

Council of Ontario Universities  
Academic Colleagues Report  
Meeting of Academic Colleagues December 12-13, 2013

Academic Colleagues met for a working dinner on Thursday, December 12 at the COU offices in Toronto. During and after dinner we engaged in lively discussion about MTCU's Differentiation Policy and its potential impact on academic programs at our universities. Many colleagues shared concerns about the unreasonably short time allowed for universities to respond to MTCU with updated Strategic Mandate Agreements (SMAs) with the consequence that it was impossible to involve university senates in the process. There was also concern that the program prioritization process, already underway at some Ontario universities, could impact collegiality within universities and unfairly threaten some programs. It appears that SMAs are likely to result in long-term (3-year) graduate funding allocations, and be used as a definitive context for new program approval. On a positive note, the SMAs may also be useful in educating the government about Ontario university strengths.

On Friday, December 13 Academic Colleagues held a morning meeting at the University Club of Toronto. Peter Gooch of COU provided an update on COU and MTCU activities. We heard about MTCU's announcement regarding funding for an institute of online education, and government's push to establish this new institute as soon as possible. We also learned that all new program approvals at Ontario universities are suspended until final SMAs are in place (approximately 3 months); core programs are exempt from this suspension. Colleagues discussed ways to be more effective and engaged in the activities of COU and Executive Heads, with consensus that this is best done by staying current and providing timely information to COU on the academic implications of proposed policy. To accomplish this, there will be less emphasis on writing long discussion papers and more focus on direct response, including shorter pieces directed to specific audiences.

As Chair of Academic Colleagues, I am now a member of the COU Executive Committee. I attended my first Executive Committee meeting by teleconference on November 21. The committee was asked to consider a fair process for reviewing and possibly revising the formula for distribution of OUAC revenue to universities. In the interest of fairness and to avoid self-interest it was suggested that the review be conducted by a third party with contextual input from a reference group of Executive Heads. A final decision on this process will be made by Executive Heads at their next meeting. Executive Committee also discussed pre-budget submissions, and the need for COU to identify significant issues on which to advocate for Ontario universities. Later in the meeting we were joined by Nancy Naylor, ADM, Postsecondary Education Division of MTCU and Marie-Lison Fougere, ADM, Strategic Policy and Programs Division. Marie-Lison reported on SMAs and the need for balance between system-wide and

institution-specific metrics to provide information for MTCU decisions. Some Executive Heads stressed the need for additional time for universities to prepare meaningful responses to the Differentiation Policy Framework but the ADMs seemed unwilling to budge on this.

On November 29 MTCU released *Ontario's Differentiation Policy Framework for Postsecondary Education* and requested updated SMA submissions, institutional enrolment projections, and tables showing program areas of strength and strategic focus from each university by December 20, 2013.

Respectfully submitted,

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