

Academic Colleagues Report
Council of Ontario Universities
289th Meeting of Council
Royal Military College of Canada
Kingston, ON
April 23, 2010

Council met on Friday, April 23 on the campus of RMC in Kingston, ON. Sheldon Levy, Chair of Council, opened the meeting with discussion of two topics of particular concern to members. The first topic, pensions, had dominated the discussion of Executive Heads at their Round Table the previous day. Concern about pensions varies across the province. Universities with defined contribution plans are not in trouble, while those with defined benefit plans have major issues. Ontario universities have been arguing against “solvency” as the basis for our pensions and would prefer a “going concern” basis premised on the assumption that universities are not at risk of closing suddenly. The province insists on “solvency” and expects universities to follow the law. Universities in trouble with their pensions must make provisions to pay into pension plans by making deep cuts in their operating budgets. Council has been working tirelessly on behalf of Ontario universities to avoid this problem.

The second item of concern to Executive Heads was the provincial government’s plan to pass legislation freezing compensation for all public sector employees for two years. Although this legislation would only apply to non-bargaining employees, there is the expectation that this intent will apply to bargaining groups when they negotiate their next collective agreements. There will be no government interference with bargaining or arbitration. The government defines compensation to include salary, benefits, pension, and holiday time. Merit-based progress through the ranks, pay for performance, and promotion increases will not be frozen. Executive Heads will have to sign off on compliance, but will not be regulated by the legislation. The expectation is to “manage within existing funding”, and although not explicitly stated there is an implication that transfer funding will not be increased even to cover allowed increases in compensation based on performance. Intense negotiations are anticipated, requiring a problem-solving mode of negotiating.

After this initial discussion, there were several presentations to Council. The first presentation was by Julia Christensen Hughes of Guelph, co-editor of a new book “Taking Stock: Research on Teaching and Learning in Higher Education”. This was followed by a presentation on student engagement by Chris Conway of Queens University, based on the results of the “NSSE Interventions” and “NSSE National” Projects. An Academic Colleagues Discussion Paper “Student Retention: A Moving Target” was also presented and discussed. Following these presentations there was an update on the prevention of violence and harassment in the workplace arising from an amendment to the Occupational Health and Safety Act of Ontario. All employers in Ontario are required to develop workplace violence policies as well as programs to implement these policies.

There were only two items for decision at this Council meeting. The first was to appoint Alastair Summerlee, Guelph, as Vice-Chair of Council for 2010-11 (and in that capacity he will become Chair of Council in 2011-12 and 2012-13) and Lesley Lovett-Doust, Nipissing, to the Executive Committee for a two-year term. The second decision established a new COU affiliate called the Council of Ontario Educational Developers (formerly an informal group called the Instructional Development Officers of Ontario).

On the evening of April 22 there was a Council reception and dinner at Fort Henry. President Gilbert was bid farewell.

Respectfully submitted,

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Alternate COU Academic Colleague for Lakehead University