

Report to the Academic Board

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There were five meetings of the Council of Ontario Universities (COU) during the 2001-2002 academic session, with the first meeting for the current academic year scheduled for October 17. During the past year I also served on the Committee on Policy and Planning.

For forty years the Council of Ontario Universities, whose mission is to provide leadership in higher education achieve excellence through co-operation and innovation, has been working to improve the quality and accessibility of higher education in Ontario.

The Committee of Presidents of the Universities of Ontario was formed in 1962 to ensure institutional participation in the formulation of policy and program initiatives carried out by government during the university expansion of the 60s. The committee soon changed its name to the Council of Ontario Universities and later expanded to include two representatives from each member institution: the executive head and an academic colleague appointed by each university's senior academic governing body. There are currently seventeen member universities and two associate member institutions: the Royal Military College and the Ontario College of Art and Design. The Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada also meets regularly with the Council. At the University of Toronto the appointment of the academic colleague, along with an alternate colleague, are approved annually by the Academic Board, and this past year the alternate has been Professor Rob Vipond, Chair of the Department of Political Science.

The mandate of the Council is to provide leadership and to promote cooperation among the provincially assisted universities of Ontario, to participate actively in the development of public policy, to promulgate the contribution of higher education in the Province of Ontario and to promote cooperation and understanding among universities, the general public, and the provincial government. To achieve its goals COU makes available to the university community and general public reports and policy papers on a wide array of topics such as enrolment, faculty, finances, physical facilities, health sciences and applications. The Council promotes increased government commitment to, and public support for, postsecondary education in the province. It provides common services to universities through the Ontario Council on Graduate Studies (OCGS), the Council of Senior Administrative Officers – Universities of Ontario (CSAO –UO), the Ontario Universities Application Centre (OUAC).

During my first year on COU, many of the issues raised were those signaled by my predecessor Professor Edward Chamberlin in the report he submitted to the Academic Board on November 15, 2001: expansion of the Ontario university System; funding of

universities by the provincial government; capital funding; faculty renewal; secondary student reform; student assistance; university research; tuition fees; university accountability; university indicators; college-university relations; private universities; the Quality Assessment Board and new universities; private universities and learning technologies.

Funding of universities in the province still remains a critical issue in spite of an increase in the overall level of support from the provincial government. However, for many years the Basic Operating Grant has not kept up with the cost pressures of inflation and an expanding full-time student body. These annual funding cutbacks have given rise to important reductions in the number of staff and faculty, gaps in library collections, deteriorating laboratory equipment and deferred maintenance of physical plant. In 1995-96 operating grants from the provincial government totaled \$1.82 billion whereas it totaled \$1.725 billion in 2001-2002. When inflation is taken into account from 1995-96 to 2001-2002 the Basic Operating Grant fell by \$143 million. Ontario's funding of postsecondary education still remains much below the national average. The current status of physical facilities across the province remains inadequate and recognizing this the government of Ontario announced the SuperBuild program to address the major capital requirements associated with the expansion of enrolment, greater research activity and maintenance. During the last year the Council sent out its first annual Capital Plan and Investment Report (CPIR) survey to put together an accountability report as required by SuperBuild on all planned capital investments to clarify how the provincial universities are maintaining and renewing their infrastructure. In 2001-2002 COU continued to build the case for additional funding in this sector.

The number of full-time faculty has decreased by over 15% in the last ten years while the number of students has increased to a degree that the student-faculty ratio in Ontario is the highest in Canada and currently more than 10% above the average of the other nine provinces. Over the next decade, Ontario's universities will be losing a record number of faculty, coupled with serious increased enrolment. COU undertook a background study to the *Smith Report* that modeled the supply and demand of full-time faculty over the next decade. The study estimated that 13,500 new faculty will be needed to replace retiring faculty (7,461), to meet increases in student demand (4,224) and to bring the provincial student-faculty ration in line with the national average (1,815). The Provincial Government's multi year announcement of funding directly proportional to projected enrolment growth over the next three years will go some way in helping Ontario universities plan for the longer term and hire faculty. The Working Group on University Capacity, composed of university and government representatives, convinced the ministry to increase operating grants, directly proportional to projected increases in enrolment. The increase for 2001-02 was set at \$33.5 million, 2002-03, \$38.5 and the year of the expected greatest increase in student demand, 2003-04, at \$151.6 million. However, when two times as many qualified students applied for first year entry, the provincial government intimated that it would not increase the projected 2001-02 \$33.5 million to the universities. The position taken by the University of Toronto not to accept more students than agreed upon without full funding was instrumental in determining COU adopt the same strategy when negotiating with the ministry who subsequently

committed to provide full funding on a yearly basis for real and actual enrolment growth. Finally the Working Group on University Capacity began to meet last fall in order to determine the level of graduate expansion needed to meet the anticipated faculty demand over the next decade. The full funding program initiated at the University of Toronto was considered by Academic Colleagues as a very innovative and powerful recruitment initiative for the best Ph.D. students.

The impact of the “double cohort” accompanied by the underlying increase in the university-age population on the provincial universities was a source of much debate in Council. In 2003, the first graduates of the new Ontario Secondary School (OSS) program of studies will seek admission to Ontario universities. Two main issues arise for COU as the new curriculum becomes fully implemented: that of adequate space for the OSS students and for those who are completing the Ontario Academic Course (OAC) and the standard of evaluation and level of preparation for study at the university of both groups of students. COU has been meeting with the provincial ministries involved to monitor grading practices and to consider and evaluate all possible strategies. Changes that occurred this year in the Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP) have placed emphasis on loans (rather than grants) and the financial assistance programs of the universities. In the province this has resulted in increased student debt loads and a significant administrative burden for Ontario universities. The COU Task Force on Student Assistance completed a report in fall 2001 that provides a comprehensive review of the existing student financial assistance system and its effects on students and institutions.

Finally, Academic Colleagues began a working paper series to provide input to Council on academic issues, that will be posted on the COU website. Three papers were completed in 2001-02. The first paper, *The Role of Ontario Graduate Education* makes a case for the reinforcement of “... graduate education in Ontario institutions in order to maintain the overall quality of the institutions and to secure the future.” The second, *Increased Integration of Programs in Engineering and the Humanities*, advocates the need for graduates to have a real understanding of the impact of technology on society. “As engineering today more than ever shapes our society and society more than ever shapes the technology produced by engineers, the need for greater balance in the preparation of our science, technology and humanist graduates seems unavoidable if we are to continue to address the future with confidence.” The third paper questions whether a three-year program can sufficiently provide graduates with a reasonable knowledge base of their chosen discipline. It concludes that, “given the popularity of the 3-year degree, it is unlikely that many institutions will eliminate the degree entirely, although some may choose to delete the degree from specific disciplines. Ultimately, the challenge is to define more clearly what a university degree is and how the integrity of that degree can be ensured.” In the next year Academic Colleagues plan three further working papers on academic issues to present to Council.