

COU Academic Colleagues Committee Report to the Ontario Tech U Academic Council

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Synopsis

This report provides an overview of the meetings of the Academic Colleagues held on **February 15 & 16, 2022** and **April 5 & 6, 2022**. It also provides an overview of the **313th COU Council** meeting held on **April 8, 2022**. All meetings occurred online.

Background

The objective of the Council of Ontario Universities Academic colleagues committee is to support the COU Council, consisting of the executive heads of the institutional members of the COU and academic colleagues.

Meeting Summaries

COU Colleagues Meeting (February 15 & 16, 2022)

Evening meeting, February 15, 2022

1. Conversation with Victoria Barham, Dean of the Faculty of Science, University of Ottawa, on Bringing the Community into the Classroom**

Dr. Barham spoke to the Colleagues about strategies for bringing the community into the classroom. The traditional method of taking students out into the community can be challenging with the volume of students in large Faculties. Traditional strategies suit small cohorts and tend to serve the strongest students the best, rather than those who could benefit the most. The research demonstrates the importance of things like co-op placements, volunteerism and the like, but many students from disadvantaged backgrounds or those with work and family commitments are the least likely to be able to participate. Dr. Barham told us that the model needs to be flipped; we need to bring the community into the classroom, rather than the classroom into the community.

- **Venture Initiative** is a joint initiative with the Faculty of Arts that takes a large enrolment class (mainly at the 2nd year level) that normally had nothing to do with the community (e.g., global politics) and pairs it with an organization with a chronic problem that they want help solving. It involves a pedagogical activity that is compulsory for all students and culminates in showcase presentations with prizes and t-shirts, with high school students and community members. The impact has included: helping students to connect the dots; to learn to apply the analytic tools and knowledge they are acquiring in their course to solve a real problem; and, to start to understand the limits of their knowledge. The goal is not to “solve” the problem, but to think about how to solve problems, to develop an entrepreneurial mindset, and to develop communication skills. Community needs are placed at the centre so students can see in a concrete ways why it is important. For it to be successful, the program needs funding and extra support. Logistically, there should be no more than 6 students per team and it is similar to problem-based learning models. They used the Stanford design lab for training for instructors and there is a “change-maker in residence” who goes into the class, introduces the problem and method to the classes, and supports instructor. See: <https://socialsciences.uottawa.ca/venture-initiative>

- **Directed Research in a Professional Setting** is a longstanding program run by the Dept of Economics for 4th year students to develop research skills in a professional setting. They put out a call for proposals where community partners identify a research project that is suitable for a student to complete in 130 hours, including deliverables. There is a matching process and then the student works independently to prepare a research report. The final grade is proposed by supervisor (at the community partner organization) and validated by faculty members. The impact: it is highly motivating for students; it expands the diversity of course offerings; it is an opportunity to develop a professional network when preparing for the transition to full-time employment or considering grade school, etc.; students acquire different skills than co-op or practicum placements; and, for the community partner, the project can explore a question that they may have wanted to explore further but have not had the resources.
- **Walls-to-Bridges v2.0 pilot:** In traditional Beyond the Walls programs, students go into a prison and study alongside prisoners. This model is logistically challenging. Instead, the Walls-to-Bridges 2.0 leverages technology to allow incarcerated students to enroll in any course that can be livestreamed. This is easier to manage with regards to security challenges and geographic limitations. The impact: it expands access to education to those who cannot attend in person; it is closer to a 'real' classroom experience; and, it is transformative for all students. See: <http://wallstobridges.ca/>

2. Preparation for Council Meeting

Colleagues discussed potential topics for the Council meeting (with executive heads) to be held April 8, 2022.

Morning meeting, February 16, 2022

1. Information Sharing

Colleagues shared information about their university's COVID protocols, how well courses were running, and so on.

2. COU Update (Cecilia Brain)

Program Approvals

- The ministry has sent a memorandum to the sector announcing the implementation of a revised program approval process. Approval of a submission will reside with either the Minister of Colleges and Universities or the Director of the Postsecondary Accountability Branch (PSAB). The approval level will be determined based on a new assessment tool that will be used to review all program approval submissions received by the ministry. This change is intended to make approvals quicker, but will not replace quality assurance.
- Program approvals that will continue to require Minister approval, regardless of the assessment score, include:
 - Consent applications under the Post-secondary Choice and Excellence Act, 2000
 - Programs in regulated professions (e.g. teacher education, medicine, nursing, paramedicine)
 - Programs that are precedent-setting or in a new area of delivery
 - Programs where the government is a major direct employer (e.g. policing, border services)
 - Programs that have high operating grant costs
- The assessment tool includes five categories. Each category is assigned a score out of 100.
 - Labour Market Need/Demand/Outcomes (30 points)

- Work-integrated/Experiential Learning Opportunities (30 points)
- Program Impact on System (20 points)
- Tuition (10 points)
- Funding Level (10 points)
- Program submissions that receive a score of 80 or higher out of 100 will be delegated to the Director of the Postsecondary Accountability Branch for approval. Programs that receive a score of less than 80 will be sent forward for the approval of the Minister of Colleges and Universities.
- Ministry staff will engage with institutions over the coming months to ensure that there is a common understanding of these changes and to make any necessary refinements to the new processes. The Ministry will release guidelines that will include quality service commitments related to timelines for program approval decisions, as well regular communication to the sector on the status of program approval submissions. The Ministry will work collaboratively in the coming months with postsecondary institutions in developing and finalizing guidelines. The ministry will be updating the Program Funding Approvals and Administration Module (PFAAM) for program approvals and relevant policies to reflect these new processes over the coming months.

International

- In December, the British Council IELTS released a report showing that there is rapidly increasing competition from European and Asian markets for international students in high-demand programs: <https://studyportals.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/British-Council-Studyportals-The-changing-landscape-of-English-taught-programmes-in-2021.pdf>
- This is a significant risk for Ontario institutions. COU will be exploring options for a sector approach.

Pre-Election Strategy

- COU's advocacy is focused on the vital role the sector has to play in helping the province rebuild after COVID-19 and drive a robust economic recovery, framed around four key pillars: helping rebuild a world-class healthcare system; developing job-ready graduates; driving regional economic development and supporting a globally competitive economy. The fifth pillar then outlines how in order to continue supporting the province, universities need support.
- **Internal Government Advocacy:** Based on advice from affiliates and committees, working groups and economic research, COU is proposing a three-pronged strategy for internal government relations:
 - Tuition Flexibility
 - Increases in Operating Grant Funding
 - Increases in University Capacity
- **Public-facing Communications:** To further support internal government advocacy, COU recently launched its public-facing campaign. The campaign leverages communications and government relations to influence the government, as well as build relationships with candidates and the other major political parties. This campaign will run from January until April.

Strategic Mandate Agreements (SMA3)

- Performance-based funding for Ontario universities is scheduled to be activated for 2022-23. This is after the government delayed activation for the first two years of SMA3 to mitigate the impacts of COVID on performance evaluation. On December 17, COU sent a letter to the ministry expressing the sector's concerns regarding the timing of recoupling performance funding given the impact of COVID-19, and the impact of the Delta and Omicron variants.
- The Faculty Activity and Faculty Compensation reporting metrics are scheduled to be implemented for 2022-23. These metrics are not tied to performance, but will be made public.

The ministry has started a consultation process with the sector on the proposed reporting template. The sector has formed a working group with representatives from OCAV, CUPA and GRO to develop recommendations for MCU.

Micro-credentials

- The results of the Microcredential Challenge Fund were communicated to institutions on December 9.
- COU is working with the Ontario Council of Ontario Lifelong Learning (OCULL) to collect data on universities' continuing education offerings to supplement advocacy around microcredentials and the established role of universities in upskilling/reskilling for the labour market. A two-phase data request (February/May) is being developed in consultation with OCAV.

eCampusOntario

- The microcredential portal (listing OSAP-approved college, university and Indigenous Institute microcredentials) was launched on December 15: <https://micro.ecampusontario.ca/>

Math Proficiency Test for Teacher Candidates

- On December 17, 2021, the Ontario Superior Court of Justice Divisional Court found the Math Proficiency Test (MPT) requirement infringes on the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.
- The court found that the MPT had an adverse impact on entry to the teaching profession for racialized teacher candidates and other reasonable alternatives should have been implemented.
- They ruled that Ontario College of Teachers (OCT) shall grant certification to teacher candidates who have not yet passed the MPT, but who have otherwise met all other teacher certification requirements
- While the government has filed a motion to appeal, the MPT will not be a requirement in the interim.

3. Institutional Autonomy & Financial Sustainability (Lisa Krawiec)

Institutional autonomy: According to Universities Canada's principle of autonomy: "Institutional autonomy ensures that universities are free to pursue enquiry and disseminate knowledge based on evidence, truth and peer review. Universities must be free to pursue their own mission based on the oversight of their governance bodies to meet university community needs and local needs." Autonomy allows universities more agility to shift, but it can mean less accountability. COU notes that the amount of government funding is decreasing while accountability requirements are increasing. With Bill 276 (sched. 16 and 28) being implemented unilaterally without consultation (e.g., the creation of NOSM U and Hearst U), there is concern about destabilizing the sector. Alberta has the greatest provincial control over universities, while Eastern universities have the most autonomy.

Financial sustainability: Challenges to financial stability includes: declining operating grants; tuition cuts/freezes; the impacts of COVID-19; a reliance on international student revenue which increases risk; decreasing operating grants. Ontario has the lowest provincial grants per FTE in the country. At the same time, scholarships and bursaries have increased. Universities need to give the government reasons to invest in universities.

Budget recommendations to the Ontario government include: increasing operating grants and tuition flexibility; increasing new funded university spaces in high-demand programs; and, emphasizing the importance of the Humanities (e.g., philosophy for Artificial Intelligence developments). There is a need for multi-year frameworks for long term planning rather than new frameworks every year.

Advocacy to the provincial government includes the importance of building the province's labour force with high demand talent: spaces are needed for future growth; developing job-ready graduates with flexibility because graduates earn well and jobs align well with the skills they develop in university. University grads are successful and worth investing in. This is connected to the need to reinforce resiliency and a competitive economy.

The remainder of the meeting was composed of planning discussions for the April meetings and reports from three committees.

COU Colleagues Meeting (April 5 & 6, 2022)

Evening meeting, April 5, 2022

1. Conversation with Sheila Côte-Meek, Vice-President Equity, People and Culture, York University, De-colonizing Academia

Dr. Côte-Meek presented an overview of the dimensions that informs her work on colonization and decolonization, noting that colonization has led to extreme inequities and ongoing violence. Going back to the work of Franz Fanon whose work linked colonialism with violent states, colonization has been linked to the land. Education is one of the primary tools of colonization. The structures that hold together the academy are colonial and influence what and how subjects are taught in universities. While culturally-based education is important, it does not address the ongoing forms of violence that continue to exist in mainstream institutions of education. Dr. Côte-Meek discussed the principles and practices of decolonization, indigenization and equity, noting that decolonization is about the land, ideology, and violence, and looking for ways to create alternative methodologies and worldviews. Indigenization is about the process of working with Indigenous peoples to support a deeper understanding of Indigenous worldviews and methodologies, but it is not as deep as a decolonization process. Equity is the process of creating equivalent outcomes.

Dr. Côte-Meek also considered the strategies for creating space for Indigenous epistemologies, referencing Miheesuah & Wilson (2004): who gets to decide what is researched? Dr. Côte-Meek pointed out that research must be driven by the community, must interrogate their own understandings as researchers, as well as ways of being/doing and how they may marginalize or exclude other ways of being and doing. This is especially true when a university hires an Indigenous scholar. Universities need to look at hiring practices, research ethics protocols, Collective Agreements, and policies for tenure and promotion, among other things, to ensure that the university is not excluding those whose research, for example, is community-based or is highly confidential. Community-based research that is truly embedded in and respectful of community takes longer to complete. Many communities look to Indigenous researchers to undertake research that can never be published because of its sensitive nature. How will universities support Indigenous research that does not fit into the usual way of doing things within the university?

Indigenization, especially the hiring and integration of Indigenous scholars, is complex and requires that all parts of the university be well-prepared to engage in the process of indigenization. This might entail ensuring that different units within the university are prepared via the training of hiring committees (e.g., unconscious bias training), having committees that are reflective of who they want to hire, and so on. University administrators also need to be aware that research shows that Indigenous and racialized people tend to have higher service loads. Are there ways to have workload reductions for excessive

service work? Universities need a critical mass of Indigenous and racialized people across the university so that no single person is overloaded. Doing this work is complex. It is hard to bring about structural change in institutions that have ingrained values. There are lots of points of entry to make change, but it is important to rethink how we do things on a daily basis (e.g., how meetings are run: for example, unsettle the usual way of doing meetings by allowing an assistant to have a voice at the table). Existing practices and hierarchies tend to exclude people, so we need to think through how to create equity in different spaces beyond just the classroom.

Discussion and debrief

Discussion focused on hiring practices and ensuring that there is strong mentoring and other support for new hires who are Indigenous, especially in smaller universities where a cluster hire is not possible. Once Indigenous scholars are hired, the tenure and promotion processes need to ensure that relationships and community supports are in place to allow for new models of teaching and research. Community-based research is very different and the usual model of doing most of one's field research during the spring/summer term needs to change. Adjustments or changes in the process must not be simply 'exceptions' for individuals because that is isolating; it needs to be a de-structuring and rethinking of the institution and its processes.

Morning meeting, Wednesday, April 6, 2022, 9:00 am – 12:30 pm

Much of the meeting was spent preparing for the Council meeting on April 8 and discussing what is happening at other universities.

COU update (Steve Orsini)

- Updates on applications, which were up 11% across the sector (especially Nursing, which increased by 35%).
- 93% of University graduates will have a full-time job two years after graduation; 90% will have a job in their field. Overall, university graduates are resilient in challenging job markets (e.g., they are the last to be laid off).
- COU has submitted a pre-budget brief to the provincial government. There is an ongoing concern about institutional autonomy and the financial challenges around tuition freezes and no increases in operating grants; COU has asked for either more flexibility in tuition or more operating grant funding (especially need a multi-year funding framework rather than going from year to year. There is a need for university graduates, as well as other types of workers, that is expected to continue in the near future.
- Pressures in the system are also related to the government decision to (a) allow colleges to have 3-year degree programs; and, (b) the proliferation of private career colleges and universities.
- Other concerns: situation in Ukraine; outcomes of underrepresented students; and, the exploitation of international students.

Committee Reports

- Various committees reported on their discussions.

313th Meeting of Council, Friday, April 8, 2022, 9:00 to 11:00 am

1. Welcome from the Chair
2. President's Report: overview of the activities of the COU, especially regarding the relationship with the provincial government and Colleges Ontario.
3. Academic Colleagues' Report
4. Recognition of Outgoing Members of Council
5. COU New Membership Applications
 - The Northern Ontario School of Medicine and Université de Hearst have both applied for membership in COU. They have had access to the resources of COU as federated members of Laurentian University. With the unilateral changes that the provincial government has made to Laurentian and its affiliated colleges and institutions, NOSM and Hearst now need to apply as individual members. Largely due to their small size, they do not quite meet the COU criteria for membership. A motion to accept both as 'provisional members' until at least June 30, 2023, was passed.
6. Discussion Item - Decolonizing the University
 - Presentation by Academic Colleagues
 - Paulette Steeves introduced ideas about the definition of "decolonize". She highlighted ideas about:
 - pyro-epistemology: "metaphorically describes critical Indigenous scholarship. A practice of Pyro-epistemology is a ceremony in which cleanses the academic landscape of discussions that misinform worldviews and fuel racism."
 - Agnotology: how knowledge has not come to be; "the study of deliberate, culturally-induced ignorance or doubt"
 - Indigenization: a system of naturalizing Indigenous knowledge systems
 - Indigenization will be unique at each university
 - Andy McWilliams discussed the importance of educating faculty members and other folks within the university about Indigenization.
 - Catherine Carstairs discussed the importance of ensuring the success of Indigenous faculty members through mentoring and changing institutional systems and policies.
 - Doug Ivison discussed the fact that decolonization needs to happen at all levels of governance, which will require radical changes.
 - Simon Glass asked questions about how COU is working towards decolonization.
 - Discussion and Q&A with the Executive Heads.
7. Various committee reports