Council of Ontario Universities
Report to Senate of the Academic Colleague
Kathleen Okruhlik, June 2011

The COU Academic Colleagues met in Toronto May 26th and 27th. There was no meeting of the full Council.

Budget Update: Recall that the 2011 provincial budget committed to fund an increase of more than 60,000 spaces in postsecondary education over the next five years (to 2015-16). MTCU indicated that the university share of the 60,000 spaces is expected to be 41,000 spaces (graduate and undergraduate), phased in over the five years. The budget, however, made no specific commitments concerning capital—for the postsecondary sector or for other sectors. There is reason to think that we may learn something about the ten-year capital plan very soon (perhaps as early as May 30th).

The budget also announced that the government will reduce funding for executive offices of specific transfer payment agencies by 10% over two years. Subsequent clarifications indicated that the funds are to be redirected by institutions; in other words, this is not a reduction in operating grants or transfer payments. Universities will be required to redirect 10% of current spending on executive offices (typically the offices of presidents and vice-presidents) to "front-line services". No further direction was provided as to how the funds must be redistributed.

Election Readiness: COU is working hard to keep university issues in the forefront.

Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance: One of the livelier discussions of these meetings concerned OUSA's concerns about ancillary fees. Many of us barely knew of this group's existence, but we were told that it has done a very good job on several issues. (You can read about it http://www.ousa.ca/) Note that Western's USC is a member organization. As I understand it, the general view is that the Ministry's present ancillary fee policy needs to be reviewed and altered in certain areas. Several Academic Colleagues expressed their own concerns about ancillary fees and how they are assessed. There was, however, a general view that more facts are needed before a proper assessment can be made. COU will continue to communicate with OUSA on this issue.

Credit Transfer: $8 million is being allocated to colleges and universities to develop methods of credit transfer. The method of distribution has not yet been decided.

New Working Groups: Two new Working Groups have been established. One will deal with graduate expansion: trends, projections, impacts (including relationship between grad expansion and need for research grants). The other Working Group will deal with access to student financial assistance. This group will be chaired by President Chakma.

Ontario Online Institute: You can now read COU's recommendations regarding the Ontario Online Institute on the Council's website: http://www.cou.on.ca/

I shall be pleased to answer questions about these and other issues on the floor of Senate.