

Council of Ontario Universities  
Academic Colleagues Report  
301<sup>st</sup> Meeting of Council, April 7, 2016

On the evening of April 6, Council met at the Ryerson Image Centre on the campus of Ryerson University for a reception and dinner. Council members whose terms are ending this year were recognized and thanked for their contributions.

On the morning of April 7, Council met at the Engineering and Computing Centre on Ryerson University campus for a presentation and discussion on a sector-wide strategic communications plan being undertaken by COU on behalf of Ontario Universities. Manifest Communications and Level5 Strategy Group have been engaged by COU as consultants on the project. The project was initiated to address widely held societal perceptions about universities and the mismatch between facts and these perceptions. The myth of the university-educated barista persists despite very positive statistics on employment for university graduates. A goal of the strategic communications plan is to speak with one voice and connect with parents, taxpayers and the province on the value of universities to students and society. The first phase of the project involves listening to concerns, and this phase is currently underway.

Council met for a working lunch in the Alumni Lounge at the former Maple Leaf Gardens, currently the Mattamy Athletic Centre at Ryerson. This was the first Council meeting for COU's new Executive Director, David Lindsley. In his President's report, David Lindsley spoke about his first 90 days on the job and the positive developments for Ontario universities, including the federal budget announcements and free tuition for Ontario families earning less than \$50K. He remarked that the Premier and the Ontario government are focused on student experience, and that this should be a focus of the strategic communications plan.

Paul Davidson, President of Universities Canada (formerly AUCC) also spoke about positive developments for the university sector in Canada. He said that when Justin Trudeau was the youngest member of the Liberal caucus he was given the portfolio of Youth Critic and he visited every university in Canada to speak with students. Bill Morneau stated in his federal budget that investing first and foremost in education (including research) will enhance all sectors of the economy, and this philosophy will be reflected in developing an economic strategy. This is a time for greater ambition and to develop a new generation of champions for higher education and research.

Respectfully submitted,

Mary Louise Hill, COU Academic Colleague for Lakehead University