

COU Academic Colleagues Meeting Report October 18-19, 2017

Academic Colleagues (ACs) met on Oct 18th (6-9 pm) for a working dinner at the COU office in Toronto. The main objective of this meeting was to prepare for the first Council meeting of the academic year (Oct 19, 2017) where ACs and Executive heads (EHs) were to discuss emerging issues in university governance. For example, challenges in dealing with government mandated changes such as inclusion of experiential learning (EL) in academic programs and student's academic transcript? A lively discussion followed regarding the definition of EL. What constitutes EL was debated in relation to the broad preliminary definition put forwarded by the Ontario government. Does hands on field and laboratory work count? Does EL always involve a work place and employer? It was suggested that since student experience vary widely from course to course and campus to campus it is up to the university to best articulate the activities in student learning they wish to argue as EL keeping the broad definition in mind. According to Ontario government, the goal of EL is to "supporting students in getting hands-on learning opportunities that help them transition to employment. It is also to address employers' needs for new graduates or young employees to hit the ground running". Six check lists were distributed to the ACs identifying what will be counted as EL. Discussion ensued as to the wisdom of teaching students a set of skills that might be attractive to employers now, which is changing vs giving them a rounded education with which they can adapt to the changing job market. If the later is better and universities are doing a good job in accomplishing that then universities have an obligation to demonstrate and effectively communicate that to all parties (students, parents, employers and government). The last part of the dinner meeting was devoted to articulating an innovative approach to engage the EHs in the council meeting in discussing the practical challenges they face in university governance with respect to government mandated change and how ACs can be of help.

In the morning of the 19th ACs met at 8:30 when Mr. Peter Gooch, Senior Policy analyst of COU gave an update on COU activities and government initiatives with special reference to Strategic Mandate Agreement (SMA) 1, 2 and 3. There will be some funding allocated to EL opportunity development. Several task forces have been formed and a working definition of EL is very near, he said, it not all about placement but explicably tied to workplace. Personally I am still unclear of the definition of AL. COU is thinking about a web-based function to initiate co-op-based programs (as in U Guelph) for universities. In SEM 3 there will be a one-time funding for capacity building ideas aiming to develop transition programs for recent graduates to facilitate employment. Internationalization of universities is another priority for the government. The government is keen on increasing the intake of international graduate students to 50%. The next part of the AC meeting was focused on developing three specific questions for the EHs (all related to mechanisms to deal with government mandated changes) in order to initiate an engaged discussion with the ACs at the council meeting.

The ACs met again on October 19th 8 – 11:45 am and resumed discussions to finalize the questions for EHs at the council meeting at 12 noon. In the Council meeting ACs and EHs had a lively discussion focussed on the challenges EHs face with government mandated changes at Ontario universities and what role ACs can play to alleviate that. It was suggested that a better communication among the university executives and faculty on these issues can help. EHs appreciated the support of ACs and their creative thinking in dealing with the various aspects of government mandated changes. It was emphasised that ACs and EHs must work together in creating a common purpose at a broader context in dealing with emerging issues. After this discussion the Chair of the Council presented his report followed by appreciations and recognitions of the excellent services of several outgoing EHs. He expressed warm welcome to all new council members. This was followed by reports from the President of COU and Dr. Paul Davidson of Universities Canada. Indigenization initiatives, COU engagement strategies with the government, recruitment of international students, value of higher education and research, effective communication to achieve public support for university education, research and innovation clusters, outbound student mobility, equity, diversity and indigenous reconciliation were emphasised in these reports. The council meeting ended at 2:30 pm. The ACs met again after the council meeting to i) chose the topics of discussion for the next meeting in December 12 and 13 and ii) present several committee reports. The meeting ended at 3:30 pm.

Respectfully submitted,



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