

## 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 December 2018, February and April 2019 meetings. The April meeting was a joint Academic Colleagues and Executive Council's meeting.

### 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 focused on 2 topics, that consisted of **Free Speech** and **Learning Outcomes**. The topic of free speech was primarily discussed in Fall term and throughout out the December and February meetings while the topic of learning outcomes was discussed in the April meeting as a request of the chair of the COU executive committee. Due to this change in topic midway through our year the report is divided into 2 topical sections, Free Speech and Learning Outcomes.

### Free Speech COU Colleagues Summary

In the December COU colleagues meeting there was a Conversation with Jamie Cameron, Professor, Osgoode Hall Law School, York University around the intersections between free speech and human rights issues. Below is a summary of some key points from this discussion as related to universities:

- The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms includes a section (section 2b) regarding freedom of expression and freedom of the media. It also expresses limitations to freedom of expression such as when an activity is harmful ("harm," however, is not well defined, and proving harm is challenging.) Criminal law also places limits on expression, and there are civil law restrictions (defamation, discrimination, for example). There is no consensus on how much tolerance should be allowed for expressive freedom. When expressive freedom intersects with human rights issues, our point of view will depend on our reflexive understanding of limits.
- It is important that universities respond to expressive freedom questions in a principle driven (rather than ad hoc) way and it is likely that that battles concerning the balance between free speech and human rights will be fought in implementation rather than policy.

At this meeting we also invited Ikram Farah & Stephanie Bertolo (McMaster Students Union) to talk about student perspectives and experiences. Below is a brief summary of these discussions:

- Since many controversial speakers are invited to campus via the student groups it is key that student groups provide information to the campus regarding invited speakers. If speakers are expected to be controversial, student groups are encouraged to add a moderator and engage with security offices. Preparing students for controversial speakers is promoted by talking with them about what it means to be global citizens.

- In a classroom setting faculty need to be prepared for when/if challenges occur concerning controversial topics. Faculty can be prepared via training in facilitating difficult conversations, anti-oppression training, or inclusive pedagogy.
- The idea of accountable space rather than safe space was discussed that would prepare students to express freely, and also to be socially responsible and accountable to/for engagement with others.

The topic of free speech was briefly discussed in the February meeting as the poor weather resulted in the cancellation of the invited speaker for the evening portion of the meeting. The only 2 significant points concerning this topic were:

- It was noted that the National Post recently ran an opinion article on free speech policies at Ontario universities that primarily stressed that most universities did not really make any changes to their existing policies to accommodate free speech.
- HEQCO compiled a report to government regarding the free speech policies. The report provides an overview of the policies, rather than an analysis regarding each of the required elements by university. HEQCO has not started work on the free speech reporting template yet (to be used starting in fall 2019), but has indicated willingness to work with COU as the template is developed.

### Learning Outcome Measures

This topic was discussed at the April COU colleagues meeting and was the focus of the COU colleagues report at the COU executive's council meeting. The core discussion was focused on the results of the SMA pilot 6 project on VALUE Institute Assessment of Learning Outcomes presented by Dr. Jill Scott, Vice-Provost (Teaching & Learning), Queen's University and Dr. Brian Frank, Associate Dean (Teaching and Learning), Faculty of Engineering and Applied Science, Queen's University. Both Dr. Scott and Dr. Frank presented to the COU colleagues with the intention of creating a reduced and focused presentation to the executives during lunch based on the guidance and comments of the colleagues. Below is a summary of the key points of their work:

- The study contains 3 phases: Phase 1 – looking at whether improvement in learning can be measured; Phase 2 – looking at building the network and engaging faculty; and Phase 3 – looking at extending the measures across several institutions to support common learning measures for SMA3.
- Four particular learning outcomes were investigated: a) writing, b) critical thinking, c) problem solving and d) life long learning.
- Students were assessed using several standardized learning measuring tool such as CLA+ Collegiate learning assessment, CAT critical thinking assessment test, and Value rubrics.
- A group of UG students were assessed commencing from year 1 to year 4.
- Phase 1 Lessons learned:
  - Standardized tests can be fairly costly
  - Participation declined over time with more participation in 1<sup>st</sup> year compared to 4<sup>th</sup> year.
  - Student effort on doing the tests was a factor and motivating the students and faculty was also a challenge.

- Phase 2's objective was to integrate the evaluation with the course teaching objectives and measures resulting in the adoption of the VALUE rubrics that can be used to map course objectives with learning outcomes.
- Phase 2 lessons learned:
  - Support for instructors to develop course-based assessments is crucial through grants and/or course relieve.
  - Faculty need to be mentored so that a culture of measurement across all aspects of higher education can be developed.

From the academic colleagues perspective it is important to enlist champions in these efforts as well as compensatory support. Cultural shifts require people that can help push things forward. Champions can also help students understand what they can do, and can help government understand students' skills development.

### Other COU Report Briefs

At all our meetings we receive a number of COU report briefings. These reports are also distributed to executives at the university and some are posted at the COU web site. As such they do not have to be directly related to topics that the colleagues are discussing. Some points are listed below based on these COU report briefs.

- On March 19, government released data from the Student Voices on Sexual Violence survey. Government provided a [summary of results](#) to colleges and universities. No data was delivered to universities.
  - With the announcement, government indicated a number of immediate actions for postsecondary institutions, including:
    - Requirement to report annually to boards on measures related to the experiences of and supports for students who have experienced sexual violence.
    - Increasing the Women's Campus Safety Grant to \$6M, shared across colleges and universities.
    - Requirement for institutions to have a task force devoted to the issue, including student representatives.
    - Requirement that all institutions must review their sexual violence policies by September 2019.
  - COU has asked HEQCO for consultation regarding the reporting that will be required in fall 2019.
- The Tuition Framework and Fees guidelines were distributed on March 29, 2019. As announced earlier, the framework calls for a tuition decrease (10%) for 2019-20; a freeze is also in place for 2020-21. The framework also outlines what is considered "essential" (compulsory) fees. This has been a contentious issue among students.
- COU continues its university advocacy to government. Recent advocacy activities include:
  - MPP Policy Breakfast focused on ending hallway healthcare. The event featured a panel of healthcare stakeholders that talked about solutions to hallway healthcare, and how universities can support solutions. The event was very successful, and generated a lot of

social media interest. COU will be organizing another MPP policy breakfast in the near future.

- With government interested in efficiencies and productivity, COU secretariat has asked universities to provide some examples of existing red tape that may be addressed, and/or examples of how universities have worked together to be more efficient.
- The Fall Economic statement (FES) was released in November 2018. This document provides discussion that will help shape COU's advocacy. The FES focused largely on the government's commitment to finding efficiencies, making every dollar count and getting the province's books in order, while also highlighting the importance of trust, transparency, accountability and affordability.
- COU is organizing a task force to think and talk about possible budget cuts and impacts. The Task Force will also start thinking about the mechanisms that may be used to attach funding to metrics.
- Career Ready Fund (CRF) – Experiential Learning website: in the CRF funding last year, a small pot of money was awarded to a consortium including Guelph, York, COU and the Ontario Non profit Network. The consortium is building a website that can be used to link small and medium sized employers to students who are seeking EL opportunities. The website will serve as a hub of info for employers and partners. It will launch in May 2019.