

University of Toronto Academic Colleague, Council of Ontario Universities (COU)
Report to the Academic Board, June 2, 2014
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For Academic Board members not familiar with the Council of Ontario Universities (COU), I start my report with a brief background 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), 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 (formally known as the "Companions of the Presidents"). In my experience as a colleague, I've found the Academic Colleagues to be a diverse group; some colleagues are "rank-and-file" faculty members and others are faculty with current or recent administrative experience. 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, task forces and working groups, such as the "Quality Council" and OUAC Advisory board.

As part of our work, Academic Colleagues aim to generate discussion and provide perspectives to complement the views of the Executive Heads. One of the challenges has been to ensure Colleagues' discussions are relevant to the most pressing issues in the province and that the appropriate format exists for Colleagues to express their views to Executive Heads during the twice a year full Council meetings. In previous years, one or two Colleagues would produce a paper on a pertinent academic issue and then present to the Executive Heads the Council meetings. This year, we moved to a new model whereby two or three Colleagues are selected to present a range of viewpoints on an agenda topic during the Council meeting. In the fall, the topic was differentiation of Ontario universities and in the spring, online education and MTCU's goals for the Centre of Excellence in Online Learning. This format appears to foster more productive exchange between Colleagues and Executive Heads than occurred in previous meetings. Below I briefly summarize some of the issues discussed related to differentiation and online education.

The Strategic Management Agreement (SMA) process and differentiation was a much-discussed issue throughout 2013-14. The year began with the September release of the MTCU draft differentiation framework and associated system-wide metrics. As mentioned by the Provost at previous meetings of Academic Board, Dr. Paul Genest was appointed by MTCU to lead the SMA process and meet individually with universities. As the year progressed, Colleagues were informed that allocation of graduate spaces was discussed as part of the SMA process, with the expectation that MTCU will use the SMAs to make adjustments in this area. Colleagues also debated the planned use of metrics related to what universities were to achieve through their SMA. At the writing of this report, the SMA process is coming to a close with most universities having signed agreements. Once SMAs are made public by MTCU, COU will continue to work with member institutions to review SMAs impact on graduate enrolment and undergraduate programs. For Academic Board members interested in the SMA process and differentiation, I encourage you to stay informed on this issue as it unfolds.

The second issue dominating our discussions was online learning. As Academic Board members may recall, in December 2013, MTCU announced the Online Ontario initiative, including funding for the development of online introductory/foundational courses or collaborative delivery of low-enrolment programs. The pros and cons of offering Ontario-wide online courses at the first year were evaluated, along with issues related to feasibility, access, cost and institutional identity. We also

shared information about current online offerings at our institutions. Most universities have some type of online offerings, ranging from a few courses to those with a large number of online courses, programs and central offices devoted to supporting online initiatives. There was much interest in U of T's MOOCs and how these were being used to support flipped and other pedagogical initiatives in credit-bearing courses at U of T. At our final meeting of the year (May 22nd), we will be discussing academic integrity and online learning.

As in previous years, there was no shortage of topics for discussion due to various MTCU policy initiatives. Other issues discussed included the role of research in undergraduate education, metrics for measuring teaching effectiveness, and international student enrolment/support.