Council of Ontario Universities
Report to Senate of the Academic Colleague
Kathleen Okruhlik, January 2013

The COU Academic Colleagues met in Toronto December 6-7, 2012. There was no meeting of the full Council.

Hiatus: The central question for COU and its member universities is how to do anything constructive during the present provincial hiatus. John Milloy, who is once again Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities, has made it clear that he will simply manage ongoing projects and that new initiatives and discussions will be put on hold. This may be understandable, but it places universities (and COU) in an awkward position.

Tuition: A good outcome for universities and those involved in their planning processes would be a decision to simply allow the existing tuition framework to remain in place.

Efficiency Targets: It does not appear that there are any easy ways for universities to achieve greater efficiencies. If there are to be cuts, we need to know soon so that we can plan accordingly.

Undergraduate Growth: This growth may outstrip budgetary allocations; so universities are worried about discounted BIUs. They call for discussion and for greater clarity.

Grad Expansion: It is not clear that there is enough information available to allow universities to move on their targets for 2013-14. COU would like a transitional process to be put in place.

Pensions: This is a topic that is very high on COU's agenda, since most universities will hit the wall soon on pension solvency. Various ways of dealing with this problem are under active discussion. Because Western has a defined contribution (rather than defined benefit) pension plan, we are in a different situation.

Ontario Universities Online: Universities have decided to move ahead on this initiative (although some rethinking may be required once the province weighs in). OUO would start small with a Coordinator and core staff, whose job it would be to support as well as coordinate the efforts of universities to provide good online courses. If people were willing and interested, OUO might help develop "common course elements," but this model is meant as an alternative to the free-standing degree-granting "online university" preferred by the former Minister.

HEQCO Productivity Report: The Faculty Productivity Metric is one thing that COU thinks we should attend to closely and with some concern. A number of very important pieces seem to be missing (including service, grad supervision, part-time and sessional work).

Audit of Teaching Evaluations: This Audit was scheduled for release on December 12th and was expected to include a series of recommendations about such things as the use of teaching evaluations in promotion and tenure cases, the need to make such evaluations public, and the sort of action required in the event of poor evaluations.

The Demographic Cliff: We are said to be "on the cusp". Yet we continue to plan for increased enrolments and continued growth. This is a cause of serious concern in some quarters.

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