

Academic Colleagues Meeting  
August 13 and 14 2024  
Notes taken by Robyn Ruttenberg-Rozen

The main purpose of the meetings was to welcome new members and introduce the protocols of the committee. There were speakers on both days. At the end of the meeting on August 14 members of the committee provided updates about their universities. In what follows I provide a bullet point summary of the two presentations.

August 13, Glenn Jones spoke.

Link to profile page: <https://discover.research.utoronto.ca/24300-glen-jones>

Glen Jones is a Canada Research Chair in Postsecondary Education Policy and Measurement at OISE, University of Toronto. His career in education spans almost 50 years. Dr. Jones is a globally recognized scholar in the field of higher education.

Glen Jones had 5 themes in his presentation:

1. Responding to the TRC,
2. International Engagement
3. Expanding Credentials
4. Leadership and Stability
5. Increasing Politicization

### Responding to the TRC

- *Most public universities are moving (slowly) to expand program offerings and build relationships – but will momentum be maintained in the face of funding challenges?*
- *Creation of a new sector of self-governing Indigenous Institutes (currently 9 in Ontario with expansion across the country). Expanding relationships between Indigenous and traditional public institutions.*

- Worried that momentum is waning, but still moving in the right direction and slowly. But still far away from a “decolonized university.”
- We are seeing an emergence of a new sector of higher education indigenous institutes across the country.
- It will be important for decolonization to think about how our institutions engage with these higher education institutions.

## International Engagement

- For research – new post-Covid approaches (hybrid conferences, international connections), but growing divides given increasing costs of travel
- For education – implications of the Federal CAP (fall of the Ontario PCPPs, Canada's reputation, popular perceptions within Canada) – will likely rebound (but will we have learned anything?)

- In regards to research: financial viability will still be impacting this area. i.e.: There is less funding ear-marked toward developing in-person relationships and the networking this allows. Emerging scholars and others will be affected by this.
- We will see international numbers rebound, but the lessons learned vis a vis balancing books only on international students might not be learned.
- Only 3 provinces were over the federal cap for number of international students.
- Fees for international students are based on university and research rankings!

## Expanding “credentials”

Leesa Wheelahan refers to the “fetishization of micro-credentials” as a solution to a poorly understood and defined “skills gap”

Increasing interest in new master's programs as a response to international student cap

New regulations in Ontario Colleges sector allowing for:  
3 year applied degrees  
Applied master's programs

- Little evidence for microcredentials as a solution, but there is a lot of push on this as a solution. Increasingly governments are looking for universities to recognize them. This will be a conversation for coming years.
- New Masters programs with international students we will see some really interesting programs coming in the coming years.
- Discussion of how colleges, in their search for more funding, are blurring the boundaries with universities and are becoming real competition in offering their degrees.
- We are going to have a whole bunch of new credentials in colleges which will have an effect on the university sector. Dr. Jones wondered how quickly these credentials would be approved, and if there will be high level distinctions—grey boundaries. For example, to what extent will a person with a 3 year applied degree be accepted for masters study.

## Leadership and stability

- Evidence that the number of university presidents failing to complete their initial term has been increasing and the average term in office has been decreasing
- More recent evidence (Eric Lavigne) suggests that there are similar issues with Provosts (VPAs) in terms of number of interim appointments and shorter terms
- Less (but some) evidence suggests issues with Dean appointments (though perhaps field specific).
- Continuing concerns about issues of diversity in senior appointments

- Higher ed leadership (presidents and provosts) are not staying as long. Number of interim positions quite large. Same with deans.
- Raises questions around stability in higher ed leadership
- Upper administration staying for longer terms would provide stability—but there is also too long.
- For those who don't complete the term it is almost always as a result of a relationship with the governing board problem.

## Increasing politicization in university-government relationships

- Increasing government intervention often focusing on accountability, but also in terms of "academic" dimensions of university work
- Bill 166 in Ontario provides government with new authority over issues of student mental health, "racism and hate" and student costs.
- Other initiatives in BC, Alberta, etc.
- Not quite the polarization and partisan politics of the US – but troubling.

- Some internal university decisions are now being regulated by the government (Bill 166). Governments are wanting greater control as to how universities are dealing with these issues.
- Public outside of Canada (US and Europe) are positioning academic elites as the enemy—troubling

## BUT (in comparative terms) still good (so far)

Universities continue to have a relatively high level of autonomy (though trend towards government involvement)

High levels of public support (compared to the US and some other countries)

High levels of access/participation

Continuing evidence that we have a high-quality higher education system.

- Universities still have autonomy (mostly).
- Unique in Canada is that we continue to have high levels of public support for our academic institutions, which is different than US.
- There continues to be a large proportion of the population who see education as transformative. This is a different message than university only being useful for financial reasons.

August 14, Steve Orsini spoke

Link to profile page: <https://munkschool.utoronto.ca/person/steve-orsini>

Steve Orsini is the President and CEO of the Council of Ontario Universities. Orsini has a long history of leadership positions and leading change in the public sector.

- He just received the SMA4 mandates (not public)
  - Note: SMA4 is the college and university strategic mandate agreement
- The SMA4 is starting from a place where there is nothing to negotiate with—everything is staying frozen. And things are weird, like McMaster got extra funding for STEM one year and not the next year? How can you fund for one year?
- Last few years the Ontario government has been constraining universities but allowed the colleges to run wild. This is why the Federal government stepped in. But the Federal Government is at fault as well because they should have stepped in sooner regarding the international students.
- Colleges have a surplus of a billion dollars, while universities have a deficit of 300 million and growing.
  - we didn't make the money hand over foot like colleges did.
  - Steve Orsini is predicting that this will grow in the hundreds of millions because of the international caps
- After the Blue-Ribbon Panel—government didn't really listen. The money the government gave the sector is time limited... with all the problems Steven already shared with us in a previous academic council.
- The Ontario government ended up giving money to a lot of other sectors because of Bill 124 but we got ignored.
- Government says they will relook at everything in 2 years. The current provincial government is notorious about divide and conquer. Significantly, because of this Steve Orsini says we need to all come together. So he is meeting with OCUFA and other organizations.
- A couple of things are in our favor:
  - In the last 4 years we've had a 12% increase in applications—number of Ontario students (Ontario sector)
    - They think it can grow up to 18%
    - But without changing the current funding model what is likely is that potential applicants will need higher marks and more kids will not get in.

- Our strength is that Ontario students want to attend Ontario universities
- We have a government that favours colleges (we don't show up on their books but colleges and school boards do). We have to find that leverage in the sector. Therefore, we need a strategy—Steve is saying that convincing the public is the way to go. They are escalating their relationships and media and ramping it up.
  - The minister is on our side, its really the center saying no.
- Orsini's strategy is to not freeze tuition. Let tuition grow but help the low and moderate income.
- A tuition freeze is the government saying they want more control over the universities
- There is a risk that colleges are trying to creep into our areas.