

COU Academic Colleagues Committee Report to the UOIT Academic Council

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Note: That this report typically includes a synopsis of the April COU Colleagues meeting (held in conjunction with the COU council meeting) but this meeting was cancelled due to the COVID 19 pandemic.

Synopsis

This report overviews the key discussion items and topics discussed at the COU Academic Colleagues committee for the December 2019 and February 2020 COU colleagues 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. At the September 2019 meeting, the committee focused on “thought leadership” related to the future of postsecondary education: **“Given the priorities Ontario universities share, what critical issues should COU pursue as part of our proactive policy leadership?”** This topic became the focus of further COU colleagues meetings.

Meeting Summaries

At the December 2019 meeting, Dr. Mastroeni (Assistant Professor, OCAD University) and Leah Zaidi (futurist and entrepreneur) joined the colleagues for a conversation on foresight and the future of Ontario universities. Some of the points they made include:

- In considering the evolving role of universities, the sector should focus on the future of the world, and on how universities fit into that future.
- The future in general, and the future of work in particular, are unpredictable and complex systems; the factors that drive change are not in the control of universities.
- Three world issues that must be taken into consideration are:
 - climate change;
 - protecting diversity, equity and democracy; and
 - artificial intelligence.
- There is an increasing public distrust of institutions, including universities.
- Universities must articulate a value proposition in an environment in which prospective students now have access to free or low cost content over the internet. One suggestion was that universities emphasize the importance of spaces for dialogue and for the preservation of truth(s).
- To respond to a new generation of “digital natives” and to new social and labour demands, universities should: (1) enhance and expand multidisciplinary programs, exposing students

- to multiple research areas; and (2) expand opportunities for students to curate their own education experience.
- Current structures/institutions might need to be dismantled to allow others to thrive.

Colleagues noted that climate change, issues related to diversity, equity and democracy, and the impacts of artificial intelligence are not issues of the future, but of the present, and that universities are already responding to these challenges.

Colleagues also noted that making all programs multidisciplinary was only one model; other models might be as or more effective in meeting the challenges of the future. Currently, most programs include electives that allow students to explore other disciplines. Colleagues also shared examples of courses created and designed with student input.

Colleagues expressed concern about the perception of universities, a university education, and the professoriate by both students and employers. They stressed the importance of engaging with the public—for example, through program advisory councils.

On the role of COU

David Lindsay joined the Colleagues to discuss the Affiliate Review and described what he perceives to be COU's three lines of business:

1. Coordinating activities that universities do better and more efficiently together: for example, Ontario Universities Application Centre (OUAC), University Health Insurance Plan (UHIP), library procurement (OCUL).
2. Provide support for “communities of practice” --groups of individuals that have the same type of role across universities (Provosts (OCAV), Planning and Analysis (CUPA), Administrative Officers (CSAO), Registrars, etc.).
3. Policy and advocacy with government.

On the role of COU Colleagues

At the February 2020 meeting, Eva Busza (Vice-President Policy and Sector Collaboration, Council of Ontario Universities) talked about the role of Academic Colleagues at COU. The night started with each colleague sharing the process by which they had been selected for the position and their understanding of their role.

The process by which Colleagues are selected varies depending on the institution. Some are asked to the role by the executive head or provost at their university and others are elected by senate or faculty. In some cases, the role is a highly contested position, and in others there is a requirement that the Colleague be one of the academic deans.

On their role and impact, many colleagues expressed that they considered themselves conduits of information. Some deliver a brief or report to senate and some see themselves as providing a different perspective on sector-wide issues than the ones provided by executive heads. One colleague noted that their knowledge of issues affecting the sector allows them to be a liaison between faculty and executive heads.

Eva Busza commented that from several discussion with the executive and in the COU affiliate consultation three key roles/functions of the COU colleagues emerged: (1) an ambassadorial role—

bringing what they learn at COU about whole of sector positioning, approaches, and priorities back to their own institutions; (2) their particular expertise and networks that can be leveraged to inform thinking about the future of the sector; and in a slightly different vein, she stated that a number of executive heads had conveyed that they saw the function as providing professional development for promising future sector leaders.

David Lindsay echoed Eva Busza's characterization of the way in which academic colleague roles and functions are described in the literature and have surfaced in discussions at the Executive Head Table: i.e., as ambassadors who communicate whole of sector information and positions back to their institutions and as experts that can inform thinking and shaping of the future of the sector in their areas of specialization. A number of executive heads in recent years have expressed the view that they see this position as providing an opportunity for professional development with a view to foster leaders in the sector.

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.

Bill 132 (now passed: Better for People, Smarter for Business Act)

In this bill several significant changes to post-graduate studies took effect such as:

- Algoma: will now be allowed to confer bachelor degrees in any arts or science program. Also allows for the university to offer degrees in any branch of learning at a future date to be determined by Cabinet.
- OCAD: will now be allowed to offer Bachelor of Arts, Master of Arts and PhDs. Also allows for the university to offer degrees in any branch of learning at a future date to be determined by Cabinet.

Collaborative Nursing

- Colleges are advocating to be allowed to deliver stand-alone baccalaureate nursing programs. Universities have expressed support for the existing collaborative model. Deans of Nursing and provosts are working on advocacy around this file.
- On Feb 11 the Minister announced that colleges will be allowed to offer stand-alone bachelor's degrees in nursing, overturning the collaborative program framework for colleges and universities that has been in place for 20 years. Universities are disappointed at this development.
- The government's rationale includes that students leaving smaller/rural college communities to do the university portion of the program often do not come back to their home communities. There is no clear evidence of this.

SMA3

- Universities are having their second round of SMA3 meetings with MCU. The ministry expects drafts to be submitted for later in February and for SMA3 documents to be signed by the end of March.

- In response to sector advocacy, MCU has issued some revisions to SMA3 guidelines. These provide more flexibility and predictability for institutions:
 - Universities will now have three reweighting opportunities, one in each of the first three years of the SMA3 (2020-21 to 2022-23).
 - The ministry removed the “continuous improvement” factor for (1) institutions whose average performance for the past three years places them in the top quartile for the sector in select metrics (employment rate, graduation rate, Tri-Agency funding), and (2) for institutions that meet or exceed their minimum expected performance in the first three years of SMA3 (for all metrics except the institutional strength/focus and the economic impact metric).
 - For the Tri-Agency funding metric, the ministry will increase the minimum band of tolerance from 1% (which applies to all metrics) to 4%.
 - The Innovation metric, which measures revenue attracted from private sector sources, will now include research funds from foundations and not-for-profits. These revenue sources had previously been excluded.

Tuition Framework

- The current tuition framework reduced all funding-eligible program fees by 10% in 2019-20 and froze fees at those rates for 2020-21. These changes have resulted in a sector-wide two-year revenue loss of approximately \$1.1B. The government has signaled that it is thinking about the development of the next framework. COU and its affiliates are working on principles and options to inform the government’s decision.

Digital Learning

- On January 6th, HEQCO released a [report](#) on digital learning programs. Ministry staff have signalled an interest inside government to develop a digital strategy for the postsecondary sector. COU is considering opportunities to influence government directions.