

COU Academic Colleagues Committee Report to the UOIT AC

Authored by: Ramiro Liscano (COU Academic Colleague Representative for Ontario Tech University)

Synopsis

This report overviews the discussion around mental health and Covid-19 within the COU Academic Colleague's meeting as well as a report on this topic by the COU Academic Colleague to the Executive council at the 309th Meeting of Council. This joint meeting between the COU Colleagues and the Executive typically occurs in April but was cancelled due to the Covid-19 closures and hastily re-scheduled for June 22nd, 2020. This triggered a preparation meeting of the COU Colleagues that occurred on June 18th, 2020. Both of these meetings occurred online.

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.

Meeting Summaries

COU Colleagues Meeting (June 18th, 2020)

The objective of this meeting was to prepare for the COU Colleagues report to be presented at the COU Executive council meeting on June 22nd, 2020. For this Executive's meeting it was decided that the following 2 short presentations would be presented and as preparation the presentations were presented to the colleagues at the June 18th meeting.

- | | |
|--|---|
| • Student Mental Health and the COVID crisis: What should we expect? | Dr. Kim Hellemans
COU Colleague, Carleton Un.
Dept. Of Neuroscience |
| • The Centre for Innovation in Campus Mental Health Update** | Marija Padjen, Director
Centre for Innovation on Campus
Mental Health |

Presentations

Dr. Hellemans' presentation primarily focused on the role of faculty in supporting mental health wellness for students. She stressed that the 1st year cohort is particularly vulnerable. She stressed the concern of how to create campus connectedness when most, if not all, courses and contacts are on line. Her recommendations were to i) create peer-to-peer networks, ii) talk to students and involve students' societies, and iii) use analytics in learning management systems to track student engagement.

Ms. Padjen's presentation was an overview of the tools and support available through the centre for innovation on campus mental health. The centre maintains a significant amount of knowledge and tools on mental health (campusmentalhealth.ca and morefeetontheground.ca). Many Ontario universities already leverage information and tools provided by the centre. They have developed a model for mental health known as stepcare 2.0 that most learning institutions have adopted including our institution. There is an expectation that campus mental health issues will increase (for both students and staff) with the

Covid-19 pandemic and she outlined key issues such as: keeping myself/my staff morale and motivation, challenges with technology, keeping students engaged, increased academic and financial pressures, and barriers to mental health services.

Follow up feedback

It is rather challenging to summarize such an important and complex topic and the goal of the meeting was to determine how the presentations covered the mandate of the COU colleagues. From a faculty perspective the colleagues stressed the following points:

- Boundaries between the faculty and students are important to understand and especially relationships.
- It is important to inter-relate faculty and student mental-health. From the colleagues perspective we envision issues arising in faculty and staff mental health as well.

The meeting adjourned with some comments to the presenters concerning the length of the presentations given the time constraints for the COU Executive meeting.

COU Joint Executive and Colleagues Meeting (June 22nd, 2020)

As previously mentioned, the presentations by Dr. Hellemans and Ms. Padjen were the focus of the one hour meeting with the COU Executives along with a short report by the COU colleagues chairs. The following two questions were posed to the executives in order to spur some conversation among the colleagues and the executives:

1. What changes could be made within university counselling services to provide stronger support for diverse students?
2. What type of professional development or resources might help faculty adjust to providing care in new online learning environments?

Given the short duration of the meeting and the fact that there were two presentations only comments around question 1 were discussed. Some of the comments consisted of:

- Brock University mentioned the hiring of a mental health worker with human rights background.
- OCAD University was planning to hire a person focused on EDI at the front line.
- The first year for International students is critical.
- There was some concern as to why not many diverse students are going for mental health support (this was a point made in Dr. Hellemans' presentation.)
- There was also a comment made about the inclusion of all actors at the university in the mental health process. An interesting "real" example was presented about security guards that often spend a lot of time talking to students and can spot concerning behaviour in students in environments that faculty and staff are typically not part of.

General Personal Comments

The online COU meeting format is not as effective for informal discussions and interactions as the prior face to face meetings. Prior to Covid-19 the COU Colleague and Joint Executive and Colleagues Meetings consisted of an evening meeting followed by a morning meeting on the following day. This allowed for the opportunity to informally discuss topics over dinner and lunch. This difference was very noticeable for the Joint Executive and Colleagues Meeting held on June 22, 2020 which switched to a presentation format with a minor time period to discuss concerning issues and receive a broader feedback from other

executives. At the end of the scheduled one hour meeting with the executives there was no follow up discussion among the colleagues. In the end it was not clear if the executives gained any insights from the colleagues and vice versa.

COU Report Briefs

At all our meetings, we receive a number of COU report briefings but due to the brevity of the online meetings there were no reports given by COU staff to the colleagues.

COU Academic Colleagues Committee Report to the Ontario Tech U AC

Alyson King (COU Academic Colleague Representative for Ontario Tech University)

Synopsis

This report provides an overview of two meetings held on August 18 and 19, 2020, and a third meeting held on September 1, 2020. The meeting on August 18 focused Black Lives Matter and anti-racism. The August 19 included further discussion of anti-racism, information sharing about the universities actions related to the pandemic, and updates from COU. The meeting on September 1st was held to approve the appointment of a new President and CEO of COU. All of these meetings occurred online.

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.

Meeting Summaries

COU Colleagues Meeting (August 18-19, 2020)

Evening meeting, August 18, 2020

Conversation with Carl James, Professor (Faculty of Education) and Affirmative Action, Equity and Inclusivity Officer, York University, on the topic of anti-Black racism.

- Dr. James joined the colleagues for a conversation on anti-Black racism. He emphasized that Anti-Black racism is systemic and the result of colonialism. The only way to move forward is to become conscious of the political, economic and social conditions that have led to our current situation and noted that this would be an uncomfortable process so we need to be comfortable with being uncomfortable. Dr. James noted that the presence of Black people in Canada dates back to 1628 and that it is important to understand how racism is systemic. He asks: 'Why are we comfortable using visible minority, lumping everyone together?' A rethinking of systemic racism requires more than "unconscious bias" training because we need a consciousness that racism is systemic. It is a way of starting a conversation where the basis of discussion is inequity and structural factors; in other words, if inequity is the basis of society, those realities will shape our lives.
- Anti-Black racism forces us to consider race, the Black experience, this experience as different, and to name the issue by using the words: Anti-Black racism. He explained that racialized people are constantly trying to negotiate with an environment that does not acknowledge them. He encouraged Colleagues to pay attention to the race of their students and to include their experience in the curriculum and in the course materials.
- A Colleague shared that the widespread protests that followed the death of George Floyd have empowered racialized individuals to speak more freely about racism.
- Dr. James framed discrimination as a process by which individuals determine who should be part of their in-group in the context of too many stimuli to make an informed decision. Individuals then take shortcuts that rely on biases to determine who will be part of the in-group. This

process leads, for example, to research teams composed solely of people who have similar life experiences.

- Colleagues discussed the use of the words “fit” and “excellence” in the context of the hiring process. One university mentioned that their institution banned these words because they were historically loaded with bias.
- Throughout the conversation, Dr. James posed a number of questions to Colleagues: (1) How does one diversify faculty or any group for that matter? (2) How can universities set an example for society? and (3) What work needs to be done to change the system?

Morning meeting, August 19, 2020

1. COU Overview

- Cecilia Brain provided an overview of COU, including its purpose and structure, as well as the Terms of Reference for Academic Colleagues. (COU Overview slides are available).

2. Dinner de-brief

- Colleagues discussed the lack of diversity within their ranks. They encouraged each other to increase diversity through the nominations processes at their universities. Colleagues acknowledged that faculties at universities are not diverse and not representative of the student body. They shared initiatives at their institutions to hire indigenous professors. Some are starting to consider targeting hiring for other underrepresented groups and at least one university has announced the targeted hiring of Black professors (e.g., at OCAD, there was a cluster hire of Black professors in Design). It is important for students to see BIPOC professors..
- There was an acknowledgement that current financial circumstances made it difficult to hire new faculty but also that regardless of this constraint, universities must make an effort to diversify their faculty.
- They noted that this is not just about hiring more diverse faculty. It is also about supporting PhD students through mentorship, and new faculty through the various stages of promotion.
- There was also a discussion on how universities can set an example and support changes towards diversity in society. One idea was to provide guidance and support to organizations that host student placements and to prepare students who are going to these placements to make changes from within those organizations.

3. Information Sharing

- Many universities are asking faculty and staff to continue working from home through the fall semester. Some of these universities are only allowing access to campus buildings under very tight restrictions. A few universities are planning to provide face-to-face instruction in select programs in the fall.
- Some international students are having problems accessing course materials and/or technology due to state censorship of the internet in their home countries. There are concerns that these students might be putting themselves at risk legally or politically in the case that some course content violates local laws.
- Ensuring academic integrity in proctored exams continues to be a challenge. To be effective, Respondus needs particularly strict and intrusive surveillance mechanisms.

4. COU update

The final part of the meeting was comprised of Briefing Reports from COU staff.

- **SMA3s** were supposed to be signed by end of March, but this was paused because of COVID. The agreements are still not signed, but there have been consultations with the Ministry on how to get it signed by the fall so the hard work is not lost. Universities raised concerns about how the pandemic could affect enrolment and performance metrics and how this could affect their financial sustainability. The Ministry has put forward some concessions because the Ministry wants it signed: the machinery will be continuing, but the funding will be “decoupled” from the metrics for 2020-21 and 2021-2022. During this period, universities will continue to collect and report on metrics to support public transparency and to track the effects of the pandemic. The academic year 2022-23 will be first year that metrics will be tied to funding, but there is still uncertainty about what proportion will be linked to the metrics. The government has paused reporting on two items, including faculty compensation; if there are any losses or gains, they have agreed to slip the year to the following year. The signings are expected by August 31 and evaluations will start in the fall. In sum:
 - everything will be in place in year 3;
 - the data being collected are mainly public data;
 - evaluations will still occur, but performance and funding will not be linked because we need to see how COVID will impact some of these metrics.
- **Consultations with the Ministry of Colleges and Universities (MCU):**
 - Since late June, the sector has had numerous weekly consultations on a wide range of issues, including financial sustainability, digital learning, micro-credentials, international students, and research and innovation.
 - The Minister sees COVID as an inflection point, as an opportunity to pivot and make further investments in the future of PSE. He saw the move to online as a success because things that normally would take 10 years happened quickly. Because there is an enormous risk for lost revenues, he wants to seek opportunities to increase revenue and decrease costs.
 - Financial sustainability – since domestic tuition fees and government grants, which are currently frozen, account for two-thirds of operating grants, there is a huge risk for potential losses to the sector. In addition, there are new costs with prepping campuses and moving courses online. Universities have already spent \$50M in costs related to the pandemic and anticipate \$125M in new costs this year for campus preparation and moving courses online. COU is advocating for funding to offset these additional costs, tuition increases, and enrolment corridor protections.
 - Digital learning – Looking at possibilities to find efficiencies in online learning and to have revenue generation by exporting the province’s. The MCU is looking at a centralized or common platform for universities to host their online courses (to reduce costs and rationalize by having one online course for all universities, e.g., introductory calculus). Universities expressed concerns about this approach noting that it would not reduce costs; it would disrupt the university business model; and raised issues about faculty Intellectual Property of curriculum. Instead, the sector has encouraged government to support: student access through IT infrastructure; research into best practices for digital learning; and access to professional development, training and support for faculty.

- Microcredentials – are a priority for the Minister to support upskilling/retraining those unemployed or furloughed due to COVID. Online microcredentials are seen as a way to support employment. The sector has highlighted its Continuing Education programs, micro-courses, innovative program designs, and pilot work on micro-certification. Colleges have made this as a priority, but recognition of them is limited. They have also shared a number of challenges with the Ministry, including that: these credentials are not included in the Ontario Qualifications Framework (OQF); that there is limited employer recognition of micro-credentials; and that OSAP does not provide support for programs that are less than 12 weeks. They are costly to produce. The sector has asked the Ministry to take time to explore these challenges and find solutions.
- International – the Ministry understands the importance of international students and their importance to the economy, but COVID has radically disrupted the way that international students think about their education. Canada is in a good position, but there is enormous risk regarding revenue and supporting international students when they get here. This is a rapidly evolving thing. The sector is asking the province to work with the federal government to find a way for international students to come to Ontario in a way that protects public health.
- Research & innovation – The Minister is interested in innovations and Intellectual Property (IP) developed at Ontario’s PSE institutions staying in the province and benefiting Ontarians. He is concerned that Ontario may not have capacity to commercialize IP and, as a result, it is sold to international companies. A new MCU-led Strategic Council on IP will work to implement many of the recommendations of the Expert Panel on Intellectual Property. These include free online resources for IP developers/researchers and a common online curriculum for any individual or entity who receives public funds in support of entrepreneurial activity.

5. COU Internal Updates

- Starting in 2020-21, Mohammed Lachemi (Ryerson) is the new Chair of COU. Rhonda Lenton (York) is the Vice-Chair.
- David Lindsay is not continuing as President of COU. A search for his replacement is underway and very close to finishing. It is hoped that a new President will be announced shortly and begin her/his term in the Fall. **COU has since announced that starting on September 14, [Steve Orsini](#) would assume the role of President and CEO.*

6. Planning for Council Meeting

Colleagues agreed to recommend that the topic for the October 16th Council Meeting be racism on campuses.

Special Meeting of Council (September 1, 2020)

This was a short meeting of both the Executive Heads and the Academic Colleagues to approve the appointment of Steve Orsini as President and CEO, effective September 14, 2020.

“With more than 30 years of experience in government and health care, Steve brings a wealth of public sector experience. As Secretary of the Cabinet, Head of the Ontario Public Service (OPS), and Clerk of the Executive Council from 2014 to 2019, Steve reported to the Premier of Ontario and was responsible for more than 60,000 employees in the OPS. As Secretary, Steve championed the development of the OPS of the Future Action Plan, its Inclusion and Diversity Blueprint, and the government’s first Anti-Racism Action Plan. Steve also served as Ontario’s Deputy Minister of Finance and Secretary of the Treasury Board from 2011 to 2014. Prior to that, Steve was Deputy Minister of Revenue and Associate Deputy Minister for Taxation, Pensions and Agencies. Steve also held senior leadership positions at the Ontario Hospital Association, including Vice-President of Policy and Public Affairs.

“Steve has a long history of working collaboratively with all levels of government, the broader public sector, NGOs, and industry associations on system transformation. For example, Steve Chaired the Premier’s Housing Development Approval Round Table, supported Ontario’s input into the Amazon bid, played a leadership role on behalf of Ontario in negotiating the HST and federal administration of Ontario’s corporate income tax, oversaw the policy design of the Ontario’s Child Tax Benefit, supported the province in comprehensive pension reform, and worked with the federal government and other provinces in reaching an historic agreement in creating the pan-Canadian Cooperative Capital Market Regulator.

“Steve is currently the Co-Chair on the Ontario Chamber of Commerce’s Advisory Council on Ontario’s Economic Future and a member of the Intergovernmental Fiscal Relations Steering Committee reviewing Canada’s fiscal architecture. Steve previously served as Chair of the Ontario Financing Authority and Ontario Electricity Financial Corporation, as well as a Member of the Public Policy Forum Board of Directors and Advisory Council of the Lawrence National Centre for Policy and Management at the Ivey School of Business.

“Steve has a Bachelor of Applied Arts in Urban and Regional Planning, a Master’s in Environmental Studies, and a Certificate in Public Administration. He has also completed the Canadian Securities Course, Parts I and II of the CICA In-Depth Tax Course and the Harvard University Health Care Leadership Program. Steve is currently a Distinguished Fellow at the Munk School of Global Affairs & Public Policy and a Senior Fellow at the C.D. Howe Institute.”