

COU Academic Colleagues Meeting Report February 13 & 14, 2017

Academic Colleagues met on February 13 & 14 at the COU office in Toronto. This time Colleagues invited **Julia Shin Doi**, General Counsel & Secretary, Board of Governors, and **Glenn Craney**, Deputy Provost & Vice-Provost, University Planning, Ryerson University to discuss the university board of governor's perspectives on government-mandated changes. Colleagues were particularly interested in learning about how the Board, the Senate, Executive Heads and Faculty Association work and deal with disagreements between key stakeholders. Ms. Doi and Mr. Craney presented a most optimistic picture that appeared to suggest that all is well and we should not be concerned because that university secretariat manages the university's wellbeing well by their efficient communication with the government and timely action. They suggested that one should think about the board as providing direction, but not controlling the institution. University secretariat often help communicate between stakeholders and conflicts can be dealt with to ensure a collegial relationship between executive heads and board members. It sounded all very nice. Communication was also emphasized in the discussion regarding government initiatives. They pointed that communication with government can at times be challenging, often allowing little time for consultation. Communication is also constrained because of the political process; there are some limitations on what government can talk with universities. Colleagues discussed the SMA process. It was noted that the SMA process was intended to start a longer conversation between government and universities. Working toward SMA3 is one way to keep moving toward a strategic conversation with government. Colleagues also discussed the ways in which government is a funder for higher education, but has no formal funding contract (as in k-12 education). There is no government mandate to fund postsecondary education; government funds PSE because it is good public policy. PSE funding is the third largest transfer payment in Ontario, after health care and k-12 education. Since 2006, there has been a shift in how universities are viewed by the public; universities are currently viewed as part of government (or the broader public sector). This may account for the ways government seems to be involved in university business. Boards and senates are both involved in the SMAs, but from different perspectives. One of the perspectives boards bring to SMA considerations is risk and risk mitigation. The five priority areas included in the SMAs are also priorities for institutions generally (boards and senates). Some advice was offered regarding working productively with government, including: Keep conversation with government active; Work to understand what the government is focused on; Consider a holistic approach, including a focus on opportunities rather than threats. Colleagues noted that government seems interested in managing the university sector as a system, but universities seek autonomy and differentiation. This may lead to tensions. Colleagues talked about the values that are important to maintain in spite of the shifting context, including academic freedom, shared governance, and the important influences/changes a university education can bring to graduates. Colleagues also discussed the fact that academic freedom may be eroding as government initiatives increasingly shape university work. Some government initiatives are not aligned with institutional values.

On February 14th, first there was a preview of the Three concepts considered important given the changing environmen: academic freedom, values, and self-governance. Some mandated changes are incremental, and some are episodic (one-offs). And while government may have good

intentions, sometimes the effects are not positive. As we get closer to SMA3, the risks may be higher for universities, as funding will likely be tied to metrics. Colleagues agreed that SMA3 will change things for universities, likely at all levels. As faculty and departments are influenced, more faculty engagement would be needed. This discussion was followed by the COU updates. Highlights are, **Strategic Engagement campaign:** Full report is available on the website (www.ontariosuniversities.ca). **Provincial budget:** The federal budget released on February 27 will be a factor in the provincial budget. The provincial budget will be the liberal election platform. COU is advocating for investments for universities, but with recent announcements (STEM and AI expansion, expansion of OSAP, the career ready funding, and costs associated with the equal pay for equal work legislation), we do not expect additional big investments. **SMAs:** Universities are able to post their own SMA2 agreements, COU has learned that government will not post university targets side-by-side. **Vector Institute:** The province has invested \$30M for the expansion of artificial intelligence (AI) graduates; this funding is aimed at industry (*The Vector Institute*) rather than universities. Vector (and government) is focused on 1,000 additional AI master's graduates. Funding will be directed to students as scholarships. Some funding may be used to support infrastructure to develop internships. Three types of activity are expected: i) Support for existing programs that could be modified to include an AI focus; ii) New program development (using a cost-recovery model) and iii) The development of collaborative programs, with universities working together to deliver AI programs. **STEM expansion:** the funding for AI sits within a context of STEM expansion. Because of recent enrolment growth in STEM, universities are well on the way to achieving the targeted growth. Support for expansion will likely be negotiated as part of SMA3. **Fair Workplaces Act:** The recent legislation (formerly Bill 148) provides amendments to several acts, including the Labor Relations Act. The most significant impact is likely associated with the *equal pay for equal work* provision. Colleges and universities are exposed on this issue because of how the academic workforce is structured. The full impact of the legislation will not be known until universities work through contract negotiations and grievance processes. COU has launched a process with a few universities to gather information related to risks and potential costs. **Capital Strategy:** The ministry has developed a capital strategy, with increased funding for facilities renewal. Details may be included in the provincial budget. **Greenhouse Gas initiative:** Government has allocated \$300M to universities as part of the greenhouse gas initiative. Some universities are participating in the *cap and trade* process, and others are not. **Internationalization:** The ministry is developing an internationalization strategy for PSE. COU has worked to shape the development of the strategy; COU suggests that the strategy should be framed as an Ontario initiative, with an emphasis on economic development and growth. COU has received clear signals from government that it will not seek tuition regulation, and will not be initiating enrolment caps for international students. Government may be seeking assurances that universities are providing clear information to incoming international students regarding tuition increases while they are in-program. **Peter Gooch** announced his retirement from COU effective June, 2018.

Conversation with **Dr. Harvey Weingarten**, President and CEO, Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario: Dr. Weingarten met with colleagues to discuss current issues in the postsecondary sector, including change management. It was evident that he is passionate about elevating the quality of postsecondary education in Ontario, which is most admirable. However, I found his narratives of our current postsecondary education system in Ontario being in a 'bad

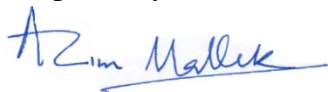
shape' a tad pessimistic and the choice of words in his firing speech inappropriate. Below is a summary of his message:

- Institutional change is an important topic because a high-quality postsecondary sector is critical for economic progress and civil society. Institutions must be able to adapt and change (and improve). Dr. Weingarten indicated that the PSE system in Ontario should refocus on quality. Funding is often the issue universities talk about, but quality should be the central focus.
- While institutions do change, programs are reasonably stable. A big change in the sector is the ways in which government is intervening today—more so in other jurisdictions in North America and the UK.
- Change is difficult for many reasons, in his view Universities are not always motivated to change, and the conditions that might support change are not always available; Universities may have faculty members who are less engaged than others and a framework for change is needed.
- Without change in the PSE system, it is possible that quality will diminish.
- The decisions that impact quality include: Decreased funding for capital; Larger classes; and Not measuring student learning outcomes.
- In his view Universities may focus on questions such as: Are our universities best positioned (in organization and programs) to offer the highest quality programs and graduates?
- Do our students have the skills and competencies necessary for the future?
- What do our graduates need to look like, and what do they need to know (or do)?

It is good to know that Dr. Weingarten is passionate about raising the quality of PSE in Ontario and I am certain that the topic is very much in the minds of Colleagues and Executive Heads of the Ontario University system. We can achieve this common goal by implementing carefully designed plan and respectful dialogues.

The meeting ended at 2:30 pm

Respectfully submitted,



Azim Mallik
Academic Colleague