



MEMORANDUM

To: Barbara H. Eccles, Secretary of Senate
From: Dr. Douglas Ivison – COU Academic Colleague
Senate Meeting Date: 18 March 2019
Subject: COU Academic Colleague Report

The Academic Colleagues met at the COU offices in Toronto on February 13 (due to inclement weather the dinner meeting on February 12 was cancelled).

COU staff provided Academic Colleagues with updates on a number of issues:

“Free Speech” policies – The Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO) has compiled a report to government regarding universities’ implementation of the free-speech policy as mandated by the government. It is simply an overview of the policies, not an analysis of them. HEQCO has not yet started work on the free speech reporting template which will be used starting in Fall 2019, and has indicated a willingness to work with COU as the template is developed.

Mike Snowdon, a COU Senior Policy Analyst, provided a summary of the recent **government announcements concerning tuition, OSAP, and ancillary fees:**

- He noted that the **10% tuition cut** will have a greater impact on smaller universities more dependent on domestic tuition fees than on larger universities with more international students, cost-recovery programs, and revenue from other sources. Across the university sector, the cut will result in a 3% revenue decrease, but for individual universities it will range from 1.5% to 5%. Details about the fund for northern universities to help compensate for reduced tuition were not yet available. He confirmed that there are no changes planned to the tuition set-aside (TSA) program, but noted that a reduction in tuition will reduce the amount of TSA funds.
- He also noted that the previous government’s **changes to OSAP** had resulted in enormous cost overruns, but had led to increased support for mature students, in particular. Among other things, the new changes eliminate non-needs-based aid; reduce the maximum family income to \$140,000; increase the number of years that students are considered dependents from four to six years; increase the presumed personal, parental, and spousal contributions; and require that OSAP for second-entry programs be at least 50% loans. The net result will be significant savings to the government but an increased debt burden for OSAP recipients. Those who most benefited from the previous government’s changes, namely mature students pursuing second-entry programs, will likely be most adversely affected by these

new changes. He expects that there will be a significant impact on retention of mature students. It was noted that some universities are discussing the possibility of providing financial support to existing students adversely affected by these changes to ensure that they are able to complete their programs.

- Finally, he noted that the government's "**student-choice initiative**," making many ancillary fees optional, will have a significant impact on student unions and many of the services, clubs, and centres they support. It will also be very costly for universities to implement, and a challenge for many universities' IT and finance offices. It was also noted that student unions play a role in offering many necessary services to students, which may now be insufficiently funded. At the time of this meeting, the Ministry was still in the process of developing a framework listing essential and non-essential (and thus optional) fees. COU has also raised the problem of 'free-riders', those students who opt out but will still try to access services defined as non-essential, but the Ministry has provided little guidance in how to address this problem.

Eve Busza, COU Vice President, Policy and Sector Collaboration, provided an update on **COU's role in the current political and policy environment**. In particular, she noted that COU is currently operating in an environment in which COU is given little time to respond to government policy decisions, often less than 48 hours, and the government engages in little consultation with COU or other stakeholders. She also noted that this government is less likely to respond to pressure from COU and university administrations than it is to respond to advocacy from students, employers, parents, and business groups. She argued that COU needs a strategy of local engagement to work with other stakeholders in advocating for the university sector. COU is currently in the process of reviewing its work to determine how it can best position itself to serve the university sector in the ongoing political and policy context, and will be submitting a report and recommendations to executive heads in the fall.

The full Council will be meeting at Queen's University on April 3 and 4.

Respectfully submitted,

Dr. Douglas Ivison
COU Academic Colleague