

Academic Colleagues Report
Council of Ontario Universities
299th Meeting of Council

The Council of Ontario Universities met at Wilfrid Laurier University (WLU) on Thursday, April 9, 2015 for its 299th meeting.

On April 8, the evening before the Council meeting, a Council reception and dinner were held at the Senate and Board Chamber at WLU. Max Blouw, Chair of Council and President of WLU, was our host for the evening and he entertained us with a brief history of the university including how it evolved from Waterloo Lutheran University without changing its initials. After dinner, Max recognized members of Council who are completing their terms and thanked them for their years of service.

On the morning of April 9, Executive Heads and Academic Colleagues met separately. Peter Gooch (COU) briefed Academic Colleagues on the issues Executive Heads would be discussing at their roundtable. A major concern is the MTCU Funding Formula Review. The stated policy goals of the review are to support differentiation, support excellence in student experience, support accountability and improve transparency, and support financial sustainability. A broad-based consultation process is underway. Executive Heads are concerned about demographic trends and the financial sustainability of some institutions, and would like to engage the ministry on this topic. There is also concern about negative media attention on the topic of part-time and sessional faculty and it may be important to provide messages that address some of the confusion. For instance, it may be helpful to disaggregate the data to report on different types of part-time instructors, including graduate students and post-docs, practicing professionals, retired faculty, contract lecturers, etc. The reported issue of “precarious employment” does not apply equally to all groups.

Academic Colleagues and Executive Heads met together from 12:00 to 2:30 in the Senate and Board Chamber for a working lunch and Council meeting. Two items were discussed at length during the first part of the meeting: 1) strategies for internationalizing Ontario universities, and 2) decline in demand for (and perceived value of) arts and humanities programs. As always, Executive Heads and Academic Colleagues expressed a wide range of opinion on these topics. Open discussion like this is essential for building and maintaining consensus among Ontario universities, something that COU relies upon in its work on behalf of all member institutions. Council also approved membership on the Executive Committee for 2015-16 and heard reports from the COU President, Academic Colleagues, AUCC and the Board of Directors of the COU Holding Association Inc.

Following the Council meeting Academic Colleagues met again and heard a panel presentation about student perspectives on Aboriginal experiences at Ontario universities. Three WLU students and a staff member from the Office of Aboriginal Initiatives spoke about their own experiences including best practices in student support, personal challenges, and advice to Colleagues on supporting Aboriginal student success.

Academic Colleagues will meet in Toronto on May 26-27, 2015. The 300th meeting of Council will be held in Toronto on October 15, 2015.

Respectfully submitted,
Mary Louise Hill
COU Academic Colleague for Lakehead University



Packs of Research Matters bubblegum cards (complete with bubblegum) were distributed at the Council lunch.