

**University of Windsor
Senate**

5.6: **Report of the Academic Colleague**

Item for: **Information**

Forwarded by: **Philip Dutton**

Academic Colleagues met in a hybrid format on February 13 and 14, 2024.

Evening meeting, Tuesday, February 13, 2023, 6:00 to 8:30 pm

A land acknowledgement was provided by Dr. Alyson King.

A conversation with Ontario University Student Alliance, Vivian Chiem, President, and Malika Dhanani, Executive Director OUSA: Issues Affecting Students.

OUSA is a membership driven organization that includes eight Ontario universities. OUSA was established in 1996 and conducts research on issues affecting students and develops informed and substantive policy papers with the goal of lobbying government and representing the student perspectives throughout the sector. Reports, news, and editorial blogs can be found at ousa.ca.

The representatives engaged academic colleagues with a presentation followed by a discussion. They identified four student driven priorities for our consideration.

The Housing and Transit priority encompassed a number of concerns. It is perceived that students pay more for rent than regular renters and the Standard Form of Lease does not inform renters with sufficient information to make a judgement about the validity of rental increases and the deadlines for application to the Landlord Tenant Board in the case of appeal. They would like the government to do more to help build affordable, accessible, and safe housing. Transit had two particular concerns. One was advocating for the VIA High-Frequency Rail project along both the Toronto-Quebec and Toronto-Windsor corridors. The second was a request that the Ministry of Transportation work with students and others in the disabled community to address gaps in public transit for the needs of students with disabilities.

OUSA is currently working on a policy paper on Mental Health support. Supporting post-secondary institutions in partnering with local health care providers in provision of acute and long-term treatment, counselling, and health promotion. Preventative action on campus and triage of student mental health issues was focused on. In particular, a request that government support funding to post-secondary institutions to recruit and hire diverse front-line mental health workers, particularly those from underrepresented groups to ensure trauma-informed, culturally relevant counselling and advice to diverse student populations.

A significant conversation around Food Insecurity was held and the importance of establishing supporting grants for food banks to maintain infrastructure and ability to provide nutritious and culturally relevant food options. Ideas were floated about a government certification to highlight resources and cost-effective strategies.

The final area of concern was that of Sector Sustainability and a request to the government to increase operating grants until students are contributing a maximum of one-third of the universities total operating budget. Caps and regulation of tuition increases for international students are important for predictability and planning for a degree.

The main topic of discussion with the OUSA representatives was around the student mental health topic. Colleagues recognize existing COU and institutional interests in areas of Student Housing, Transit, Food Insecurity, and Sector Sustainability. It was interesting to note that student concerns parallel many of our own.

Colleagues meeting, Wednesday, February 14, 2024, 9:00 am – 12:00 pm

1. Information sharing

The discussion around the table, as usual, had a common theme of financial concerns, particularly budget deficits, or projected deficits next year. Some programs areas are seen as small and expensive and others large and profitable, with funds not moving to support all areas. Concerns were expressed over the reliance on international students and the effect of the recently announced visa limits. Hiring of new faculty was generally reported as slowing, with some targeted exceptions. There continue to be reports of mid-level and senior administrative positions. There are moves to encourage faculty to take voluntary retirement, with 39 faculty leaving Guelph. There was good news from Laurentian in term of applications seeing increases across the board, along with a lot of senior administrative searches ongoing.

2. COU Report: Steve Orsini, COU d

Steve Orsini spoke to us on the current activities of COU.

International Students

A financial impact on universities and colleges is expected, but the extent is not known. While there may be targeting of “bad actors”, the federal government has also given the provincial government a lever to control our programs. Recent news indicates decreases in applications of international students at some institutions.

Blue Ribbon Panel

A government report is expected by the end of February. At the time of this writing it has been [released](#) and the government is releasing \$1.3B to stabilize colleges and Universities over the next three years. This includes a continuing tuition freeze.

- \$700 million for the new Postsecondary Education Sustainability Fund starting in 2024-25
- \$203 million in funding for top-ups for institutions with greater financial need.
- \$167.4 million in additional funding for capital repairs and equipment.
- \$10 million in additional one-time funding through the Small, Northern, and Rural Grant for colleges and Northern Ontario Grant for Universities in 2024-25.
- \$100 million in 2023-24 to support STEM program costs at publicly-assisted colleges and universities with enrolments above currently funded levels.
- \$65.4 million for the infrastructure refresh of Ontario’s Advanced Research Computing systems and for their ongoing operations and maintenance.
- \$23 million to enhance mental health supports, including \$8 million for the Postsecondary Mental Health Action Plan over the three years.

Included in the support announced is money that does not actually go to the institutions:

- \$15 million beginning in 2024-25 through the Efficiency and Accountability Fund to support third-party reviews that will identify actions institutions can take to improve sustainability and student experiences.

The COU has responded with a [statement](#).

3. Discussion of Future Topics

Future topics were discussed, and it may be that the final decision will be a discussion with the executive heads on a Wholistic Approach to Health and Wellness in response to student, staff, faculty, and institutional concerns over mental health and wellness.

4. Other Business

No other business was discussed.

Respectfully Submitted,

P.J. Dutton, Academic Colleague