

## **Highlights of discussions at the Academic colleagues (AC) meeting, December 11, 2009**

A wide range of issues were discussed at this AC meeting many of which are summarized as COU updates – December 13, 2009 at the COU website. I shall highlight three items on which Colleagues spent a considerable amount of time.

1. Peter Gooch provided a COU update emphasizing that impressing upon the government on University operating funding remains the number one priority, by reaching out to senior government officials including Leah Myers, who heads the governments secretariat on post-secondary education. Since 2002 growth in university students enrolment was by 100,000. But this increase in student enrolment was not supported by the equivalent level of government funding. Consequently there is a serious concern about quality assurance. In the next 5-6 years 60,000 more undergraduate students enrolment is expected. A considerable discussion followed on this issue. Concerns were expressed about quality assurance for increased enrolment of graduate students as well. COU and AC would like to work with the government on this important issue through effectively communicating the challenges to the government for it to appreciate the problem, and come up with practical solution.
2. Jim Butler (WLU) chair of the University Pension working group consisting of representatives from several universities presented their findings. Unmanageable “solvency and going concern special payments” has been the number one issue putting unbearable burden on the universities. Based on June 30/July1/2009 estimates going concern and solvency payments were estimated to be \$ 298 and \$257 million respectively with a total payment of \$555 million. Government provided some relief for the 2009 budget, which reduced the payment to \$ 349. The working group argued that universities should be exempt from the solvency payment on the ground that unlike private business/corporation universities are unlikely to be going out of business. The working group prepared several alternatives to the government including Deferred benefit and Hybrid pension plans. It was mentioned that the working group received strong support from the Executive Heads. The AC passed a motion supporting the work of the Pension Plan working group and thanked the committee for their hard work. A long discussion followed after the workgroup members left and the colleagues expressed serious concerns about the importance immediacy of the matter and stressed for a quick resolution considering the dire budgetary short falls of universities. The workgroup will submit its report in winter 2010.
3. The ACs will continue with the mini paper ideas and regular colleagues paper. The next two colleague papers will be on (1) PLAR (Prior learning Assessment & Recognition and (2) collaborative Online Degrees.

Please visit the COU website and see COU updates for further details.

Respectfully submitted

Azim Mallik

AC for Lakehead University