

LAKEHEAD UNIVERSITY SENATE REPORT

October 2010.

SENATE REPORT

COLLEGE OF ONTARIO UNIVERSITIES. (C.O.U) and ACADEMIC COLLEAGUES(A.C.C.)

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What is the Academic Colleagues Committee and the College of Ontario Universities?

For new faculty who may not be aware of the role of the Academic Colleagues A.C.C. and the College of Ontario Universities. C.O.U. here is a brief description.

Academic Colleagues Committee. A.C.C.

All Ontario universities send elected or appointed members to regular Academic Colleagues meetings to represent the current initiatives and trends in their respective institutions and report back to the academic staff. The colleagues then provide representation to the:

College of Ontario Universities. C.O.U.

The C.O.U. is an administrative think tank composed of academic, full time provincial government employees who work alongside the Ministry of Education to provide input and direction for Universities in Ontario.

Through regular meetings, twice per term, the colleagues discuss the current work and initiatives of the College and have the opportunity to contribute through reports and position papers on various topics related to current university events and ongoing ministry initiatives within the Ministry of Education in Ontario.

Each month there will be a summary report to senate. The report and additional information will be posted on line for faculty to access for more details.

If there are questions regarding the report you may respond at Senate or refer to the verbal report and information on line.

Online Reports:

- * C.O.U. Update-June 17, 2010.
- * C.O.U. Colleagues Issues Update. August. 2010.
- * Pension Issues.
- * Online Courses.
- * Online Degrees.
- * Student Retention.

Academic Colleagues Summer Retreat. August 15th 2010. Toronto

1. Presentation:

Academic Transformation: The forces Reshaping Higher Education in Ontario. by David Trick.

The presentation covered a variety of current trends and challenges in Ontario universities including, expanding enrolments and diverse needs with a predictable boom over the next 10 years. Increased demands for new knowledge creation and research with little government consideration for inflationary

costs to balance the increases. Undergraduate teaching in Ontario uses the most expensive approach with all undergrad programs at research universities where teaching and undergraduate instruction generally plays a lesser role. There is an impending threat of expansion with no adjustment for teaching quality. The traditional university model is threatened by large classes and an increase in part time sessional instruction.

Possible solutions include: Teaching focused universities, teaching contract faculty and role differentiation, creation of an open on line university, government funding adjustment to rising per student costs, incentives and training for teaching focused institutions.

2. Discussion Issues:

- a. **Collaborative Online Degrees.** There is currently increased pressure for universities to offer degrees on line as there are currently 15,000 enrolments in institutions out of province.
- b. **Commercialization of Research.** There is a push from government to increase the commercialization of research and for establishing an Innovation Council to identify areas for collaboration. There are forces opposed suggesting threats to traditional research funding for the Humanities plus the integrity of research with academic freedom. There is a suggestion that Commercial publications should be viewed as valid academic activities.
- c. **Increased Graduate Education Funding.** With recent increases in B.I.U. funding for more graduate students many institutions have also experienced severe staffing declines and a lack of equivalent resource funding, particularly in smaller institutions. Additional concerns are due to a lack of adequate supervision and time demands placed on academic staff. The result is a decline in graduate enrolment and reduced quality of research output.
- d. **Undergraduate Research.** There is an emerging trend to question the value of undergraduate research requirements. Given the increased demands of numbers, expense and time involvement many programs have dropped the research requirement. The problem is more apparent in the humanities where there is more of a necessity for one on one advising compared to optional group research in other disciplines.
- e. **Retention.** There is an increased trend to accept student retention as a performance indicator. University administrations are now placing an emphasis on a variety of services which maintain the student and prevent failure and high dropout rates. There is a suggestion that universities should become more strategic in their investments around retention. Individual differences and specific student problems are often missed through the generalized approach. Is it time to reconsider the investments in retention and our use of retention statistics in university rankings and comparisons?
- f. **Pension Issues.**
The gravity of the pension issues were detailed by Jim Butler of Wilfred Laurier chair of the C.O.U. Working Group on University Pension Plans.
There is a strong awareness of the severity of the financial situation related to the current solvency valuation problems. The A.C.C. recognized a need to find some relief for those institutions facing valuation dates in the near future.
- g. **On Line Degrees.**
There is currently a position paper being developed by A.C.C. to discuss the challenges for developing on line degrees. There are a variety of concerns for both students and

universities regarding the evolution of on line education. Although there is a strong trend toward this form of instruction the research in the field does not necessarily reinforce the effectiveness and cost saving arguments. There are numerous unanswered questions regarding the effects on academic staff and the current status of on line course effectiveness. Due to the long range plans to increase numbers in universities in Ontario the provincial government is committed to an on line university even though there is limited evidence that it will provide an improved level of instruction and learning.

- h. **Teaching and Learning.** There is a widespread perception that current approaches to teaching and learning in universities are not optimal for student engagement and learning outcomes. The O.C.U. is establishing a teaching and learning task force to address a range of issues and a communications strategy to improve perceptions of university teaching and learning.

Note: For more details and additional issues please see the online updates.