineering and Applied Science renewal, and the Deputy Provost search have concluded, and recommendations are being forwarded to the Board for approval later this week.

In response to a question about conditions associated with the EAF, B. MacIsaac clarified that there are no written requirements from the Ministry and emphasized that the funding is a one-time grant intended solely for conducting reviews. He explained that institutions will need to use their own operating budgets to implement any recommendations. Although there are no specific conditions, the reports will be reviewed by the University's Board and submitted to the Ministry, which may reference them in the future. He confirmed that the review process, which began in November with the first report due by December 2024, will gather feedback from all levels of the University, focusing on those directly involved in the processes identified for review.

b) Strategic Mandate Agreement (SMA4) Update
S. Thrush provided an update on the transition to SMA4, covering the five-year period from April 2025 to March 2030. She advised that bilateral negotiations begin next week, with the government prioritizing student and graduate outcomes and community and economic impacts. She noted that SMA4 metrics have been reduced from 10 to 8, with six carried over from SMA3 and two to be selected based on the University's strengths. STEM programs are a key focus, with the Ministry requesting details on enrollment projections, program costs, labour market demands, and barriers to growth. She emphasized that the University's high proportion of STEM programs and it's alignment with these priorities will be leveraged to advocate for necessary investments. She also outlined other considerations within SMA4, like enrollment corridors and accountability, with 5% of funding tied to transparency and efficiency metrics. Although no base growth is planned for years one and two within SMA4, input will be sought for years three to five. Despite limited room for negotiation, the University aims to align with Ministry priorities, emphasizing regional needs, STEM programs, and its tech with a conscience focus. Further details on metrics are expected in January alongside SMA3 reporting.

In response to a question on the community engagement priority, S. Thrush explained that while it is tied to economic outcomes, it cannot currently be captured in SMA metrics due to the requirement for three years of data. She suggested that community engagement could be considered for institutional metrics outside the SMA framework and emphasized that the SMA metrics focus on stabilizing and securing funding rather than fully reflecting the University's identity and values.

6. 2025-2026 Budget Approach*

B. MacIsaac outlined the University's financial outlook, with a projected $15 million revenue increase to $260 million next year, driven mainly by higher enrollment. He discussed a $900 million provincial investment in post-secondary education, with Ontario Tech receiving additional revenue of $1.6 million this year, rising to $2.8 million next year, but with no guarantee beyond three years. Domestic tuition rates have been frozen since 2019, and an assumed increase of 3% , compared to 5% in the past few years, in international tuition has been built into the draft budget due to higher competition and concerns about Canada being perceived as "closed."

S. Thrush presented the 2025-2026 budget plan, highlighting moderate domestic growth of 1.5-1.75% in uncapped programs and growth in graduate research and course-based masters. However, international enrollment remains uncertain due to a lack of information on how federal caps will be applied, particularly for graduate students. She noted that for international undergraduates, the cap is expected to be met in 2025, with a 5% intake increase planned for future years.

The plan emphasizes retention and persistence, using a three-year average for projections. Scenarios included the budget scenario as presented, a "frozen" case with no growth in international enrollment and a growth scenariotargeting a 10% annual increase to reach 18,000 students. The outlook is cautiously optimistic, with uncertainties about international enrollment and policy changes. She noted that further information would be provided once available.

B. MacIsaac presented the budget's expenses, noting a $12.5 million increase in labour costs due to salary increases and new hires to support enrollment growth. He mentioned that revenue is expected to exceed expenses by $8 million, but uncertainties surrounding international student caps could reduce the projected budget by about $3.5 million. A further $3 million should be set aside for future or unexpected expenses, such as potential capital projects and unanticipated operational challenges.

He emphasized the University's reliance on enrolment growth with government funding and domestic tuition frozen . Overall revenue growth is projected at 1.5%, driven by increased enrollment, while labour costs, which account for 66% of the budget, will rise by 6%. He noted that the University's differentiated growth strategy has been key in maintaining a balanced budget and positioning the University ahead of others.

L. Livingston discussed the current uncertain environment, highlighting external factors that the University has experienced over the past few years such as the COVID-19 pandemic, historic inflation, and now government restrictions on international students, frozen tuition fees, and geopolitical conflicts. She emphasized that these factors are beyond the University's control, creating unprecedented levels of uncertainty. She noted that despite these challenges, the focus remains on mitigating the impacts through advocacy, fundraising, and a commitment to the University's differentiated growth agenda, which includes expanding existing credit

and non-credit programs to attract more students and ensuring the retention of current students. She expressed gratitude to Deans, faculty, and staff for their efforts in developing new programs and supporting enrollment growth.

In response to a question, S. Thrush explained that differentiated growth may not suit all institutions, but Ontario Tech is well-positioned due to its alignment with government priorities. She noted that the University is balancing undergraduate and graduate growth, focusing on expanding masters' programs to generate additional revenue and emphasized the importance of meeting regional demands in STEM, health, education, and applied programs while monitoring program balance and development within funding constraints.

J. Stokes addressed concerns regarding attestation letters and advised that the University currently has enough letters for its undergraduate programs, though there is a risk due to shrinking applicant pools. On the graduate side, the situation is uncertain, as the Provincial government has not yet received the Federal allocation for graduate students, making it difficult to predict future impacts.

B. MacIsaac highlighted the need for physical expansion, with the University operating at 71% of required space standards. Growth will require new buildings, which are a focus of the $250 million capital campaign. Addressing recent capital commitments, including loans for Shawenjigewining Hall and a purchased building, he explained that the idea for reserves now includes operating flexibility due to uncertainty. He also noted the cost-saving purchase of the Campus Corners building, supported by a $5 million donation, reduces annual expenses by $300,000 and adds an asset to the University's portfolio.

7. **Undergraduate Studies Committee (USC)**
M. Bluechardt noted no actionable items for Academic Council. She advised that the October USC meeting included the expedited approval of the new BA in Sociology and Tech Innovation program, which was recommended at last month's Academic Council meeting and will go to the Board of Governors for final approval. Additionally, revisions to the 2024-25 Undergraduate Academic Schedule and minor curricular changes were reviewed.

8. **Graduate Studies Committee (GSC)**
J. Stokes highlighted a successful internal recruitment event for undergraduates considering graduate school and discussions on adapting student recruitment to international changes. He advised that Associate Deans are working with Graduate Program Directors to explore ways to increase domestic graduate enrollment.

a) **New Program Proposal – Faculty of Business and IT (FBIT); Doctor of Philosophy-Cybersecurity* (M)**
J. Stokes presented the new program proposal being recommended for approval from GSC. In response to a question regarding resources for this new proposed program,

C. McGregor clarified that no additional resources are needed as a tenure-track faculty member in cybersecurity has already been hired. She noted that this hire supports both the new program and existing programs, including the Master of IT Security (MITs) and bachelor's cybersecurity courses.

Motion:
Upon a motion duly made by J. Stokes and seconded by K. Wilson, pursuant to the recommendation of the Graduate Studies Committee, Academic Council hereby approves the Doctor of Philosophy – Cybersecurity program and recommends approval of the program to the Board of Governors.

9. **Research Committee**
L. Jacobs thanked faculty and staff for their feedback on the Strategic Research Plan, noting that a written version will be ready by late January. He highlighted recent events, including the Women in STEM event, the Research Excellence Award ceremony, and the WHO Rehabilitation Research collaboration. He announced that the University has been named Research University of the Year for Smaller Universities by Infosource for the second year in a row and mentioned the approval of three new research entities, two of which will be presented at the next Academic Council meeting.

a) **New Research Institute – Mindful AI Research Institute* (M)**
L. Jacobs presented the Mindful AI Research Institute, a pan-university initiative led by Dr. Peter Lewis, and includes representation from all Faculties. He highlighted that over the past month, fifty faculty members expressed interest in aligning their research agendas with the Institute. He advised that AI-related research accounts for 8% of the University's publications, with a 150% growth in AI publications over the last five years, ranking the University second in the country among smaller Universities for AI publications. He noted that the Institute aims to consolidate AI research and innovation, focusing on themes such as self-awareness, social intelligence, responsible development, and the social impact of AI and that its vision aligns with the University's principles of tech with a conscience, and addresses the challenge of low-energy AI systems.

L. Jacobs confirmed that the Institute meets governance policies and procedures, as it involves faculty from multiple Faculties and significant external, diverse partnerships, including government, nonprofit, and business sectors. He highlighted formal collaborations with organizations like Lakeridge Health and the Vector Institute, ensuring compliance with the University's governance standards for establishing research institutes.

Motion:
Upon a motion duly made by D. Thompson, and seconded by A. Cooper, pursuant to the recommendation of the Research Committee, Academic Council hereby recommends the Establishment of Mindful Artificial Intelligence Research Institute (MAIRI) Centre for approval by the Board of Governors, as presented.

10. **Policy Consultation**
    The Chair acknowledged a member's request to review how policy feedback is presented to Academic Council, noting that there were no policies for face-to-face consultation at this meeting. The policy instruments listed on the agenda were only provided for informational purposes regarding written consultation.

    N. O'Halloran explained the policy consultation process, noting that the framework outlines different paths for consultation and approval depending on the type of policy. For legal compliance and governance guidelines, the consultation is done through written comments, with no report-back mechanism to those who provide feedback. Comments are reviewed by the approval authority.

    J. MacInnis confirmed that as per the policy framework the President is the final approval authority for the two policy instruments noted for written consultation. A report will be prepared for the President which will include the feedback obtained during the consultation process. J. MacInnis also noted that the subject policy instruments are in response to government directives received by the University.

    *To note: The guidelines are incorrectly entitled Anti-Indigenous Racism, Anti-Black Racism Guidelines under the Agenda as presented.

11. **Consent Agenda**
The Chair confirmed that the Consent Agenda and the items in the Consent Agenda were approved and received in the approval of the Agenda at the start of the meeting.

    a) Minutes of the Meeting of October 22, 2024* (M)
    b) Conferral of Fall 2024 Degrees* (M)

12. **Other Business**
    a) J. Stokes volunteered to provide the Land Acknowledgement for the January 2025 Academic Council meeting.

13. **Termination**
    Upon a motion duly made by S. Nokleby, the November 2024 Academic Council meeting was terminated at 4:25 p.m.

    Kirstie Ayotte, Assistant University Secretary