Western

Vice-Provost (Academic Planning, Policy & Faculty)

MEMORANDUM

To: The Audit Committee of the Board of Governors

From: Alan Weedon, Vice-Provost (Academic Planning, Policy and Faculty)

Date: March 5, 2013

Re: Report of the Auditor General of Ontario on University Undergraduate Teaching Quality

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The office of the Auditor General of Ontario released its annual report in December 2012. A copy can be viewed at: http://www.auditor.on.ca/en/reports_2012_en.htm.

Section 3.12 of the report provides the results of a value-for-money audit of university undergraduate teaching quality. The report is based on on-site audits conducted at the University of Toronto, the University of Ontario Institute of Technology, and Brock University. The report made four recommendations to the universities and one recommendation to the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU).

I am pleased to be able to report that Western already has provisions and procedures in place that respond to, and satisfy, the four recommendations that apply to universities. These provisions and procedures are set out in Senate regulations and are also contractually defined in the faculty collective agreement.

The recommendations are listed below, and for each I have inserted information on how Western already meets the intent of the recommendations:

**Recommendation 1:**

*To help ensure that administrators and students have sufficient information to make informed decisions, and that all faculty members receive the necessary feedback to maintain or enhance teaching quality, universities should:*

- *Consider means to aggregate student course evaluation information at the university, faculty and department levels so that administrators can identify best practices and areas requiring attention;*

  Western has the means to aggregate student course evaluation information in the manner identified. Information aggregated at the University level is provided in the Annual Report to the Board of Governors on Performance and Activity Indicators, and this is published

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on Western's Public Accountability webpage at:
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- *Develop a core set of student course evaluation questions to be used throughout the university to facilitate comparison of student evaluation results;*

  Western has a core set of student course evaluation questions that are used throughout the University for each and every course and instructor.

- *Provide students with the summarized results of student course evaluations to assist them in making informed decisions on course selection; and*

  Western provides access to all students at Western (as well as faculty and staff) to the results of all student course evaluations and student evaluations of instructors. This is done precisely to enable students to make informed decisions on course selection. Any person with a valid UWO ID and e-mail account password can access them at:
  https://www.ipb.uwo.ca/evaluation/index.php

- *Ensure that faculty, including sessional faculty, periodically receive constructive feedback on their teaching effectiveness, and encourage faculty to undertake any necessary professional development.*

Every faculty member (including part-time faculty) at Western must submit an Annual Report on his or her teaching, research and service activities and this is used to evaluate the faculty member annually. Any faculty member's Dean may invite the faculty member to an interview to discuss the evaluation, and in the case of poor evaluations can develop a remediation plan with the faculty member, including the identification of resources and mentoring to facilitate development. Failure to undertake the plan and improve performance can lead to discipline (and termination). As Vice-Provost I review the annual performance evaluations of all faculty. In the case of poor performers, I follow up with Deans to ensure that a remediation plan has been put in place or that improvements have occurred.

**Recommendation 2:**

*To help ensure that tenure and promotion decisions and the underlying documentation appropriately reflect the relative importance of a professor's teaching ability, the universities should:*

- *Ensure that all relevant information on teaching performance is made available to tenure and promotion committees and that all documentation supporting their recommendations is retained for an appropriate period of time; and*

  Each faculty member's Promotion and Tenure File must contain a teaching dossier that comprehensively documents the performance in teaching. The File is maintained for a period of seven years after the decision on promotion and tenure. In addition, the record of performance in teaching that feeds into the Promotion and Tenure File is maintained in the

faculty member's official personnel file for as long as the individual is an employee at Western.

- *Explore means to ensure that tenure and promotion processes clearly reflect the relative importance teaching ability has with respect to such decisions.*

  Western's promotion and tenure process requires that a faculty member meet the necessary quality criteria in each of teaching research and service. Strong performance in, say, research cannot make up for a weak performance in teaching. In recent years between zero and 3 faculty are denied tenure annually, some because of a weak research record, and some because of a weak teaching record.

**Recommendation 3:**

*To help ensure that all faculty members provide effective classroom instruction, universities should work with faculty to encourage greater participation in professional development activities and implement procedures to ensure that faculty who would benefit from additional teacher training are formally encouraged to participate in these activities.*

This is achieved through the process described under the last bullet of recommendation 1.

**Recommendation 4:**

*To enhance their understanding of the impact that use of various teaching resources has on teaching quality and student outcomes, universities should:*

- *Assess the impact of class size on teaching quality and study how best to address the challenges posed by large classes; and*

  As part of the Annual Planning Process my office provides Deans with data on class sizes, and this forms the basis of discussion of faculty hiring needs. Also, Western's Teaching Support Centre is available to assist individual faculty on the pedagogical challenges of teaching larger classes, and regularly offers sessions where best practice is discussed.

- *Weigh the impact of using teaching and sessional faculty and the extent to which they can best be used to address resource constraints.*

  As part of the Annual Planning Process my office provides each Dean with data on who is teaching which course in the Faculty they are responsible for. These data include the contract status of the instructor (i.e., tenured, probationary, full-time limited-term, or part-time), and form the basis of discussion of faculty hiring needs, both in terms of what is best from an academic perspective, and from a budgetary perspective.

**Recommendation 5:**

*To assist students in making informed decisions on university and program selection and to help achieve its goal of adequately preparing Ontario students for the future workforce, the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities should:*

- *Collect and make public sufficient information on student outcomes, including information on graduate employment outcomes and students' satisfaction with the quality of their education; and*

- *Work with the university sector to support the development of meaningful measures for student learning outcomes as a way to maintain teaching quality.*

**Next Steps**

The following is drawn from a briefing note prepared for the Ontario Vice-Presidents (Academic) by staff at the Council of Ontario Universities (COU).

It is our understanding that the Ontario Legislature's Standing Committee on Public Accounts will review the audit recommendations of the Auditor General's 2012 Annual Report in the fall of 2013.The Standing Committee on Public Accounts is a committee comprising both government and opposition members, supported by a small staff of employees of the Legislature.

The committee is "*empowered to review and report to the House its observations, opinions and recommendations on the Report of the Auditor General and the Public Accounts, which documents shall be deemed to have been permanently referred to the Committee as they become available*."

It is possible that, as part of this review, the committee will require a written response from the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU) as well as from the three audited universities. There is also a possibility that both the Ministry and the three audited universities could be called to committee hearings to respond to questions regarding progress made on the recommendations.

In each of the Auditor General's annual reports, there is a required report-back on audits two years after the release of the report. The Auditor will request that MTCU and the three audited universities provide a progress report in late winter 2014.

The three universities will be expected to provide a written progress report on the Auditor General's recommendations, and to substantiate their assertions with appropriate documentation.

The Auditor will review the progress reports and seek clarification or more information supporting the status of implementation of the recommendations. As with the initial audit, the Auditor will provide the three universities and the ministry with a draft of their proposed text for the follow-up report. The three universities and MTCU will have the opportunity to provide comments to the Auditor before they finalize the annual report.

The follow-up report will be released in December 2014, as part of the Auditor General's Annual Report.

As noted above, MTCU will be providing a status update to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, if asked, in the fall of 2013 regarding progress made on the recommendation to the government. The ministry may also be asked by the committee to respond to the progress being made by the three audited universities (both in writing and possibly at the committee if the Ministry is called).

To prepare for this report back, MTCU staff will work with representatives from COU and the broader university sector to seek advice on implementing the Auditor's recommendations made specifically to MTCU. As part of this effort, MTCU has established a working group with university representatives on key performance indicators – to review the potential for disclosure of currently unpublished information from MTCU's annual survey of graduates, and to explore the potential for development of the survey.

The Ministry may also be seeking information on progress made by the three audited universities, as well as by the sector as a whole, on the four recommendations to universities. It is expected that MTCU will be working through COU to collect such information.