



MEMORANDUM

To: Barbara H. Eccles, Secretary of Senate
From: Dr. Douglas Ivison – COU Academic Colleague
Senate Meeting Date: 20 January 2020
Subject: COU Academic Colleague Report

The Academic Colleagues met in the COU offices in Toronto on December 10 & 11.

On the evening of December 10, the Colleagues had a dinner discussion with Dr. Michele Mastroeni, an Assistant Professor in OCAD University's Faculty of Design and its Strategic Foresight and Innovation program, and Leah Zaidi, an entrepreneur and futurologist who is a graduate of the Strategic Foresight and Innovation program. They led **a discussion on the future of Ontario's universities**. In their comments, they emphasized that:

- Universities should think more broadly, and focus on the future of the world and then how universities fit into that future;
- The future is unpredictable and complex, and universities have little ability to control the future conditions in which they will have to operate;
- In their strategic planning, universities must take into account climate change; diversity, equity, and democracy; and the impact of artificial intelligence on the future of work and society.
- The public is increasingly distrustful of institutions, including universities.
- Universities must demonstrate their value in an educational context in which prospective students have access to free or low-cost digital content. They suggested that universities emphasize their role in providing spaces for dialogue and in the preservation of truth.
- In order to meet the demands of "digital natives" and new social and labour demands, universities must enhance and expand multidisciplinary programs, and expand opportunities for students to curate their own educational experience.
- Universities need to embrace 'creative destruction' by dismantling conventional structures, governance systems, and disciplinary silos. One of the presenters frequently emphasized that universities must become more entrepreneurial and engage in frequent and constant renewal, in part by eliminating tenure and other systems that prevent universities from embracing change.

Colleagues emphasized that issues related to climate change, diversity and equity, and artificial intelligence are not future issues but contemporary ones, and that universities are already engaging with these issues in a variety of ways. Colleagues also questioned a number of the assumptions underlying the presenters' comments, arguing, for example, that while multidisciplinary programs have value, so do disciplinary ones. They also responded skeptically to the presenters' claims about 'creative destruction,' noting that there is value to existing structures and that while change is often beneficial, change for change's sake can be destructive and counter-productive. Colleagues also noted that the public's view of universities isn't as negative as presented by the presenters.

On the morning of December 11, Colleagues were presented with a series of reports.

The Colleagues who were invited to attend the inaugural **Ontario Universities Summit** on September 26 presented a summary of the event. The Summit was attended by university administrators and higher-level staff, but, with the exception of the two Academic Colleagues, not by faculty members. The purpose of the summit was to: identify collective sector collaboration and government advocacy priorities; develop a better understanding of and better coordinate the major initiatives and projects undertaken at the committee and affiliate level; and establish understanding and support for a more collaborative and strategic way of working as a sector.

Summit attendees received polling data from Ipsos on the perception of universities and postsecondary education. Post-secondary education is a low spending priority for the public, and the public sees universities as overly expensive. The majority of those polled, though, did support increasing funding for universities. Ipsos highlighted the need for universities to act and speak collectively in order to try to more effectively present their narrative to the public. Ipsos emphasized the need to highlight the role that students already play in preparing students for the workforce and challenge the public perception that university graduates lack employable skills.

Summit attendees also listened to a panel discussion on the current provincial government and the political context in which universities have to operate. The panelists emphasized the importance of opening up avenues of communications with the current government, and challenging some of the government's preconceptions about universities. They suggested that as the government matures, there will be increasing opportunities to work with the government to pursue the goals of the university sector.

Strategic Mandate Agreement: All universities have completed their bilateral discussions with the Ministry of Colleges and Universities, and completed first drafts were to be submitted to MCU by December 17.

With regard to the Faculty Workload Reporting Metric, COU submitted a memo in October recommending that the metric: 1) focus on teaching only; 2) be renamed "teaching activity"; 3) be reported at the institution level; and 4) be reported on universities' own websites with a context narrative.

With regard to the skills and competencies metric, COU submitted a memo in late November with a number of recommendations, including 1) universities own their data; 2)

establishing small sample sizes; 3) filtering for student effort; 4) funding offsets from MCU; 5) reporting at institution-level on institutions' websites.

Student Choice Initiative: On November 21, Divisional Court struck down the Student Choice Initiative, stating that neither Cabinet nor the Minister have jurisdiction to interfere in how post-secondary institutions manage their internal affairs. The government has now stated that it will appeal the decision.

Bill 132 (Better for People, Smarter for Business Act): Algoma University and OCAD University will now be able to offer a wider range of degree programs.

There will be changes to speed up the program funding approval process.

Internationalization: MCU staff are signaling that the government is interested in developing an international strategy, focused on 1) immigration; 2) regional economic development; and 3) outward student mobility.

'Free Speech': As commissioned by the government, the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario released its free-speech report in November. The report indicated that all universities and colleges are in compliance with the requirement that they have a free-speech policy that meets government requirements. It also found that in the past year there were only 21 formal complaints across the system and that all were resolved internally.

Collaborative Nursing: Colleges are advocating for the right to offer stand-alone baccalaureate nursing programs, and MCU has been reviewing the current collaborative nursing education model. Universities strongly support the existing model.

Math Proficiency Test for Teachers: As of April 1, 2020 teachers will have to pass a math proficiency test in order to become a member of the Ontario College of Teachers. The government initially expected universities to administer the test, which raised major logistical concerns for universities. The government is now looking for a third-party provider to administer the test.

Indigenous Faculty Survey: Lighting the Fire: Experiences of Indigenous Faculty in Ontario Universities reports on a survey conducted of Indigenous faculty members in Ontario universities. It revealed that Indigenous faculty members often encounter racism in the workplace, are expected to take on higher levels of administrative and service commitments, and have a higher burden of mentoring. The result can be early burnout. The report recommended that universities:

- Examine research and Research Ethics Board policies;
- Review university policies that guide committee representation;
- Continue anti-racism work;
- Provide support for all faculty to include Indigenous content and pedagogies in teaching and research;
- Review policies and practices regarding classroom spaces;

- Review policies regarding engagement with Indigenous people and communities.

President and CEO of COU David Lindsay is entering the final year of his term and will not be seeking a new term. The process of selecting a new President and CEO will begin in the coming months.

Quality Council: Following the recommendations of the 2018 review of the Quality Assurance Framework, a new document, *Quality Assurance Principles for Ontario Universities and the Quality Council* has been approved. This document provides the overarching principles for quality assurance in the province, and will be used by the Protocol Expert Panel and Audit Expert Panel to develop more detailed protocols for specific review processes. The foundational principles include the best interests of the student, oversight by an independent body, the autonomy of universities, transparency, continuous monitoring and improvement, and earned accountability. The document also sets out the respective responsibilities of the Council and universities.

One resulting change to existing practice is that the membership of the Quality Council no longer includes two representatives selected from among the Academic Colleagues, replacing them with two representatives from COU member institutions not otherwise represented on the Quality Council. Although this will ensure that those with particular expertise in quality assurance will have the opportunity to serve on Quality Council, it weakens the reporting relationship with the Academic Colleagues and potentially dilutes faculty members' representation on Quality Council.

The Academic Colleagues next meet on February 11 and 12.

Respectfully submitted,

Dr. Douglas Ivison
COU Academic Colleague