# COU Academic Colleagues Committee Report to the UOIT Academic Council

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## Synopsis

This report overviews the key discussion items and topics discussed at the COU Academic Colleagues committee since August to October 2017. The COU Academic colleagues committee met 2 times during this period of time, once in late August and recently in October 2017. The October meeting coincided with a reporting of the COU Academic colleagues to the COU coucil.

## Background

The objective of the COU Academic colleagues committee is to support the COU council, consisting of the executive heads of the institution members of the COU, with feedback from academic colleagues concerning COU initiatives. Every year the COU Academic colleagues committee, with the approval of council, focuses on particular topics of discussion. This particular year the committee has decided to focus on the general issue of "**Change in the current university context**" which has been triggered primarily by the recent reporting and accountability measures to the Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development (MAESD) of Ontario through the Strategic Mandate Agreements (SMA).

In order to prepare for the COU Academic colleagues meeting with the council there is typically an evening meeting with an invited guest followed by COU reports to the committee. These reports are fairly lengthy and are a summary of the activities of other COU committees of which other UOIT executives are part of and hence are briefly covered in this report in the Other COU Report Briefs section.

## Academic Colleague Report Briefs

- On the Thursday evening of the August meeting Dr. Tim McTiernan of UOIT was invited to have an informal discussion about managing change at higher education institutions. The discussion was very informative for the academic colleagues with Dr. McTiernan emphasizing some key changes in the administration of higher-level education institutions that are basically constraining the existing autonomy of our institutions and making it more challenging for the boards and academic leaders to think and act in a visionary manner.
- This open discussion with an executive head set the tone for future colleague discussions the impact of environment of change and government micro-management on academic colleagues and how to express these concerns to the executive heads at the up and coming council meeting in October.
- In preparation for the October meeting the academic colleagues committee defined a set of 9 survey questions that would help guide the discussion with the executives. These questions focused on the following 3 themes:
    1. Definition and contextualization, sharing reflections on faculty experiences and constraints generated by government mandates and a differentiated environment.
    2. Translation, covering how change efforts are communicated on campus and how faculty communities are energized to enact change.

3. Leadership for implementation, sharing suggestions for how faculty can serve as leaders in change management.

In order to capture UOIT's faculty view on these points I created a survey with the 9 questions that was distributed to our faculty with the support of the Provost's office. There were 5 responds to the survey which helped in our academic colleague's discussion at our October meeting.

- Rather than reporting the results of the survey to the executive committee it was decided that during the academic colleagues' time at the council meeting there would be an informal discussion with each of the executives sitting next to the academic colleague that would allow the colleague to also bring out some of the points expressed from the survey questions.
- In order to manage the short time available with the executives the 9 questions were condensed to the following 3 key questions:
    1. How does government mandated change create challenges at Ontario university campuses? What are the primary sources of these challenges?
    2. How do we best respond to internal communication challenges that result from contentious change efforts? What strategies exist? Where does communication break down?
    3. How is mandated change implemented or resisted in universities? Is there a special role for the Academic Colleague to play?
- In preparation for the meeting the academic colleagues had summarized their concerns as listed below:
    o Question 1: Sources of conflict may include: divergent principles (such as skills development as emphasized in experiential learning versus knowledge development); definitions matter and are not always clear; lack of resources (change is not always funded), including time; initiatives may create tensions in bicameral governance (SMA1 process is a good example); at the system level, tensions regarding differentiation versus uniformity may arise; competitions may also arise between departments or faculties on the same campus.
    o Question 2: Communications challenges are not always top down; sometimes challenges are bottom up as well. One communications problem is frequent email to faculty. Chairs are relied upon to provide direction and to ensure that messages are being delivered.
    o Question 3: it is important to note that faculty are not hired primarily to serve as change agents, but to teach and conduct research. Individuals may have limited opportunities to enact change; there are not necessarily structures in place to enable change efforts. Senior faculty may be in a better position to work for change.
- I had the opportunity to discuss these points with Tim McTiernan (president of UOIT), Sara Diamond (president of OCAD U), and Gervan Fearon (president of Brock University). After the discussions all executives and academic colleagues summarized their points to the council. Below is a summary of council's discussions based on these questions:
    o Communication seems to be an overriding issue. Though priorities may be established, they may also shift. As these shifts happen, trust may be threatened.

- - With respect to miscommunication across campuses, we might look to students for an alternative. Students use social media in effective ways; what might we learn from their approaches?
    - Many campus colleagues are working hard to enhance student experiences and enact change. It may be important to focus on better articulating what we do. Common definitions may help.
    - We may miscommunicate with respect to how much the government directs our work. We may have some work to do internally with respect to government relations.
  - We may also take the opportunity to think about the role of the Academic Colleague more generally. Colleagues have discussed the fact that their roles differ according to specific cultural and institutional contexts.
    - The opportunity for Colleagues to report to senates is important. These reports can help prepare the whole community on pressing issues.
    - Academic Colleagues may at times act as translators, helping campus constituents understand the difference between what is said, and what is heard.
  - We may find misalignment between faculty and administration on day-to-day issues. In some cases, for example, what is a priority for a faculty member may not be a priority for administration (and vice versa). Faculty "signals" may end up being "noise" to administration. Academic Colleagues may serve as a bridge in translating priorities and helping create a common purpose.
  - What's most changed in our current context is the frequency of disruptions. In the past, change was infrequent; we could afford to respond slowly. We do not have that luxury now.
  - It is important to remember that government is only one stakeholder in our context; there are multiple stakeholders to consider.
- Overall this format appeared to be a successful approach to the dissemination of the academic colleagues' concerns and will more likely be followed in future meetings with the executive heads at council meetings.
- The academic colleagues committee expects to continue its discussion around "Change in the current university context" looking at examples coming from the SMA process, experiential learning, as well as Indigenization efforts. In particular, Colleagues hope to focus on bi-cameral governance and how it is influenced by these contexts.

## Other COU Report Briefs

- SMA2: the new Strategic Mandate Agreements (SMA2) have been negotiated bilaterally, and most universities have signed the final agreements. Universities will be asked to post the agreement on their website.
- Government is expected to announce an opportunity to make it easier to reach SMA targets by expanding the number of international PhD students that may be "counted" for funding eligibility. **These PhD students will likely be charged domestic rates, and universities will need to cover the tuition difference.**
- Government has announced a 5-year plan to increase STEM graduates by 25%.

- In response to the Highly Skilled Workforce Report, Government has taken steps on the Career Kick-Start Strategy.
    - The Career Ready Fund was announced in early September. Stream one of the fund focuses on experiential learning and it is an allocation, not a competition. I am not certain f UOIT's allocation.
    - COU's Task Force on Quality Indicators is working to develop experiential learning metrics for SMA3.
    - Streams 2 and 3 have recently been announced. Stream 2 focuses on building partnerships with business, and will be competitive and Stream 3 is focused on recent graduates and transitions to the workplace.
- The government of Canada just released a report on strengthening the foundations of research, Naylor's Report, which is a top priority for Universities Canada this year.
- Canada as a destination for international study is also a focus this year. Countries of focus include China and Mexico.
- Concerning Bill 132 on the reporting of sexual violence, a new campus climate survey is being developed and will be required for all universities, colleges, and private career colleges. The survey administration is planned for February, 2018. Pilot testing of the instrument is currently underway.
- Concerning Bill 148 on the fair workplaces, better jobs act, COU is seeking clarification regarding interpretation of the legislation n particular to sessional hires and asking government to provide ongoing funding to help universities offset the increased costs. COU has also asked for clarification around the application of the legislation to students.