



## MEMORANDUM

To: Barbara H. Eccles, Secretary of Senate  
From: Dr. Douglas Ivison – COU Academic Colleague  
Senate Meeting Date: 15 April 2019  
Subject: COU Academic Colleague Report

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The Council of Ontario Universities met at Queen's University on April 3 and 4, beginning with a dinner the evening of the 3<sup>rd</sup>, and followed by meetings on the 4<sup>th</sup>.

The Academic Colleagues met the morning of the 4<sup>th</sup>, with the bulk of the meeting devoted to a presentation on **Student Skills and Learning Outcomes** by Dr. Jill Scott, Vice-Provost (Teaching and Learning) of Queen's University, and Dr. Brian Frank, Associate Dean (Teaching and Learning) in Queen's Faculty of Engineering and Applied Science. They presented the findings from their study to assess improvement in student skills and learning outcomes amongst undergraduate students at Queen's. Using a number of tests, they tested a cohort of students at various points throughout their undergraduate studies and found statistically valid, if modest, improvements in critical thinking, problem solving, and written communication in students from a variety of disciplines (though it should be noted that the first-year students already scored quite high on the tests). The data then supports arguments that a university education improves students' skills and can be used to help respond to questions about the value of a university education. With the Academic Colleagues, Drs. Scott and Frank discussed the opportunities and challenges of conducting similar work in different universities with different demographics and the potential for collaboration between universities on such research, and reported on a pilot project on skills assessment for SMA3 involving Queen's and Ryerson.

Colleagues also discussed the opportunities and challenges of integrating the skills assessment methodologies used in their study in program and course design so that skills assessment is not just about documenting outcomes of existing pedagogical approaches but about helping to redesign programs and courses to improve student success in achieving learning outcomes and in ensuring that assessment better reflects learning outcomes. It was noted that such initiatives required faculty buy-in and sufficient resources to support faculty members in redesigning courses and assignments, and in implementing the often more labour-intensive assessment tools.

Drs. Scott and Frank then presented a shorter version of their presentation to the full Council, which generated substantial discussion from the Executive Heads.

In addition, the Academic Colleagues received additional reports on the following:

- The COU continues to consult with stakeholders in refining its **advocacy strategy** in the context of the current government.
- As a result of an earlier government initiative, every Ontario student has an **Ontario Education Number (OEN)**, which has produced a huge amount of data. The Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Universities (MTCU), however, isn't giving access to the data, which is a missed opportunity to improve knowledge about Ontario's education sector. The COU is lobbying to get access to at least some of that data.
- The next round of **Strategic Mandate Agreement** discussions will likely start soon, though there is still a lot of uncertainty about the process and government priorities. It is expected that differentiation and performance-based funding (including metrics linked to skills assessment) will be a key part of this round.
- COU is engaged in discussions to revitalize **Common University Data Ontario (CUDO)**, which presents a common set of data about each of Ontario's universities. The goal is to make CUDO more accessible and user-friendly.
- **The Student Voices on Sexual Violence Survey** summary report has been released. The survey had a reasonable response rate (26%) and disturbing if not always accurately reported results. According to the survey, 63% of university students have experienced sexual harassment (not necessarily, as reported in some media, on campus or during their time as university students). So far only limited data has been released, and it's unclear when and if the full set of data will be made available.
- **The tuition fee framework and ancillary fee guidelines** have been formally released, including guidelines for determining whether fees are compulsory or optional. Compulsory fees include those to support varsity sports, athletics and recreation, buildings, career support, campus safety, health, and transit passes (for the latter, only if in place by January 2019).
- The **Quality Council** reported that it continues to review and approve new programs but there is a delay in MTCU approval for new programs. At the same time, the government continues to approve 'offshore' programs (i.e. programs offered in Ontario to Ontario students by programs located outside of Ontario).

The last Academic Colleagues meeting for 2018-19 will take place in May.

Respectfully submitted,

Dr. Douglas Ivison  
COU Academic Colleague