

**University of Toronto Academic Colleague, Council of Ontario Universities (COU)**  
**Report to the Academic Board, 29 May 2017**  
**Markus Stock**

For Academic Board members not familiar with the Council of Ontario Universities (COU), I start my report with some brief background information on the organization. The COU consists of the twenty-one publicly funded universities in Ontario. The mandate of the COU includes facilitating discussion between member institutions, advocating on behalf of members, and working with provincial and federal governments on policies affecting universities. The COU also supports and coordinates services for members, including the Ontario Universities' Application Centre (OUAC), Quality Assurance (through a body called the Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance, or Quality Council), the Inter-University Transit System (IUTS), and Scholars Portal. The COU is governed by an executive body, the Council. The Council is composed of two representatives from each university, the Executive Heads of member universities and the Academic Colleagues. The full Council meets twice a year and the Academic Colleagues meet separately an additional three times per year. An important function of the Academic Colleagues is their membership on COU committees, such as the Quality Council, the Government and Community Relations Committee, the OUAC Advisory Board, or ad-hoc committees on pressing topics, such as the Highly Skilled Workforce Steering Committee.

As part of our work, Academic Colleagues aim to generate discussion and provide perspectives to complement the views of the Executive Heads. In each of the two full Council meetings, Colleagues are selected to present a range of viewpoints on an agenda topic during the Council meeting; occasionally the presentations are augmented by presentations of invited additional experts sharing their perspectives on the topic at hand. The topics discussed this year were experiential learning (EL) as well as work-integrated learning (WIL) in the context of the Premier's Highly Skilled Workforce Expert Panel Report in the fall Council meeting; and responses in the post-secondary education sector to the Truth and Reconciliation Committee Calls to Action in the spring Council meeting. Other important topics were the Strategic Mandate Agreements (SMA) between universities and the Ontario Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development (MAESD) and the *Futuring Initiative* of the Ontario universities.

Below, I briefly summarize some of the issues discussed related to this academic year's main topics.

The role of experiential learning (EL) and work-integrated learning (WIL) in Ontario universities was one of the topics dominating our deliberations this year. Following recent discussions regarding EI and measuring learning outcomes, the topic was highlighted by the Premier's Highly Skilled Workforce Expert Panel Report *Building the Workforce of Tomorrow: A Shared Responsibility*.<sup>1</sup> While building a highly skilled workforce for Ontario is a very clear priority of the provincial government, universities have received little direction from MAESD on this file. COU has worked to respond to the government's agenda through the MAESD Experiential Learning Working Group and the OCAV Task Force on Quality Indicators. COU has also convened a Highly Skilled Workforce Steering Committee, which includes representatives from many functional areas across Ontario universities. This group has developed a funding proposal for government in support of expanding experiential learning opportunities. COU has also considered metrics that may be used to report on learning outcomes for experiential opportunities. The COU's Academic Colleagues discussed a variety of issues around this topic, such as the importance of involving both undergraduate and graduate students in experiential learning opportunities, the costs of experiential learning, and support to develop new EL/WIL initiatives. Deliberations also focused on the role of faculty members in the development of highly skilled workers/workplaces, and on the need to train and prepare faculty members to design and deliver

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ontario.ca/page/building-workforce-tomorrow-shared-responsibility>

experiential learning opportunities. The Academic Colleagues emphasized the important role faculty members play in the students' development of transferable skills and in educating them about the benefits of EL and WIL—both at the undergraduate and graduate levels. Evaluating the challenges and barriers to engaging faculty members in EL and WIL, Academic Colleagues recommended that effective ways to ensure faculty engagement in EL and WIL should be found, and that the matter of merit-based gratification and the consideration of EI/WIL in promotion and tenure assessments should be addressed. We also talked about the importance of helping students communicate their learning outcomes to employers. It was found that co-curricular records (CCR), such as the University of Toronto's CCR, and e-portfolios might help students reflect upon and articulate their learning experiences and accomplishments, and enhance their ability to communicate these to future employers.

The universities' responses to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's calls to action were the focus of the spring COU meeting.<sup>2</sup> Supported by a number of experts, COU Academic Colleagues talked about indigenous initiatives at Ontario universities. In particular, Academic Colleagues deliberated on questions such as: How are faculty members at Ontario universities engaged in campus indigenous initiatives? What opportunities or supports will assist faculty members in strengthening such initiatives on their campuses? In sum, Academic Colleagues voiced the conviction that indigenous initiatives on Canadian university campuses are a shared responsibility of all members of the university communities and need to be a long-term commitment. Rather than seeing such initiatives as a 'problem,' they may be considered an opportunity to contribute to universities as a whole, as a 'knowledge project' that in part also requires building awareness of how indigenous knowledge is already embedded in our understandings of the world. Universities also need to recognize the ways in which indigenous knowledge enhances the research enterprise, and reflect indigenous priorities and processes in the tenure and promotion system. Most importantly, Academic Colleagues agreed that as we think about indigenous initiatives, we need to consider sustainability. How do we support such initiatives, fortify resources for them, and keep this work going in the post-secondary educational sector?

As is obvious, these topics and questions also reverberate with conversations at the University of Toronto about EL/WIL<sup>3</sup> and about responses to the TRC report on our campuses.<sup>4</sup> Looking forward, it is likely that both EL/WIL and indigenous initiatives will remain among the important topics for universities as well as for provincial and federal governments. For Academic Board members interested in these topics, I encourage you to stay informed about them as they continue to evolve.

Another topic of continuous conversation has been COU's strategic engagement campaign, the *Futuring Initiative*,<sup>5</sup> which aims at fostering a renewed conversation about the central role of Ontario's universities in creating a successful future for students and communities. Designed to highlight the role that universities play for the future of innovation, employment, entrepreneurship, and research in Ontario, these conversations and outreach events are geared at parents, students, employers, and other decision-makers.

As in previous years, there was no shortage of further topics for discussion due to various MAESD policy initiatives. Other issues addressed included the metrics for SMAs as well the changes in provincial tuition billing and the concomitant modifications in OSAP delivery. On the SMA metrics, MAESD priorities are on factors such as student teaching and learning, student experience, access, skills development, and research excellence, and there was a shared conviction that better metrics will be needed, especially for

---

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/index.php?p=890>

<sup>3</sup> <http://memos.provost.utoronto.ca/announcing-the-task-force-on-experiential-work-integrated-learning-pdadc-89/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.utoronto.ca/news/truth-and-reconciliation-u-t>

<sup>5</sup> <http://ontariosuniversities.ca/about/>

access, skills development, and research excellence. With the second round of SMAs (SMA 2) due this year, metrics development will have to continue in preparation for the following round (SMA 3). The COU conversations about tuition billing follow the Ontario government's changes to net tuition billing. This policy is aimed at helping prospective students better understand the true costs of their postsecondary education, making it easier for some students to realize their net tuition by taking into account OSAP and institutional aid right away. COU has committed to working with MAESD to realize this project, highlighting that its scope affects university application centres, including finance, IT, enrolment planning, registrarial services, student aid, and communications. At this point, the large majority of Ontario universities is engaged in net tuition pilot projects.