

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 for the April and May 2018 meetings. The April meeting was an Academic Colleagues and Council meeting while the May meeting was the final academic colleagues meeting for the 2017-18 year.

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).

The combined academic colleagues and council meeting was held at the University of Windsor campus. At this meeting the academic colleagues share a dinner and lunch meeting with the council executive heads (i.e. presidents of the universities). At this year’s lunch meeting the colleagues posed to the executives the following key 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?”**

Academic Colleague & Council Report Briefs

- Below are a number of “key” points from the lunch meeting with the executive heads:
 - The language of the SMAs can suggest job changes, which may be interpreted negatively. It may be useful to think about how we can more productively talk about the SMAs.
 - There is an important balance to strike between engaging faculty and leaving them alone to do their work.
 - Communication is important at all levels, to help shape beliefs and to lead us to the right outcomes.
 - Initiatives such as the SMAs are also opportunities for faculty to think about their work. For example, new curriculum mapping activities can result in asking faculty to think about outcomes; this is not only a bureaucratic exercise, but is also an integral part of curriculum review.
 - The SMAs are also an opportunity for faculty to show the value being contributed by their program or unit.
 - SMAs are also an opportunity for Ontario to understand the resource it has in its faculty. Faculty are contributing to Ontario’s economic and social development.

- It is important for departments to think about the metrics, but not all departments should be reporting on them. For some, the metrics are not relevant; for other departments, the metrics may be very useful.
- Colleagues agreed that SMAs may be used to meet strategic priorities, and they may be useful when universities need to advocate for increases in funding.
- Deans and department heads are often stuck in the middle of concerns around SMAs. It may be important to think about the supports that should be provided to them.
- Colleagues also wondered what data is being shared in support of the SMA goals.
- Universities might think about shifting our advocacy to focus on key professors. At alumni events, deans and department heads often hear stories about key professors that enriched students' educational experiences. This might be a good video series.
- Academic colleagues debrief of the council discussion:
 - Colleagues were generally pleased with the discussion though attendance by the executive heads was not as high as last year's attendance resulting in some of the tables having only one Executive Head, which meant that it was challenging to hear multiple perspectives.
 - It appears that for some institutions the SMAs represent business-as-usual--a formalization of things that have been developing over several years, though the "real" changes will come from SMA-3 as these will require concrete quality measures.
 - A significant concern is the Ontario election. COU anticipates that SMAs and metrics tied to funding will be retained.

Other COU Report Briefs

- **International Strategy:** The Ministry is finalizing its internationalization strategy document and the 2018 Ontario Budget provided some high level information about the strategy, though this may change now with the new government.
- **Sexual Violence:** The Student Voices on Sexual Violence Survey was in the field for university students from February 26 – March 26, 2018. All graduate students were invited to participate. Data will likely be available to universities late in the summer.
- **SMAs and Metrics:** SMA3 is likely to include metrics tied to funding. Negotiations on SMA3 are expected to begin in winter, 2019, which will make timelines on the pilot projects very tight. It is not clear what mechanism will be used to tie metrics to funding, so COU is working to develop some ideas to bring to executive heads.
- **Fair Workplaces, Better Jobs Act:** COU has been working with a small number of universities to understand the potential impacts of the legislation.
- **Career Ready Fund:** On behalf of members, COU proposed a website that will provide information to employers who may be seeking opportunities to develop experiential learning opportunities for students.