

SYSTEM VISION

BACKGROUND

This paper provides a broad discussion of the future structure and function of Ontario's post-secondary system. It addresses six topics in particular that influence the shape and direction of the sector: differentiation, satellite campuses, instructional quality and capacity, campus infrastructure, cost inflation, and funding.

These subjects arise in light of Ontario's commitment to PSE growth over the last decade. OUSA supports working towards a prosperous province and strong workforce, however the government's pursuit of growth has come at a price to students; university costs have risen while provincial funding has continued to be comparatively lagging. This has led to increased tuition and ancillary fees, cut services, and compromised educational quality.

This paper sets out a vision of PSE that prioritizes the accessibility, affordability, and quality of education by addressing issues embedded in the six topics listed above.

PRINCIPLES & CONCERNS

Differentiation

OUSA supports moderate differentiation as a means for the Province to reduce inefficient duplication in the sector and for universities to develop excellence in academic programming. However, OUSA cautions that accessibility, financial aid, and student support are equally valuable across the system, and none of these should serve as a basis of differentiation. This is particularly true of teaching and research, both of which should be stressed equally across the board rather than pursued separately as specializations.

OUSA also maintains that even in a differentiated system a broad range of course offerings must be available in order to permit students to develop well-rounded skills. Existing programs should not suffer in a university that pursues differentiation in a new field.

Satellite Campuses

Geographic proximity to a post-secondary institution is a major factor contributing to enrolment in higher education. The development of satellite campuses can be a solution to broadening access to prospective students who currently live at great distances from PSE institutions.

Satellite campuses should offer the same value to students as main campuses. Satellite campuses must be held to the same standards regarding resources, support, and

teaching quality. Moreover, the development of satellite campuses must arise from the needs of universities and students, and should not be based on the desires of municipalities and the private sector.

Instructional Capacity & Quality

Teaching is a fundamental component of a university's mission and ought to be promoted more widely. The current 'publish or perish' norm, which stresses that faculty be researchers first and foremost, is incongruous with the evidence that suggests teaching and research are best pursued in tandem.

Moreover, the government's pursuit of PSE growth as an economic and employment imperative have created additional strains on teaching capacity in universities. These strains negatively affect pedagogy and assessment methods. Steps must be taken to ensure that teaching quality can be held to high standards while catering to increased demand.

Campus Infrastructure

Available student space has shrunk over the past several years as enrolment has increased. Crowded or unavailable class and study spaces can have profoundly negative impacts on the quality of teaching and learning. Inadequate space can prevent the use of technologies and innovations that improve the student experience. Moreover, government attempts to address this situation have excluded residences and student service space, both of which are important to student success.

Rising Costs

There exists a pattern among universities of spending far above revenue in some budget areas. This practice is unsustainable and is exacerbated not only by inadequately addressed inflationary pressures, but also the pressures arising from higher resource demand following increases in enrolment. This results in fragile, thinly stretched budgets that are forced to transfer funds from healthy and sustainable sections in order to meet overstretched commitments elsewhere.

Faculty salaries and pensions have also been on the rise, further constricting university budgets. Defined pension plans, which guarantee contributions irrespective of market conditions or available funds, have drained universities of resources.

University Funding

OUSA recognizes that as the main beneficiaries of higher education, it is fair for students to bear some of the cost of their education. However the balance struck between revenue provided by students and those from government grants should always be balanced and equitable, and this notion should be enshrined in the Province's funding formulae.

OUSA is of the opinion the growth-centric funding model, which has been the only strategy used to meet cost inflation, results in declining quality, space, and resources for students. Additionally the focus on growth does little to alleviate the issues of access for under represented groups.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Differentiation

- Pursue a moderate degree of differentiation wherein universities can pursue programs, mandates, and specializations beyond a general slate;
- Despite differentiation specialties, prioritize the opportunity for interdisciplinary learning;
- Ensure that differentiation is horizontal, not vertical;
- Link differentiation with changes to funding to be successful and accountable;
- Pursue differentiation along with other reforms that foster sustainability;
- Prioritize financial assistance for rural and northern students;
- Be mindful of the proximity of alternative schools when selecting specializations;
- Use differentiation funding to promote pathways between institutions;
- Protect teaching quality and the student experience, regardless of differentiation;
- Ensure financial aid is not a basis for differentiation;
- Ensure demographic-specific support is not a basis for differentiation;
- Focus on academic growth and societal need, not short-term market considerations;
- Allow universities to pursue programs and priorities they believe best for their institutions;
- Base government goals and metrics on outcomes, not outputs;
- Students should be actively involved in any discussion about differentiation.

Satellite Campuses

- Pursue satellite campuses as a means of broadening access and choice;
- Develop minimum standards for quality and services, course choice, and teaching quality;
- Maintain and enforce a regulatory regime around satellite and major capital expansions;
- Provide tenured and other full-time staff at satellite campuses;
- Align policy decisions with the Major Capacity Expansion Framework.

Instructional Quality & Capacity

- Hire tenure-track, teaching-focused faculty;
- Seek means to reduce the compensation gap between tenured and non-tenured faculty;
- Mandate baseline teaching loads across-the-board;
- Introduce levers to incentivize education quality, including teaching chairs, teaching faculty, teaching loads, innovation funds, etc.;
- Assure students that their education will be protected in the event of a strike.

Campus Infrastructure

- Ensure that instruction and student space are targeted funding priorities;
- Raise government investments for deferred maintenance to 1.5 per cent of current replacement value;
- Target come maintenance funding to repurpose spaces for viability with new pedagogies;
- Extend government funding for capital investments to include residences and student service spaces.

Addressing Cost Inflation

- Mandate that university spending commitments that exceed existing resources be publically reported;
- Encourage faculty compensation restraint;
- Adopt provincial pension plan for the PSE sector;
- Use envelope and targeted funding to ensure educational improvement resources are not absorbed elsewhere;
- Move from merit-based financial aid to needs-based;
- Investigate cost inflation in PSE institutions and suggest cost containment strategies.

Funding

- Raise per-student operating funding to the weighted national average;
- Increase base operating funding annually by a minimum of inflation;
- Review and amend the funding formula to align with the Differentiation Framework;
- Adopt a corridor model of funding based on system-wide growth projections;
- Employ envelope and performance based funding aligned with sector objectives;
- Implement a transitional process moving towards a new funding formula.