

Report to the Academic Board

October 5, 2003

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There were five meetings of the Council of Ontario Universities (COU) during the 2002-2003 academic session, with the first meeting for the current academic year scheduled for October 16. During the past year I also served on the Committee on Policy & Planning.

For forty-one 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 eighteen 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 second year on COU, many of the issues raised were those signaled in my last report the Academic Board on November 14, 2002: 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; 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. Working closely with government the Council was able to maintain the full funding for growth principle in the face of higher-than-projected enrolment increases, supplement SuperBuild funding, introduce quality improvement and produce a system enrolment plan that will provide the historical ration of registrants to applicants in the double cohort year. In 2003-2004 the university operating budget will be more than 17.5% higher than in 2002-2003, an increase that is greater than any other major sector in Ontario. Yet, in spite of the real progress made, 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 2002-2003 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. 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. COU set up five new task forces that concentrated on the following areas of concern: the Task Force on the Future of the Publicly Assisted Universities in the Postsecondary System to assess the changing landscape of the postsecondary sector and determine which developments were important to the fundamental interests of Ontario universities; the Task Force on Double Cohort Logistics, to assist Executive Heads in identifying the level of preparedness at the local level and to raise awareness of admissions and related issues that universities face in dealing with the double cohort; the Task force on Interuniversity Athletics, to develop a report reviewing the role and state of interuniversity sport in Ontario; the Task Force on Privacy Legislation, to assess the impact of federal legislation on Ontario universities and to study the concept of a COU Information Commissioner; and the Task Force to assess the impact of the Ontario Disabilities Act on universities.

The impact of the “double cohort” accompanied by the underlying increase in the university-age population on the provincial universities continued to be 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 full 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 continued to meet with the provincial ministries involved, to monitor grading practices and to consider and evaluate all possible strategies. Changes that occurred last year in the Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP) 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.

Finally, Academic Colleagues continued a working paper series to provide input to Council on academic issues that is posted on the COU website. Three papers were completed in 2002-03. The first paper, *The Double Cohort and Quality* deals with the medium term problems related to more students with strained resources that are likely to continue well after the Double Cohort’s participation as undergraduates in Ontario universities, since participation rates for Ontario’s universities are expected to remain high: “How will we manage to maintain quality of instruction and university experience, given the vastly greater numbers of students and only moderately increases in capacity?” The second, *Evaluation, Admissions, and the Quality of Ontario Universities*, links in a very significant way the quality of the programs that Ontario universities offer to the quality of the students who are admitted. “However, making decisions about admission into first-entry programmes has become increasingly difficult...In addition, the change in the application process, which now allows students and unlimited number of choices on their application form, means institutions across the province are dealing with unprecedented numbers of applications.” The third paper: *Defining the University for the Twentieth Century*, raises the issue of the lack of differentiation in Ontario between college and university mission statements, “even though there is diversity among institutional missions within each sector.” Given the shifting higher-education landscape and since colleges look more like universities, a university’s specific governance structures do not resonate with the public as a distinguishing feature. The paper identifies the unique characteristics of a university that differentiates it from other higher-education institutions, and stresses that universities currently do not present themselves clearly to the world and also need to provide a clear rationale for their future existence.

In the upcoming year it will be important for the University of Toronto to make its case within COU on the following three priorities:

- a) graduate expansion (and recognizing this cannot be done equally by all institutions;
- b) differentiation – COU has a tendency to operate as though “one size fits all” and U of T has to continue to make the case that this will not work;
- c) funding at the national average – with the new government promising a two-year tuition freeze we must be certain that the money is somehow made up – it will be

important that all COU members make the case that quality costs money and a freeze on fees will simply not work without compensating funding, otherwise we continue to fall further behind; and no one should be happy with a 10th place ranking in funding in Canada.

As a final point I believe that readers should recognize that the increase in funding has for the most part kept the funding per student constant. The large increase in funding this year was for a large increase in students and did not improve the funding per student. The Quality Assurance Fund is an improvement but it is a small part of the overall increase, however it is very important and must continue.