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

COU Executive Heads and Academic Colleagues met at the University of Guelph April 10-11, 2013. There was a meeting of the full Council on April 11th.

HEQCO Report: "Quality: Shifting the Focus": This report is available online at http://www.heqco.ca/SiteCollectionDocuments/FINAL%20SMA%20Report.pdf
The subtitle is "A Report from the Expert Panel to Assess the Strategic Mandate Agreement Submissions," although the report actually has little to say about the SMAs. The recommendations focus on a "more active, assertive and purposeful role" for the government in driving "system-level planning and change". The reader is reminded that "funding formulas are the major levers available to drive system-level planning and change." The Expert Panel notes that "[a] policy of greater differentiation is beneficial and is compatible with greater institutional collaboration and greater system integration". And finally: "Achievement of the government's goal of increased differentiation requires clear policy direction and consistent and disciplined commitment to system re-design."

College-university relations: Much of this discussion focussed on implications of the "college first" post-secondary education strategy proposed in the PC White Paper, *Paths to Prosperity: Higher Learning for Better Jobs*. The White Paper strategy proposal seems to be based on the notion that "[w]e need a culture shift in our system" because "increasingly university students end up in colleges, after accumulating significant student debt." The proposed strategy would bias enrolment growth toward colleges, with the suggestion that future growth in universities would be tied to creating paths for transferring college students. The paper discusses the need to "encourage students to seek the least expensive and most employable programs first and foremost" and says that data show that average weekly earnings for skilled trades workers and college diploma holders have been increasing at a faster rate than those for holders of a bachelor degree. Among other things, the White Paper suggests that future employability and academic behavior should be considerations in OSAP eligibility, that tuition increases should be tied to quality improvements, and that the regulatory burden on careers colleges should be reduced, since many of these colleges "are great businesses that deliver education to Ontarians well, faster, and with a higher degree of quality". The White Paper discussion connected nicely with the Academic Colleagues Discussion Paper, "CAAT Transfer Students in Ontario Universities: A Review of the Evidence," by Torben Drewes and Eric Nay, also on the agenda for this meeting. The paper provoked a lively discussion about the nature of successful transfer arrangements and the need for more data. The (limited) evidence available to the authors suggested that college transfer students seem to do as well in university as non-transfer students, although the authors stress that these data would not support an inference about student success under any future transfer arrangement. One point that was made during these discussions was that we should resist any governmental "divide and conquer" strategy that pits colleges and universities against one another ("to do the government's dirty work"). We should instead seek areas of common interest in which we can join forces to work on behalf of the post-secondary sector.

COU Update: The most recent COU Update, dated March 21, 2013, is available from Marci Oswald upon request. Please bear in mind that the COU Update is not a public document and is made available for the sole purpose of assisting you in your work as Senators.

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