

Council of Ontario Universities Academic Colleague Report  
Submitted to Academic Board May 15, 2020  
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During the 2019-2020 academic year, Academic Colleagues addressed a range of pressing topics for the post-secondary sector.

Fall discussions continued to address the specifics of the SMA 3 framework, alongside a general discussion of performance metrics. Academic Colleagues also provided feedback on the strategic planning of COU's advocacy. Central to both the original planning document and Colleagues' feedback is the recognition that an effective strategy for communicating the value of universities to government and citizens of Ontario is vital. This developed into discussions over the Winter on the future of universities, including a presentation by a "futurist." Throughout, Colleagues registered caution about mapping COU strategies and advocacy pillars too closely to the current government's platform – noting that the strategic planning extended beyond the term of any one government, and that the government's current priorities failed to reflect the full interests of the post-secondary sector. "Sustainability," for example, was not an initial priority identified by COU, but of importance to many Colleagues and their institutions.

Of import in the Winter was a discussion about the "future" of Academic Colleagues, and a desire amongst Colleagues to play a more active role in COU, and in some cases, to be more active within their own universities. COU has undertaken a range of activities in the last eight years to assess its structures, membership, and members' responsibilities. Reviewing these documents and assessing the current arrangement, Academic Colleagues requested we play a more active role in COU, with a desire to reinvigorate the bicameral structure of COU or devise a new structure that would allow Colleagues to take part in decision-making, consultations, and other core activities of COU.

On this point, it is useful to acknowledge that the University of Toronto is quite distinct from other universities, both in our financial support of COU, but also our governing structure. The vast majority of my Academic Colleagues sit on Senate, and many are elected by their Senates to become an Academic Colleague. They provide oral and/or written reports to Senate regularly. In contrast, my reporting responsibilities entail a year-end report to Academic Board for information. During the course of my term, I have learned to dialogue with various senior staff and administrators. I would recommend the University of Toronto's Academic Colleague report more frequently to Academic Board, either in writing within the Consent Agenda, or potentially in writing/orally for Information. A more robust mechanism for filtering the knowledge gained at COU Academic Colleague meetings to the University community could be beneficial.

Not surprisingly, the Spring meetings have been focused extensively on Covid responses, stretching from the experiences of individual faculty vis-à-vis teaching, research and service, to

department-, divisional-, and university-level responses. Collectively, our experiences span the following range of programs:

- Research and professional graduate programs
- Co-op
- Life/Medical, natural, engineering, and computer sciences
- Humanities and social sciences
- Studio-based art
- On-line degrees

The insights from Colleagues' across the province from our early transition to on-line learning regarding bandwidth and connectivity outside Southern Ontario and on First Nations' reserves, access to devices, student mental health and well-being, international students' contexts, and experiential learning/co-op learning are incredibly useful.

Colleagues have also compared both official institutional decisions and anticipated actions for the 2020-2021 Academic Year. These include an expectation that teaching will need to be on-line, and utilize the full range of on-line pedagogies (including asynchronous offerings). The question of tuition reduction has also been discussed, however, this presents complex challenges. For many of the universities in the province, reducing tuition would create significant economic stress. The COU is actively advocating for student financial support at this time. In the current context, COU and universities broadly need to generate sensitive messaging that communicate our value to society, without losing sight of our privilege.

The Covid-situation has re-affirmed Colleagues' desire to address mental health in the 2020-21 Academic Year. Informed in part by the University of Toronto's discussions at Academic Board, Academic Colleagues will be broadening this conversation to mental health and the university as a site of care.

On a final note, a search for a new President and CEO of COU is underway. Current President David Lindsay is not continuing in this post. COU has retained the firm Boyden to assist with the search.

As my term on Academic Board ends June 30, 2020, so too will my term as an Academic Colleague. I want to take this opportunity to register my appreciation to sit as U of T's Academic Colleague. It has been among the most rewarding and valuable assignments during my time at the University of Toronto.