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

The COU Academic Colleagues met in Toronto October 13th and 14th. There was also a meeting of the full Council (Executive Heads + Academic Colleagues) on October 14th.

The McGuinty Government: The Premier remains a strong advocate for postsecondary education, but money is very tight. He will be looking for better results and administrative efficiencies. We can expect tough action on administrative transparency. The Liberals will try to govern as if they were still a majority, but it is likely we will see far fewer pieces of legislation. It will be necessary for COU and its member institutions to remain in close contact with the leadership of all three political parties.

New Tuition Grants: The Liberal government's commitment to provide a 30% tuition grant for students from families with a total income less than $160,000 will require new bureaucratic structures with associated costs. COU is watching with interest (and some trepidation) to see how these structures and costs will be handled.

Ontario Education Number: The plan is to assign an identification number to each child entering the Ontario education system. The number will be permanent and will facilitate collection of reliable data, which COU hopes the Ministry will share with universities. These data will help in planning, budgeting, tracking retention, dealing with credit transfers, and meeting other challenges. COU supports introduction of the OEN but has some concerns about extra costs that may accrue to universities in the administration of this program.

ONCAT: The Ontario Council on Articulation and Transfer is the successor organization to the College University Consortium Council (CUCC). Its job is to develop and enhance transfer credit policies in Ontario's postsecondary sector. Deciding what mechanisms may be appropriate for transfer of credits between colleges and universities remains a particularly difficult challenge.

Value of a University Education: COU and others in the university sector have been worried for some time that colleges may be doing a better job than universities in promoting the value of their educational offerings. This is reflected in recent newspaper articles questioning whether the money spent on a university education is worth it (in terms of future economic pay-off). So COU has stepped up its data collection and publicity efforts. The most recent result is the November 9th Media Release called "Ontario university graduates get jobs, earn more money, despite recession." It reports that over 91% of 2008 university grads surveyed were employed within six months of graduation and almost 94% two years after graduation. These rates are only 2% lower than rates for the previous year, despite the fact that the recession was at its worst in 2008. From 2004 to 2010, growth in employment for university grads outpaced all other levels of education: jobs grew by 28% for those with a university degree, 17% for those with a college diploma, and only 4% for those with a high school education. Ontario university grads also earn more than others.

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