



MEMORANDUM

To: Barbara H. Eccles, Secretary of Senate
From: Dr. Douglas Ivison – COU Academic Colleague
Senate Meeting Date: 29 October 2018
Subject: COU Academic Colleague Report

The Academic Colleagues met at the COU offices in Toronto on October 17 and 18

On the evening of the 17th, Denise O’Neil Green, Vice-President, Equity and Community Inclusion at Ryerson University, gave a presentation on the balance between freedom of expression and human rights. She emphasized that universities rightly have a strong commitment to academic freedom and freedom of expression but reminded us that no expression is free of consequence and that discussions of free speech need to be contextualized in histories of violence and oppression and reflect the power imbalances and different lived experiences of members of the university community. She argued that we cannot simply discuss free-speech issues as purely intellectual debates, but acknowledge that for many students and others in the university community these issues are personal and often have an impact on individuals’ and groups’ senses of identity and belonging. She emphasized that we need to acknowledge the tension between competing commitments to freedom of expression and freedom from harm, and noted that for many students there is a cognitive dissonance between universities’ stated commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion and the challenges to their sense of humanity and self-identity that they encounter in classrooms and on university campuses. Faculty members need to understand the changing student demographics and the shifting expectations that result as new groups of students take their places in universities. Marginalized students often don’t find themselves included in the dominant education culture that privileges freedom of expression over other issues, and in the age of #metoo, she argued, universities and faculty members must meet greater expectations of accountability. She concluded by arguing that in the 21st century we need to reconceptualize freedom of expression in ways that better balance other freedoms and recognize the impact of speech.

On the morning of the 18th, the Colleagues gathered to prepare a presentation to full Council on freedom of expression. Specifically, the Colleagues had previously identified two questions: How can universities engage with students on issues of free speech? and How can universities best support faculty to engage with students on free speech? Although there was a consensus on the importance of freedom of expression, there were diverging views on the limits to that freedom and how to balance it with other university

priorities (e.g. commitments to diversity and inclusion, human rights, freedom from harm, reconciliation with Indigenous peoples).

At the lunch meeting of Council, the Colleagues provided a number of personal anecdotes of teaching experiences related to freedom of expression and then Colleagues and Executive Heads broke into small groups for a discussion of the two questions identified above. Some of the suggestions presented to Council included:

- Requiring Chairs, Deans, and other academic administrators to attend training sessions on issues related to freedom of expression and how to balance it with other rights and freedoms. Such training would also ensure that those in administrative positions would know how to respond and appropriately advise faculty members dealing with such issues.
- Developing and supporting inclusive and culturally responsive pedagogy and curriculum development.
- Developing and communicating best practices for responding to issues related to freedom of expression.
- Offering workshops and training sessions for faculty members on issues related to freedom of expression.
- Holding workshops in which administrators, faculty members, and students are encouraged to engage in dialogue on issues related to freedom of expression.
- Encouraging ongoing dialogue between administration, faculty unions, and student groups to better enable good-faith discussions when controversies related to freedom of expression arise.

Student leaders will be invited to give a presentation on freedom of expression to Academic Colleagues at the December meeting.

In addition to freedom of expression, the Colleagues received reports on and discussed a number of other issues:

- The external review of the **Quality Assurance Framework** recommended a number of changes, including the articulation of a clear statement of principles; greater local authority for quality assurance; the lessening of bureaucratic and regulatory burden on universities; and increased transparency of Quality Council operations and decision making. The key recommendation is that Quality Council move from a focus on program-level review to **institutional accreditation**, so the focus would be on ensuring that each institution's internal processes meet the principles of the Quality Assurance Framework. This would allow for a more nimble process for program approval and a lighter burden on institutions. The reviews also recommended that **Quality Council communications** be more transparent and outward facing, and Colleagues were asked to provide suggestions on how to do this and to review a draft Quality Assurance Reports Communications Plan.

- Other than freedom of expression, the **government priorities** are still unclear, and COU is hoping to proactively engage on more substantive issues in the months to come.
- The **Ernst & Young audit** report indicated that it was not able to assess whether there is an appropriate return on investment in postsecondary education, which suggests that there may be a demand for more accountability.
- The audit report also advocated for a **more “modern approach to labour relations”** in the public sector.
- It is not clear whether the Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Universities (MTCU) will continue with **Strategic Mandate Agreements** or develop a new process for identifying priorities.
- The government has not yet indicated its intentions regarding the **tuition framework**, which expires this year.
- Across the university sector in Ontario, domestic enrolment is flat, but first-year **international enrolment** is up 17%. Eva Busza, COU’s Vice-President, Policy and Sector Collaboration, cautioned colleagues about over-reliance on international enrolment as demand may diminish in medium term as China and India build up post-secondary capacity.

I should note that at the COU meetings there was no indication of the government’s decision to **cut funding for the three new GTA campuses** in Brampton, Markham, and Milton.

Since the COU meetings, the government tabled its changes to labour legislation, the **Making Ontario Open for Business Act**. The COU circulated a document to Colleagues indicating that the impact of the changes would reduce labour costs for the university sector.

Respectfully submitted,

Dr. Douglas Ivison
COU Academic Colleague