

University of Toronto Academic Colleague, Council of Ontario Universities (COU)
Report to Academic Board, May 13, 2012
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The Council of Ontario Universities consists of twenty member universities and one associate member (Royal Military College). The COU fosters discussion and cooperation between Ontario universities, works with the federal and provincial government on issues facing universities, and works for the improvement of higher education in Ontario. The governing body of the COU is the “Council”, consisting of the Executive Head (President or Principal) and one Academic Colleague from each member university. The Academic Colleagues are a diverse group; depending on how member universities select colleagues, they may be “rank-and-file” faculty members or faculty with administrative experience. The full Council meets twice per year. Executive Heads and Academic Colleagues also meet separately three times per year. Academic Colleagues have the opportunity to sit on COU committees, task forces and working groups.

The Colleagues aim to generate discussion and provide insight to complement the views of the Executive Heads. This is normally achieved through the preparation of one to two discussion papers a year. This year colleagues produced papers on teaching evaluations and research grant funding. Also produced was a mini-discussion paper, for Colleagues only, on “What is a University”. This focused on some Colleagues’ concerns over how universities are defined and the future outlook for universities.

The provincial election, release of the “Drummond Report” and the Auditor General’s ongoing audit on teaching effectiveness were the topics of lively debate this year. These debates led to productive conversations on the need for Colleagues not only to provide a critical perspective but also to support the COU and their various public advocacy initiatives (including the spring “Back to Class” week events at universities across the province and the brochure, “Beyond the Sage on the Stage: Innovative and Effective Teaching and Learning at Ontario Universities”, about effective teaching practices at Ontario universities available at http://www.cou.on.ca/issues-resources/key-issues/more/pdfs/cou_beyond_the_sage_on_the_stage---teaching-and-le).

Other issues considered by Colleagues through discussions or work on committees and task forces included:

- The quality appraisal process: the Quality Council (QC) and Quality Appraisal Committee are now meeting monthly to review new undergraduate and graduate program applications;
- Credit transfer issues and the role of the Ontario Council for Articulation and Transfer (ONCAT);
- Mandate agreements and differentiation of universities - currently these agreements appear not to be a priority for MTCU;
- MTCU’s interest in three year degrees;
- Performance indicators, teaching effectiveness and assessment of learning outcomes.

Finally, the Colleagues are preparing a paper on undergraduate research opportunities for presentation to Council in the fall of 2012. The goal of the paper is to demonstrate the connection between research

and effective teaching and its impact on student learning. Possible questions to be addressed include: How is research linked to critical thinking? What experiences encourage student excitement about research? The paper will also provide examples of the range of research opportunities, broadly defined, available to undergraduate students. These examples may be at the level of individual faculty, courses, programs or division. To ensure U of T is represented in this paper, I invite you or your colleagues to send me brief descriptions of existing research opportunities (no more than half a page/example; please send to sandy.welsh@utoronto.ca).