Tuesday, May 27th, 2014


Dear members of the Senate,

On May 20th, 2014, the Academic Colleagues from Ontario’s Universities met at the Council of Ontario Universities offices in Toronto for a “working dinner”. These dinners allow us to sit around a table for three to four hours and discuss topics of mutual concern and interest to Ontario Universities. The topics are decided upon prior to the meeting and this month it was decided that the discussion should be centered on academic misconduct in online courses. There is a great deal of discussion in the government about the role of online teaching in this province and the relative prevalence of cheating in online courses versus traditional in class course has not received a great deal of attention. The colleagues read a number of papers prior to the meeting and then discussed the topic at length. Everyone contributed to the discussion and over time it changed from online misconduct to academic cheating in general. We talked about stats of cheaters, why they cheat, the resource implications of catching everyone and creating a culture of integrity to prevent cheating. Colleagues shared anecdotes from their own careers and offered tips on what they have done to mitigate cheating.

The colleagues reconvened the following morning at the COU offices and were debriefed by COU staff on an assortment of topics that were then discussed by the whole group. For brevity, the topics will be summarized in bullet form below:

TOPIC 1: Colleges are petitioning the government to be allowed to offer 3-year degrees:
- This is very counter-differentiation.
- Accreditation difficult. Colleges want their own accreditation board.
- Colleges are using base-funding for research. Getting more and more grants as well.

TOPIC 2: Election planning
- This election seems to be all about jobs
- Result is unpredictable
- Best for us to build and strengthen all relationships with leaders in all ridings
- COU has provided each party with kits on university issues
- COU has using social media to debunk myths on universities – employment stats, experiential learning
- No decisions from MCTU until election decided.

TOPIC 3: SMAs and diff
- 18 of 20 SMAs signed before election started.
Questions for MTCU:
- Will they revise metrics
- Will this happen again in 3 years?

TOPIC 4: Capacity expansion framework (money for capital expansions on campuses)
- Released instructions in March
- Will target areas that are bursting at seams
- Every university is putting in proposal
- Don’t know how much risk there is to these dollars with election

TOPIC 5: Online
- Steering committee will establish a new centre of excellence
- Steering committee will give opportunity to groups to give input before finalizing organization
- Been sent to students, unions, OCOUFA, CFS, e-learning group, registrars.
  - Waiting for feedback on this
- Working towards more detailed description of what new entity will be and what powers it will have.
- Will be highly collaborative between groups (universities).

TOPIC 6: Program approvals
- Decisions were to be made after SMA, but election came up right away

TOPIC 7: COU task force of funding flexibility
- Executive heads were interviewed to find themes that are significant for review
- SMA templates commit the government to move towards a funding review
- See what happens after election
- COU wants to use this to try to effect a cultural change in how MTCU works with COU. COU wants to be a partner with them rather than consulted on an as-needed basis.

If any questions arise from the content of this report, please do not hesitate to ask.

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