



## MEMORANDUM

To: Barbara H. Eccles, Secretary of Senate  
From: Dr. Douglas Ivison – COU Academic Colleague  
Senate Meeting Date: 16 September 2019  
Subject: COU Academic Colleague Report

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### **The Academic Colleagues met for their final meeting of 2019-20 at the COU offices in Toronto on May 15 and 16.**

On the evening of the 15<sup>th</sup>, Dr. Marcia Moshé, Ryerson University's project team leader on SMA3 pilot projects gave a presentation on two SMA3 pilot projects on learning outcomes undertaken by Ryerson. The first project tested the UVic Competency Framework for assessing learning outcomes. This framework tests ten core competencies related to job performance developed in consultation with industry stakeholders across a variety of sectors. Students in work terms completed assessments on three core competencies at three points during the term, and their workplace supervisors also completed assessments. Key findings were that competency ratings increased over the term, and that supervisors' assessments were higher than student self-assessments. The second project tested the VALUE Rubrics, which assess higher-order learning outcomes by evaluating student assignments. The pilot project revealed challenges with training evaluators to consistently assess the assignments and with student engagement. In discussing both projects, the Colleagues felt that although the projects had the potential to help students to improve their skills and to better articulate them, both projects were resource-intensive and costly and would be challenging to scale up. Colleagues also thought both projects demonstrated that assessing learning outcomes is more valuable for pedagogy than for accountability.

On the morning of the 16<sup>th</sup>, the Colleagues received updates from the COU on the recently published SMA3 framework and its ten metrics. Colleagues expressed concerns about the new framework, and its linking of 60% of funding to performance metrics, but the fact that universities will be competing against themselves rather than each other and that the targets will be based on historical performance and set within bands of tolerance should mitigate the potential harm to university budgets.

The Colleagues were also provided updates on:

- the cuts to the post-secondary sector (totaling \$1.4 billion);

- the government's desire to end 'double-dipping' of salary and pensions by pension-eligible faculty members;
- the government's desire to limit compensation growth in the public;
- the proposed introduction of pay-for-performance for those in executive positions;
- COU concerns about ensuring that appointments to university boards satisfy the need for specific skills and competencies;
- MTCU review of the program approval process;
- the creation of an SMA3 Strategic Working Group by Executive Heads. Academic Colleagues are not included in the working group, but updates will be provided to Academic Colleagues.

Martin Hicks, from the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, gave an informal presentation on accountability and performance indicators in the Ontario university sector. He described the development of accountability indicators over the past 20 years or so, and highlighted the value of assessing learning outcomes and skills development, and noted that in the current political environment universities will have to adjust to the development and implementation of such performance indicators. He highlighted some of the tools that have been piloted by HECQO and others, and noted that the government will likely look for a tool that is scalable, standardized, and easy to understand by and communicate to the public. Colleagues expressed concerns about the resource demands of such tests and their reliability and validity.

### **The Academic Colleagues met for their first meeting of 2019-2020 in the COU offices in Toronto on August 20 and 21.**

On the evening the 20<sup>th</sup>, Dr. Robert Luke, Vice-President, Research and Innovation at OCAD University gave a presentation on measuring faculty research outputs. Dr. Luke emphasized the importance of accountability to government and the general public and therefore the need to be able to measure the value of research, but acknowledged the challenge in actually measuring the diversity of research outputs by faculty across disciplines.

Dr. Luke also provided an overview of the state of research and innovation in Canada, noting that by comparison to other OECD countries, Canada ranks fairly well in spending on research in higher education, but is low in spending on research by business. He also highlighted the fact that unlike many other countries, the vast majority of Canada's research is basic research, and, to a lesser extent, applied research, but comparatively very little (less than 5%) reaches the experimental development stage (mobilizing research for product development, commercialization, and other forms of knowledge application or dispersion). He argued that university researchers need to place much more emphasis on experimental development. Academic Colleagues expressed concern about how such an emphasis would affect support for research in the Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences, to which Dr. Luke responded by suggesting that researchers in the

Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences should be more actively participating in interdisciplinary research initiatives. Academic Colleagues expressed concern about Dr. Luke's familiar emphasis on a utilitarian understanding of research that focused on commercialization and 'useful' research outputs, and about his suggestion that researchers need to move away from the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake.

Finally, Dr. Luke suggested that one concrete thing we can do to improve research funding for Social Sciences and Humanities researchers is to lobby the federal government to end the explicit exclusion of Social Sciences and Humanities research from the Scientific Research and Experimental Development Tax Incentive Program.

On the morning of the 21<sup>st</sup>, we were presented with updates on COU activities and a number of issues facing the post-secondary sector in Ontario:

- **SMA3:** We were provided with an update on the outcomes-based framework that will be implemented as part of the next round of Strategic Mandate Agreements (SMA3). It was noted that the framework does provide some protections for universities, in that bands of tolerance will provide some room for slight under-performance; universities will be able to weight the metrics in ways that hopefully benefit them; and universities are not being judged against each other. That said, failure to meet performance targets will result in funding being withheld from a university and redistributed to other universities that met their performance targets.
- **Pension double-dipping:** The government has expressed its intention to stop faculty members from simultaneously receiving a pension and full salary (though it was noted that there are not very many faculty members actually doing so) but has not yet made the changes required to implement this. Depending on how it is implemented, this new regulation runs the risk of breaching collective agreements and will likely result in legal and Charter challenges, union grievances, increased risk of labour disruption, human rights and equity issues, and brain drain.
- **Bill 124** proposes to cap wage increases in Ontario's public sector by introducing an annual compensation cap of an average of 1% for all employees under the collective agreement. It was noted, however, that an employee's salary may increase according to the terms of the collective agreement for recognition of the employee's length of time in employment, performance assessment, and/or successful completion of a program or course of professional technical education. If passed, this will not apply to existing collective agreements, but any new collective agreement will be expected to comply, and if it is not the Minister will have the authority to force the parties to return to negotiations. Bill 124 does not apply to executives.
- **Executive compensation:** The government is proposing to introduce pay-for-performance frameworks for executive pay increases, rather than automatic adjustments. The government's proposal would allow the government to determine performance metrics for executives and how many executives would be eligible to

receive such performance-based increases. Consultations are ongoing and the framework has not yet been finalized.

- **Ontario's digital strategy:** The Ministry has asked the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario to prepare a report regarding Ontario's digital strategy. HEQCO has met with agencies involved in e-learning and with universities.
- **Program funding approval:** The Ministry is engaged in consultation about ways to streamline the funding approval of new programs. The current process is time-consuming and duplicates the quality assurance process.
- **Collaborative Nursing Education:** The Ministry is conducting a review of the collaborative (university-college) delivery of nursing education. Some colleges would like to deliver stand-alone nursing degrees.
- **Intellectual Property:** The Ministry has struck an Expert Panel on Intellectual Property with the task of delivering an action plan for a provincial intellectual property framework and maximizing commercialization opportunities specifically related to the postsecondary sector. COU has convened an IP Working Group to develop a sector IP advocacy strategy.

The Academic Colleagues meet again on September 25.

Respectfully submitted,

Dr. Douglas Ivison  
COU Academic Colleague