

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 November 2017 to March 2018. The COU Academic colleagues committee met 2 times during this period of time, once in late December 2017 and recently in February 2018.

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 evening prior to the December meeting, Bill Cormack, President of Guelph Faculty Association has a brief conversation with the Academic Colleagues that covered reflections on faculty leadership from the perspective of the faculty association. Some of the “key” points that were discussed by the colleagues that evening and the next day were:
 - The autonomy of academic institutions appears to be changing with the “new” government accountability framework.
 - There is a general sense that faculty members have not been active in the creation of the SMAs, but this can be attributed to many things such as the pace at which the change was requested compared to the pace of consultation.
 - Faculty associations may have more opportunities to speak out against some of these government initiatives compared to university heads, but because they are more focused on university/faculty working conditions they don’t tend to do so.
 - Tensions created by the reality of the environment could be addressed by greater transparency and authentic consultation.
 - Colleagues noted that a division traditionally exists between faculty (labour) and management (administration). If issues are addressed from within this framework, resolutions will continue to be challenging.

- Colleagues indicated support for faculty associations to take a more active role in discussions related to change initiatives (rather than being restricted to collective agreement discussions).
- Colleagues reflected that faculty associations are very different across the universities so that the views presented by Bill Cormack can vary from institution to institution.
- Colleagues indicated interest in thinking and talking about how we can play a role in bridging the gap between faculty and administration. One such avenue are these reports to Academic Council or the Senate.
- Dr. Mahadeo Sukhai presented an overview of the Landscape of Accessibility Project that is currently underway through the National Educational Association of Disabled Students (NEADS). The overarching goal of the project is to close the gap in postsecondary attainment between Ontarians with disabilities and those without.
 - One of the particular areas for further advocacy is in access to experiential learning opportunities. Disability Services offices on campus often become one-stop shops for students with disabilities. It is important to ensure that students with disabilities are also receiving support from offices such as career services, or community engagement.
 - Another area of interest and concern is essential requirements. Thinking through essential requirements should provoke questions about the nature of the tasks students are asked to do, why they are important, and if they can be completed in multiple ways.
- On the evening of February 13, Academic Colleagues met with Julia Shin Doi (General Counsel and Secretary to the Board of Governors, Ryerson University) and Glenn Craney (Deputy Provost and Vice-Provost, University Planning Office, Ryerson University) to discuss governing board perspectives on government-mandated change initiatives. Below is a summary of some “key” points that were discussed:
 - Colleagues indicated interest in learning more about the issues that fall under the purview of the board and senate; the role of faculty associations; the extent to which board membership reflects local communities or society; and the role of Executive Heads, particularly when there is disagreement between key stakeholders.
 - Communication is important at all levels. Part of good communications is managing expectations. When expectations are met, trust can be established and sustained.
 - Communication between senates and boards is very important; the executive head helps keep communication lines open.
 - Communication was also emphasized in the discussion regarding government initiatives—in particular, it is important that government consult extensively with universities.
 - Colleagues discussed the SMA process. It was noted that the SMA process was intended to start a longer conversation between government and universities; a pathway for clear communications is needed. Working toward SMA3 is one way to keep moving toward a strategic conversation with government.
 - Differentiation is also an important issue—the government is working to set up broad priorities, and universities need space to pursue them in their own ways.
 - Colleagues also discussed the ways in which government is a funder for higher education, but has no formal funding contract (as in k-12 education). There is no government mandate to fund postsecondary education; government funds PSE because

it is good public policy. PSE funding is the third largest transfer payment in Ontario, after health care and k-12 education.

- Since 2006, there has been a shift in how universities are viewed by the public; universities are currently viewed as part of government (or the broader public sector). This may account for some of the ways government seems to be involved in university business.
- Experiential education is an important initiative government is focused on. One reason for this is because it is an issue with respect to the economy and the ways graduates get jobs. Universities, however, are increasingly asked to provide entry-level job preparation while employers are reducing training programs and activities. This shift is important because it shapes university work in very significant ways.
- Colleagues talked about the values that are important to maintain in spite of the shifting context, including academic freedom, shared governance, and the important influences/changes a university education can bring to graduates.
- Colleagues agree that SMA3 will change things for universities, likely at all levels. As faculty and departments are influenced, more faculty engagement may be needed.
- On February 14th there was a conversation with Harvey Weingarten, President and CEO, Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario. Below are some “key” points from this conversation.
 - While institutions do change, programs are reasonably stable. A big change in the sector is the ways in which government is intervening today—more so in other jurisdictions in North America and the UK, but also in Ontario.
 - Without change in the PSE system, it is possible that quality will diminish.
 - The decisions that impact quality include:
 - Decreased funding for capital;
 - Larger classes; and
 - Not measuring student learning outcomes.
 - Harvey indicated that the PSE system in Ontario should refocus on quality. Funding is often the issue universities talk about, but quality should be the central focus.
- Colleagues discussed an approach to the Council Meeting, scheduled for April 11 and 12 (University of Windsor). Members agreed that the discussion format was useful. Colleagues agreed to provide one question (rather than a series) for discussion.
 - Colleagues expressed interest in focusing on department and/or school level changes that may result from the SMA process.
 - Colleagues agreed on the following question “To what extent and in what ways will individual faculty members, academic departments and senior management have to function differently as a result of the objectives negotiated in the SMAs?”

Other COU Report Briefs

- The OCAV Task Force on Quality Indicators developed a proposal for SMA2 metrics which were approved by OCAV and were included in the recent SMA2 process and have now turned their focus to SMA3. These metrics will be particularly important because they are likely to be attached to some performance-based funding. The Task Force has proposed a series of pilot projects for the development of SMA3 metrics. Results of the pilot projects will be used in the development of SMA3 metrics.

- The pilot administration of the Graduate Programs Outcomes Survey took place last spring and summer (2017). The GPOS was sent to all master's and PhD graduates in the cohorts 2009-2014. In addition to questions regarding employment and income, the survey includes questions related to student satisfaction.
 - The response rate for the survey was 35% (n=37,784). This response rate is slightly lower than the response rate for the OUGS. Fifty-six percent of respondents were women; 41% men. Eighty-three percent are Canadian citizens.
 - The results are very positive. A few high-level results are included below:
 - The median salary for full-time PhD graduate is about \$95,000
 - Median salary for master's graduates is about \$88,000.
 - Employment rates across the cohorts averaged 97%.
 - All universities will receive a summary of the provincial results as well as institution-specific data.
- An updated version of the Faculty at Work Report has been released that uses data from 2014-15 (<http://cou.on.ca/reports/faculty-at-work/>). The report includes information on the composition of the work force, teaching activity, research activity, and service activities. The sections related to composition and teaching include full and part time faculty; research and service are only reported for full time faculty.
 - Roughly half of faculty included in the data set are part-time (52%). The highest proportion of part time faculty are in education and law; the lowest shares are in engineering and sciences. Approximately 45% of teaching is done by part time faculty (mostly at the undergraduate level).
- The full report on the strategic engagement campaign is available on the COU website (<http://www.ontariosuniversities.ca/>).
- Universities are able to post their own SMA2 agreements, but government has not indicated when they will post these. COU has learned that government will not post university targets side-by-side in order to limit comparison among universities.
- The recent legislation (formerly Bill 148) provides amendments to several acts, including the Labor Relations Act. COU has launched a process with a few universities to gather information related to risks and potential costs. A report with some aggregated data will be used to estimate sector costs.
- COU has received clear signals from government that it will not seek tuition regulation, and will not be initiating enrolment caps for international students.
- Government may be seeking assurances that universities are providing clear information to incoming international students regarding tuition increases while they are in-program.