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

The COU Academic Colleagues met in Toronto August 29th and 30th. Much of the meeting was devoted to orientation of new members. There was no meeting of the full Council.

Undergraduate Enrolments: Over 90,000 students had confirmed acceptance of offers to enter Ontario universities in September 2011. This is almost 2,000 more than in the "double cohort" year. As enrolments continue to increase, so do concerns about how to adequately educate these undergraduates. This has been a topic of ongoing concern to the Academic Colleagues, and some Senators will have read the recent *Globe and Mail* article by James Bradshaw headlined "Universities acknowledge erosion of the undergraduate experience". Although Western seems to have done a much better job than most at maintaining the quality of the undergraduate experience, we shall experience additional challenges as enrolments increase significantly for the first time in some years.

Teaching Evaluations: Each year the Academic Colleagues produce Discussion Papers that are later discussed at meetings of the full Council (which includes the Executive Heads) and then posted on the COU website. The next report will deal with the different ways that teaching evaluations are conducted at universities across the province.

Research Grant Culture: A topic of continuing concern to COU Academic Colleagues is the extent to which research grant procurement has become a dominant criterion for ranking universities nationally and internationally and (within any single university) for ranking Faculties, Departments, and individual professors. Concerns are diverse and relate not only to the apparent devaluing of teaching but also to distortions within various research cultures. So, for example, although some colleagues in humanities-related disciplines may not need a great deal of money to pursue their research, they feel pressured to apply for large grants in order to make their Department and Faculty look good. Sometimes they feel that the number of dollars brought in counts for more than the quality of the research that is produced. Meanwhile many other researchers find it impossible to get the funds that they desperately need, and numerous parties express concern about changes in rules and procedures at the three granting councils. One of this year's Discussion Papers will address at least some of these issues.

Keeping up with COU activities: In response to requests for clarification, Academic Colleagues have been told that we are free to share with Senators the COU Updates that we receive approximately every three months. These documents are intended to help members of COU track issues. They are not meant for quotation or public dissemination, but Senators may sometimes find them useful tools in their effort to understand issues at the provincial level. These documents are rather lengthy; so (at least for now) I shall forward them to Nancy Martinelli in the University Secretariat rather than include them with my reports. Any Senator who wants to read the updates may contact Nancy, and she will send the documents electronically. For other information, check out 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.