

RE: Report of the Academic Colleague from the Council of Ontario Universities meetings

Dear colleagues,

I am writing to provide an update from the most recent meeting of the Academic Colleagues of the Council of Ontario Universities, held over Zoom on August 25–26, 2026. The meeting focused on community-based research, current provincial and federal policy priorities, and possible next steps for the Academic Colleagues' engagement in the university sector's adaptation to generative artificial intelligence.

Community-Based Research

Amanda Demmer, Executive Director of Community-Based Research Canada, provided an overview of community-based research as a collaborative, community-driven, participatory and action-oriented approach that involves those affected by an issue throughout the research process. The discussion emphasized that rigour, use, relevance and trust are all necessary for research to create change. In universities, this approach can support more relevant research, stronger partnerships and greater impact.

Colleagues shared examples from their institutions and identified conditions that help this work succeed, including flexible timelines, sustained student involvement, community relationship brokers and support from university leadership. They also noted structural barriers, including project-based funding and timelines, doctoral program constraints, institutional silos, limited recognition through traditional peer-reviewed outputs, and differing definitions of success among researchers and community partners. The group also discussed the tension between research intended to advance positive social change and universities' commitments to non-partisanship and institutional neutrality.

Potential next steps for Community-Based Research Canada included developing guidance on communicating research impact and creating stronger connections between faculty members and community-based research networks.

COU Update

COU staff provided an update on several priority issues. Research advocacy remains active, including efforts to identify opportunities for provincial matching of federal research funding. The Ministry of Colleges, Universities, Research Excellence and Security is also establishing a Commercialization Metrics Sector Working Group with representation from universities, colleges, IP Ontario and government.

Colleagues were briefed on current capital investment opportunities, including the federal [Build Communities Strong Fund](#), and on opportunities for universities to contribute to defence industrial strategy and defence innovation. Three federal Defence Innovation Secure Hubs have been awarded, and COU is working with Universities Canada and the provincial government to identify further

opportunities for Ontario universities. The group also received information about the federal Canada Investment Summit scheduled for September 14–15, 2026, which is intended to attract investment and advance nation-building projects.

Generative Artificial Intelligence: Potential Next Steps

Following the May 2026 release of the COU (Generative)AI Task Force Report and earlier discussions with COU Members, the Academic Colleagues continued to consider how they might contribute to the sector's adaptation to AI. Dominika Flood, COU's Chief of Staff and Strategic Advisor, provided an overview of the recently established COU GenAI Steering Committee and AI Community of Practice.

Colleagues observed that institutional GenAI initiatives do not consistently reach faculty members, even as AI becomes increasingly integrated into students' learning experiences. Potential areas for Academic Colleagues' involvement included supporting GenAI fluency in teaching, learning and research; examining effective uses of GenAI in research; and considering the future purpose of universities in an AI-driven world, including the human experiences that cannot be replaced by GenAI.

The discussion also highlighted the value of sector-wide coordination at a time of limited resources, while recognizing the challenge of developing guidance that remains current. Before identifying specific initiatives or deliverables, Colleagues suggested hearing from experts on focused topics within the broader GenAI landscape. The Norton Guide to AI-Aware Teaching by Annette Vee, Marc Watkins and Derek Bruff was recommended as a faculty resource.

Upcoming Meetings

The next in-person Academic Colleagues meeting will be held Thursday, October 22, from 6:00 to 8:30 pm, and Friday, October 23, from 9:00 am to 12:00 noon, in downtown Toronto. The Meeting of the Members will follow on October 23 from 12:30 to 2:30 pm. The final venue will be confirmed by COU.

Kindly,



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