

# OUSAA

Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance



## **The Differentiation Debate:** Submission to the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario

August 2010

# OUUSA

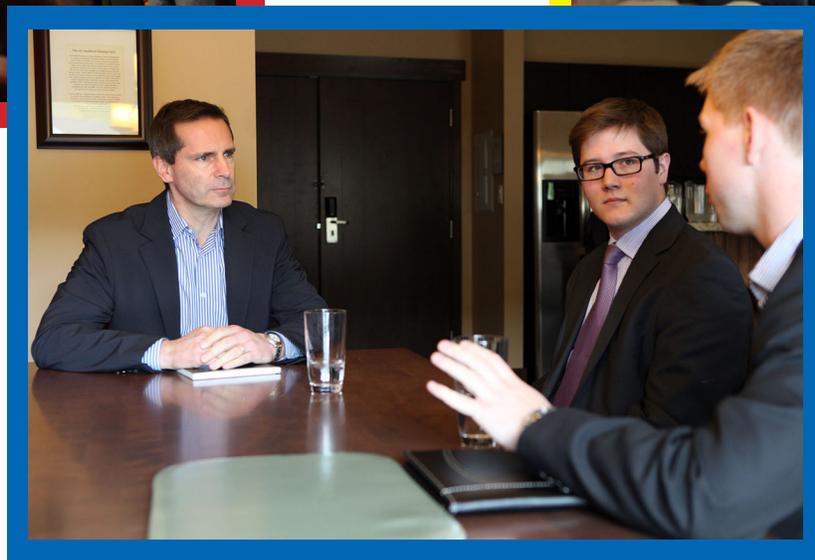
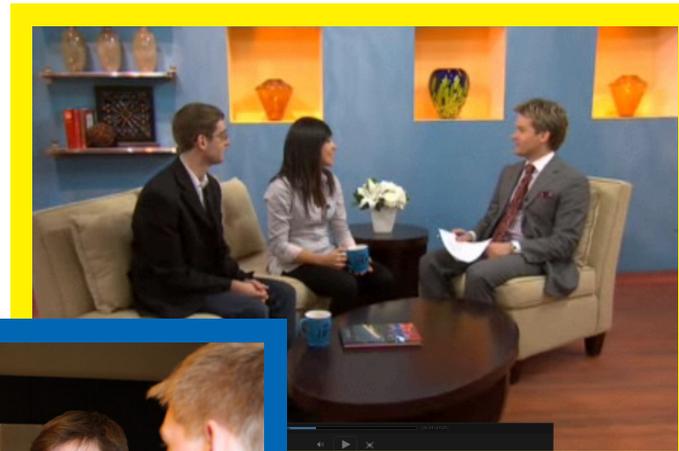
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Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance

# About OUSA

OUSA represents the interests of over 140,000 professional and undergraduate, full-time and part-time university students at seven institutions across Ontario.

Our vision is for an accessible, affordable, accountable and high quality post-secondary education in Ontario. To achieve this vision we have come together to develop solutions to challenges facing higher education, build broad consensus for our policy options, and lobby government to implement them.



## Introduction

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In 2005, for the first time in a half-century, the Government of Ontario made an investment of \$6.2 billion into post-secondary education over five years that began a process of strengthening the Ontario higher education system. The *Reaching Higher* plan focused on areas in post-secondary education that were in dire need of attention after years of neglect: enhanced student financial assistance; increased enrolment and outreach to underrepresented groups; and improved accountability for student and public dollars.

While there have been large and measurable successes over the past five years of considerable commitment from the Ontario government, there are also areas where goals were set and plans were laid out, but results did not come to fruition. Students understand the reality that sought-for improvements, particularly to the quality of education, were unattainable in the university sector despite record funding, due to unforeseen enrolment pressures and a rate of cost inflation that is consistently higher than the province's normal rate of inflation or growth in government spending.<sup>1</sup>

That said, the *Reaching Higher* has proved to be as forward looking as it was ambitious. Ontario's job market will soon be mostly comprised of professions that require some form of post-secondary education. In fact, by the end of this year, it is estimated that over 70% of new jobs will require some form of post-secondary education. The recent commitment in the Government's *Open Ontario* plan to raise Ontario's post-secondary attainment rate to this level will ensure that more Ontarians than ever before are equipped to succeed in the burgeoning knowledge economy.

Reaching this goal will require new resources. There are few, if any, investments a government can make with a higher rate of return than investment in university education. Those with a university degree comprise only 22% of the population yet contribute 41% of income tax paid and receive only 14% of government transfers.<sup>2</sup> However, given the current fiscal climate that the Governments of Ontario and Canada find themselves in, all public sectors, including post-secondary education, will need to demonstrate a willingness and capacity to use both their current and new resources as efficiently as possible.

While Ontario's political and economic realities have changed rapidly over time, the design of our public higher education system has remained mostly unchanged since the 1960s. The university system has been pushed to its limits by simultaneous pressures to expand the Province's research capacity and to increase student enrolment. As a result, the present approach to supporting baccalaureate education and public research is not sustainable and is in need of transformation. This idea is the basic thesis behind a 2009 examination of Ontario higher education sponsored by the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO) entitled *Academic Transformation*. Since its release, the book's recommendations have generated considerable debate in the Province's higher education sector. While the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance (OUSA) does not agree with all of the recommendations, we absolutely agree that it is the responsibility of the Ontario government to ensure that the higher education system is designed in such a way as to meet macro objectives while remaining sustainable over the long term.

Of all the book's recommendations, the suggestion that the provincial government should play a greater role in promoting differentiation and direction-setting in the university sector has been discussed by many in the sector as a potential method for increasing the sustainability of Ontario's higher education system. With this policy recommendation currently under consideration by the Government, the need for a student voice in the debate is paramount. Students are concerned, however that many within the higher education sector view increased differentiation as the silver bullet that will solve the system's sustainability challenges, ignoring concerns about cost inflation and alternative solutions such as transformation of the professoriate or adequate public investment in the valuable research and education missions of Ontario's universities.

Students understand more than anyone that the current system of educating a growing and diverse undergraduate population in publicly-supported, research-focused universities, while aiming to have among the highest participation rates in the world, comes at an extremely high price. The status quo is a model where students and government are required to substantially increase contributions annually simply to maintain current levels of quality, and hoped-for improvements to the learning experience for students come at an even greater cost.

Undergraduate students also witness firsthand how the societal demand on the university sector for increased knowledge production creates substantial tension in resource allocation for individual professors and institutions. Much of this demand has been the result of support from the federal government, which increased research funding four-fold over the decade from 1997 to 2007.<sup>3</sup> Though the rapid expansion in graduate education and research infrastructure has been positive from an innovation and productivity perspective, the research and graduate education funding incentives available to all Ontario universities have had the unintended negative consequence of straining resources for undergraduate teaching across the province. The professoriate has reduced undergraduate teaching responsibilities to balance demands for research productivity.<sup>4</sup> Effectively, though Ontario tuition is the highest in Canada and government funding has increased in recent years, institutions are still struggling to adequately accomplish their teaching mission. Undergraduate students are directly impacted as teaching responsibilities are downloaded onto sessional lecturers and part-time instructors.

Broadly speaking, OUSA agrees that the current design of our university system is unsustainable and that greater policy leadership from the government is needed to transform our system to one that better balances the demands for a high quality and accessible learning environment for our students with an increased capacity to undertake knowledge production and innovation. As HEQCO has stated, however, this transformation has the potential to have a tremendous impact on students, and great care must be taken to ensure that the impact is not a negative one. Contained in this submission is our vision for higher education in Ontario, our response to the proposed concept of increased differentiation, responses to several specific recommendations that have been proposed in the differentiation debate, proposed quality and performance indicators, and our belief on how best to undertake an educated transformation to a more sustainable future for Ontario's universities.

## Vision for Higher Education in Ontario

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### ***Shared Responsibility***

The bedrock of our higher education system must be a sense of shared responsibility amongst many partners, each of them receiving tangible benefits and providing significant resources to ensure the system's success.

Primary responsibility for higher education rests with the government, and now more than ever this responsibility extends beyond funding. Firstly, the government has a responsibility to foster access and ensure that all willing and qualified students have the opportunity to attend higher education in Ontario. This involves the provision of robust financial aid to students, as well as the maintenance of regulatory measures on the fees that students pay. Secondly, the government is responsible to the citizens on Ontario for the overall sustainability and accountability of the system. The government is best placed to ensure that universities and colleges are meeting the needs of our society and to provide long-term vision and direction for the sector. As post-secondary education creates jobs, improves socio-economic growth and leads to greater tax revenue, society must also bear the lion's share of funding to universities and colleges.

It must be recognized that students receive tangible individual benefits from higher education and also should share some responsibility for the system through the provision of tuition fees. However, as the only partner in higher education that does not govern the percentage contribution that they make, it is vital that students are not forced to pay increasingly large percentages of the cost of higher education in lieu of public funding. Additionally, students have the responsibility to use their education to become active contributors to the economic, social and cultural fabric of the community that has contributed to their success.

Institutions are responsible for stewardship of their place in the system. They must be accountable to those that provide them with financial resources – the general public, students and government. They are also responsible at a local level for ensuring that they are meeting Ontario's need for accessible and high quality education. Provision of institutional financial assistance, assurance of quality and maintenance of a proper balance of teaching and research are all ways institutions fulfill this responsibility.

The compact of responsibility for post-secondary education extends to faculty, staff, parents and employers. All these stakeholders have a responsibility to be good stewards of higher education, putting the needs of students and society before individual interest.

### ***Affordable, Predicable, Sustainable***

In order to ensure access, the cost of education must be affordable for those who wish to attend. Tuition, ancillary fees and textbooks must not place prohibitively large financial burdens on students and families. The government's role in providing financial assistance is vital to students who cannot afford the increasing cost of higher education. Alongside affordability, it is important that students and families can predict the true cost of higher education and plan accordingly. If tuition must increase year to year, these increases must be regulated to ensure that students know how much they will be paying year-to-year.

The need for yearly tuition increases, despite record levels of government support, belies the reality that the higher education system in Ontario is not on a sustainable path. Between 2005 and 2008, Ontario university operating expenditures per student increased by 22 per cent, vastly outpacing the Consumer Price Index inflation of 8.7 per cent during the same time period.<sup>5</sup> With expenditures in higher education inflating at such a rate, it is worrying that even the corresponding dramatic increases in government and student revenue have been found to be insufficient. OUSA strongly believes that changes must be made to the design of the system to ensure that the cost of higher education does not inflate at this breakneck pace indefinitely.

### ***Universally Accessible***

It is one of OUSA's core beliefs that all willing and qualified students must be able to access and persist within Ontario's post-secondary education system. Financial, physical, cultural and social barriers must not prevent students from attending university, nor prevent them from succeeding.

Students who come from low-income, Aboriginal, rural and northern, and first-generation backgrounds are substantially underrepresented at our universities. For many of Ontario's youth, knowledge and perception barriers play just as great a role as financial barriers. In many cases, the perception of one's ability to attend, afford, and succeed in higher education is the main determinant of success. For these reasons, OUSA has long advocated for a province-wide access and early outreach strategy to tackle this problem. It is only once greater public attention and sustained government interest are generated that we will create the mechanisms to fulfill the province's access goals.

### ***Equal Emphasis on the Importance of Teaching and Research***

Universities are, first and foremost, places of learning. This learning includes both the cutting-edge research that broadens our collective knowledge, as well as the purposeful transfer of this collective knowledge from instructor to pupil. It should be the goal of every university to ensure that both of these pursuits are given equal consideration.

### ***Clear, Appropriate and Realistic Long-Term Targets***

While universities and students have a broad understanding of the aims of our higher education system, specific targets and objectives are rarely defined. The government is best placed to set long-term goals for the sector and must collaboratively develop a process by which institutions can meet these goals. The current multi-year-accountability agreement framework has helped in the progress towards this objective, but needs refinement in order to gain prominence and importance in the institutional planning process.

The long-term goals set for institutions must be understood well by administrations, students and the government. They must allow institutions to focus on strengths and differentiate themselves. Additionally, they must put institutions on the road towards long-term sustainability and be comprised of short-term goals.

### ***Student Centric***

A student-centric system should emphasize the quality of the overall educational experience delivered by institutions, both inside and outside the classroom. Underpinning the educational mission of our universities should be a dedicated focus on student success. This means well-trained and high quality teachers supporting students in the classrooms, and well-resourced support services assisting students on the margins of success outside the classrooms.

### ***Evidence-Based Change***

Policy changes to higher education in Ontario are too often reactionary and are often political rather than strategic decisions. Efforts to increase accountability or change the system are frequently drowned out by scepticism and hostility from sector stakeholders whose interests might be threatened. In order to truly ensure an accessible, affordable and high-quality system, systemic changes and their long-term impacts must be carefully considered, and necessary changes should not be stalled simply because certain stakeholders would be displeased.

## Increased Differentiation within the University Sector

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### The Argument

In the past, government involvement in setting the direction of the university system in Ontario has been extremely limited. Although institutions have been given responsibility for meeting public demand for both teaching and research, little thought has been put into how these responsibilities should be divided between or within institutions. To make matters more complicated, both the provincial and the federal governments play major roles in funding higher education, but in different regards. Federal investments in the granting councils and graduate scholarships have heavily incentivized research at Ontario's universities. Meanwhile, the provincial government has created its own research incentives, but simultaneously incentivized substantial undergraduate growth. Universities frequently make strategic decisions in response to government funding, which has led to a system that is said to lack differentiation and fiscal sustainability.

Another underlying principle of higher education is the importance of university autonomy. Governments have little authority, and historically no interest, in setting or approving university missions and expenditures. Though the McGuinty government has become involved in setting targets for institutions through the multi-year accountability agreement (MYAA) process, the targets set for universities have been mostly unrelated to overall system design. As a result, MYAAs are no more than reporting mechanisms, rather than strategic plans for growth or overall direction.

In response to the plethora of sustainability and differentiation issues facing the sector, it has been argued by some that greater government oversight and policy guidance is required. As the authors of *Academic Transformation* put it, "from the perspective of stewardship of this expensive and strategic public resource, it is not apparent that anyone has been minding the store."<sup>6</sup>

**Student Response: Students support some increased direction setting from the province to promote differentiation and to encourage a renewed focus on students across the system.**

Government involvement in higher education has been extremely important to students for some time already. Through the regulation of tuition and the provision of financial assistance, students are far more advantaged in the system than they would be otherwise. Students certainly support an expansion of the government's role, provided that decisions are made through collaboration with the institutions and that students are consulted throughout this process. Students recognize that greater institutional differentiation has the potential to provide an environment in which the university system could more effectively expand capacity for undergraduate teaching and research activity.

It is absolutely not OUSA's belief that the provincial government should unilaterally mandate institutional missions. Rather, the differentiation process must be organic and allow institutions to focus on established and self-selected strengths, with the government ensuring overall accountability. It should be noted that there are already substantial differences amongst Ontario universities, in terms of location, size, strengths, focus, and campus culture. This is a strength of the sector that allows students to choose the university that fits their needs best. A conversation on increased differentiation should begin with the recognition that most of our institutions are already very different.

OUSA believes that the government should work with institutions to plan for future enrolment growth and initiate dialogue on what each institution believes its plans and priorities should be. From these discussions, teaching or research strengths should be incentivized where those strengths exist, and performance indicators and benchmarks should reflect the unique conditions of each institution. For instance, an institution that excels and plans to focus on undergraduate education should be able to do so without being financially penalized due to a lack of research funding. Funding from the Province for teaching-focused faculty, mandatory teaching training, or capital for undergraduate teaching and resource space would be good examples of how to contribute to institutions with this mission. Conversely, institutions with proven research strengths should be encouraged to focus on those strengths. These institutions should be given funding to develop and expand their graduate and research capacity through sufficient operating and capital funding, such that the base undergraduate funding

provided is not used to subsidize the research capacity of the university, as is currently the case at many research-intensive universities.

This would allow institutions to differentiate themselves naturally, rather than following system-wide incentives from both the provincial and federal government. An appropriate avenue to begin this process would be through next year's negotiations of the MYAAs, which would act as strategic plans to achieve differentiated objectives. These plans should be built through broad consultation across Ontario's institutions, including students and institutional governing bodies, and not be a private discussion between government officials and university administrators.

Students also believe the government has a strong role to play in holding institutions accountable for the targets and direction that they set, and that the results of metrics developed through the quality assurance framework must be made public to provide incentive to improve and should be tied to funding from the government. Students caution, however, that the resources required to provide responsible stewardship of the university sector will be considerable and likely falls outside the current capacity of the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities. It may be necessary to establish a third party or increase the Ministry's capacity to advise the development of the strategic MYAAs and to manage the quality assurance framework.

### **Student Proposal: Improve teaching system-wide.**

While students believe that differentiation could provide incentives and funding such that some institutions could begin to place their focus back on the undergraduate teaching mission, we remain concerned that teaching quality and the student experience at research-intensive institutions will continue to suffer. Students insist that just because a university chooses to focus on research does not remove its responsibility to provide a high-quality undergraduate experience for all. The government should aim to foster a supportive and high quality experience across the university system for all undergraduates.

One assessment by the authors of *Academic Transformation* is that "it is not clear what government could do to encourage institutions to more rapidly adopt proven technologies and pedagogical theories."<sup>7</sup> Students strongly disagree with this assessment and have been suggesting ways the government could improve teaching for some time now.

#### **1. The provincial government must develop incentives for all new PhD students to be given formal instruction in teaching methods and practices.**

Peer jurisdictions increasingly consider training teachers as an essential part of ensuring a high quality post-secondary sector. More than 60 universities in the United Kingdom now sponsor either voluntary or mandatory teaching accreditation programs for faculty members.<sup>8</sup>

One of the systemic problems with teaching at Ontario universities is the fact that professors are not required to complete any formal training in teaching. While many schools have opportunities for professional development, these are not mandatory and, as a result, are not widely accessed. This is a concern for students, considering the impact a skilled teacher can have on student success. Unfortunately, mandating current professors to attend formal teaching training wades into the territory of the collective agreements between faculties and institutions.

In order to teach in elementary or secondary school in Ontario, teachers must have received extensive education and training. Prospective instructors must have attended teachers' college, which requires some of the most competitive entrance requirements in Ontario. Governments in the past have gone so far as to mandate that teachers be tested on an ongoing basis to ensure that they still meet certain standards and requirements.

OUSA believes that the best way to ensure that instructors at Ontario universities receive adequate training in teaching is for the training to be incorporated into PhD programs. A pocket of funding should be made available to

universities so they are able to develop mandatory teaching training programmes for PhD students. Since many Ontario universities already have centers for teaching and learning, the infrastructure is already in place to develop and coordinate the delivery of these programs.

The benefits of providing these incentives are clear. Teachers aware of effective pedagogies in the United States have had positive results engaging students from diverse backgrounds with different learning styles.<sup>9</sup> Even for those PhD students not seeking faculty positions, the ability to communicate information effectively is still useful for their time in the classroom as teaching assistants and for their future labour market destinations.

**2. Fund instructional support programs to encourage innovation in teaching and provide ongoing professional development for instructors.**

University professors are often hired and promoted more so for their research record than their teaching skills. With so little incentive for professors to focus on teaching, encouraging professional development in this regard is of the utmost importance.

Institutions have made attempts to create professional development programming for professors. It was observed by the Honourable Bob Rae that at present, “most campuses have centres to encourage better teaching practices but they are not mandatory and it is often the teachers who need help the most who get it the least.”<sup>10</sup> If improving the quality of teaching on campuses is to truly be a priority, these centres must receive adequate support to ensure that they can reach the maximum number of professors, as well as provide relevant and engaging pedagogical training. If a funding envelope were created to support the work carried out by centres for teaching and learning, it would send a strong signal to the whole sector that the province is committed to developing the best possible teachers in higher education.

**3. The provincial government should demonstrate its commitment to teaching quality by funding chairs in teaching, similar to the research chairs already in existence.**

In 2005, the Province pledged \$25 million to create research chairs at universities across the province. These prestigious appointments are given to researchers who are “acknowledged by peers as a world leader in the field.” Ontario’s faculty are also developing leading edge curriculum and pedagogy that will have an immeasurable positive impact on the next generation of students. These world leaders are equally deserving of recognition and the government must support their activities if we are to restore the balance between teaching and research. Furthermore, these chairs could act as ambassadors at their home institutions and departments to improve teaching quality across the university.

**4. Quality teaching must be weighted equally with research performance for all decisions relating to hiring, promotion and tenure. A panel consisting of students, government, university and faculty representatives must be established to explore how this standard can be better maintained.**

For many years, OUSA has been calling for greater equality between the importance of teaching and research in the tenure process. In making decisions regarding tenure and promotion, a study found that in most tenure appeal cases, teaching ability was little more than a passing concern in comparison to research accomplishment.<sup>11</sup> Additionally, research evaluation processes are far more complex and rigorous at universities than teaching evaluations, which often are little more than the result of a single question from voluntary student surveys conducted at the end of an academic term. However, with reason, institutions tend to be protective of their own autonomy, making broad government mandates regarding hiring processes a potentially difficult subject.

To ensure that teaching quality is weighted equally with research with regards to hiring decisions, it is essential that the sector come together to arrive upon a mutually beneficial solution to the issue. For this reason, OUSA proposes that students, the government, institutions and faculties come together to discuss why and how our

institutions should hire and promote faculty. This process could include the development of new measuring tools to help better assess quality teaching, such as an improved student teaching evaluation forms and faculty peer assessment.

**Student Proposal: Create a more student-centred culture at research institutions.**

One of the proposed benefits of increased differentiation is that it could create more teaching-focused universities that are more nurturing for undergraduates than that of the typical research-driven university. However, students do not believe it is acceptable for any university, regardless of their research pedigree, to not provide robust support to students.

The creation of a more student friendly, nurturing environment at Ontario universities is not necessarily linked to institutional mission. While effective teachers are integral to the university experience, learning is also defined by the richness of the learning environment. An unfortunate reality of Ontario's current situation is that most universities are facing difficult financial circumstances. When budget decisions are made, student support, innovative curriculum enhancements, and outside-the-classroom learning opportunities are often the first to be cut. This was most recently evident at the University of Windsor, where the first staff cut was five positions at the institution's Centre for Teaching and Learning which supports faculty development in pedagogy.

Government support of these aspects of student life would go a long way to ensuring that currently existing universities provide students with a quality learning experience.

**1. Create envelopes within the funding formula that designate specific amounts per full-time-equivalent student (FTE) for student support services.**

Ensuring that campus support services are well resourced and funded is of paramount importance to ensure students feel supported on every campus. Support services such as academic skill centres, Aboriginal resource centres and mental health & counselling services help students who encounter difficulty during their time at school persist and succeed. With universities facing challenging financial circumstances, these services are consistently under threat of being scaled back while institutions deal with increased costs associated with research. Government funding of student support services would not only ensure that these services are maintained, but also expanded. With better support services, a nurturing environment can be created at currently existing institutions. This would be far more cost-effective for the Province than creating whole new institutions, while also being directly beneficial to students currently in the system.

**2. Create financial incentives for universities to develop mandatory first-year seminars, comprehensive undergraduate research opportunities programs, effective orientation programs, early warning systems, early outreach and persistence programs, businesses incubators, and international exchanges.**

There are a number of pedagogical and administrative practices with a demonstrated positive correlation on student success and engagement. Unfortunately, due to a lack of incentive, most universities have been slow to engage in these practices. From first-year seminar programs where students engage actively in a subject through group discussion, to undergraduate research opportunity programs that link undergraduates with cutting-edge research, there are a plethora of ways that current universities could make their classrooms more stimulating. OUSA has conducted research on the correlation between each of the above learning practices and student success. Further information on any of the listed practices is readily available should the Government choose to further pursue this policy recommendation.

## Response to Policy Recommendations for Increased Differentiation

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Several specific policy recommendations have been proposed by members of the university sector as a means to increase differentiation. The recommendations and students' response are outlined below.

### 1) Recommendation: Create a new sector of teaching-focused universities.

Though there is a long-held belief in academic circles that research and teaching are complimentary, studies conducted on this relationship demonstrate that research does not positively affect student learning unless it is carefully and purposefully integrated into the curriculum. This integration occurs in a limited number of programs in Ontario, while the vast majority are taught by faculty who are encouraged to be more focused on their research goals than their teaching. In fact, student satisfaction as measured by the National Survey on Student Engagement is consistently lower at research-intensive universities than less research-focused counterparts.<sup>12</sup>

In light of the state of teaching at current institutions, and the increased demand for undergraduate degrees that is expected in the next decade, the authors of *Academic Transformation* propose the creation of a new teaching-focused undergraduate university sector. Pointing to the fact that most current institutions in Ontario are pursuing research missions, the authors make the case that the creation of a new sector would mean that teaching universities could focus on the needs of undergraduate students, without having to invest in research infrastructure. They suggest that faculty at these institutions would teach six to eight courses per year, and spend 80 to 85 percent of their time in the classroom (with the remaining time being spent on curriculum and scholarly pursuits related to their field of instruction).

#### **Student Response: Students do not support the creation of new teaching-focused universities.**

Though students agree that changes must be made in the system to shift the focus back to teaching, the creation of new institutions is not the best or most cost-effective means to achieve this objective.

While the authors rightly point out that there is little intrinsic correlation between excellence in teaching and research, there is ample evidence of positive outcomes associated with intentionally integrating research into the classroom and the broader learning environment.<sup>13</sup> In fact, the culture in which students participate in the process of discovery and communication of knowledge with scholar-teachers is largely what defines the university.<sup>14</sup> Removing researchers from the university deprives students of professors that excel in the application of their field. It is possible that this new university sector could become antiquated, with an emerging disconnect between curriculum and the latest research.

Institutions that strictly teach would also not be able to offer undergraduates exposure to research opportunities. Undergraduate student research involvement correlates positively with students' attainment of a Bachelor's degree.<sup>15</sup> Having research opportunities available to students encourages them to develop a deeper understanding of the material, while having no access to research opportunities could stifle potential graduate student applicants.

Furthermore, the Government of Ontario has set ambitious goals with regards to research, innovation and graduate expansion. The capacity to pursue these goals at our institutions has been primarily through the expansion of undergraduate education and the corresponding funding to increase the faculty complement and capital for research. This would be undermined by the dedication of funding to develop new teaching-focused campuses.

Additionally, without a proper understanding, there is a high probability that the general public and prospective students will view teaching-only institutions as less prestigious and desirable than current institutions with established reputations. There are a large number of students that value the prestige that top researchers bring to an institution (46.7% of Ontario full-time undergraduates according to a 2009 survey).<sup>16</sup>

Ultimately, however, the creation of a teaching-focused university sector is a small solution to the system-wide problem of unsustainable undergraduate teaching. Undergraduate students at current institutions need the quality of their teaching to be addressed by the provincial government, and creating new universities will not directly address this need. While there is no doubt that Ontario's universities must improve in their ability to integrate research into the classroom through innovative and effective pedagogy, isolating research from teaching is not the solution.

## **2) Recommendation: Institutions should hire a contingent of full-time, tenured, teaching-focused faculty to take more responsibility for teaching at the undergraduate level.**

Without sufficient funding to hire full-time faculty, more and more universities are relying on part-time instruction to accommodate increasing numbers of undergraduates. The primary motivation behind the increased reliance on part-time instruction has been cost-savings. Institutions save an estimated \$25,900 per course through the utilization of part time instructors.<sup>17</sup> However, due to greater unionization, the savings derived from temporary and sessional lecturers will surely decrease over time.

In order to meet current and future undergraduate teaching needs, as well as move away from the current paradigm of unionized part-time instruction, some have advocated for the hiring of full-time and tenured teaching faculty. They would not have primary research responsibilities, but would be required to stay current in their chosen field of instruction through possible collaboration with their research colleagues, as well as be aware of and contribute to the development of effective pedagogies and teaching practices.

It has been posited that the dogmatic adherence to the teacher-researcher model has closed the door to differentiated appointment categories, and that this door should be re-opened. This is particularly true, given that there is no research to support the idea that a strong researcher is necessarily a better teacher. Creating roles for faculty that love teaching would allow a system where the best teachers teach and complete some research on teaching and curriculum development, the best researchers conduct research and teach occasionally when integration of research is particularly valuable, and opportunities exist to lower the reliance on part-time instruction.

Another potential benefit of full-time teaching faculty would be an increase in the quality of teaching. Since these instructors would be employed over a longer term and would be hired based on their skills in the classroom, teaching-focused faculty could cater to differentiated learning styles and adopt more educationally effective pedagogies than the traditional lecture.

### **Student Response: Students support growth in the use of teaching-focused faculty.**

Students in Ontario share the concern with the wide-spread growth of part-time and contract faculty in the undergraduate classroom. Students also recognize the opportunity that would be presented by increasing the number of teaching-focused faculty appointments. Sessional instructors are generally unavailable through office hours for tutoring or advising, have little connection to the campus, and a lack of understanding in how their course fits into the broader departmental curriculum. There is also evidence that part-time faculty have a significant negative impact on student retention in first year. Conversely, it has been found that full-time, tenure-ineligible faculty who focus on teaching did not significantly affect students' likelihood of persisting into second year. As the authors of that study put it, "full-time, tenure-ineligible faculty tend to be more visible and more integrated into the campus culture [which] mitigates any shortcomings they may have in course preparation or pedagogical expertise."<sup>18</sup>

While OUSA recognizes that many professors excel at both teaching and research, it must also be accepted that the balance between teaching and research at universities is in need of more attention. The current balance is not cost efficient or conducive to effective teaching.

There is also ample evidence to support that students are primarily interested in the teaching ability of the instructor. In a 2009 survey of Ontario undergraduates, students overwhelmingly selected traits related to teaching ability and pedagogy as the most important factors of teaching quality.<sup>19</sup> Ability to deliver organized lectures, enthusiasm and communication ability were all selected by over 50% of respondents as an important trait in a professor, compared

to only 13% who selected prominent researcher. OUSA has long been advocating for teaching training to play a larger role in higher education. The opportunity to hire professors based on teaching ability would emphasize this type of professional development.

Students believe that these positions should be tenured so as to attract individuals willing to dedicate their lives to teaching. Students also think that these would be ideal candidates to teach large introductory courses that focus on principles and facts, and that research professors would still be used in upper-year courses where more one-on-one discovery research is done by students. OUSA also envisions that teaching-focused faculty could continue to participate in some limited research with their research-focused colleagues, and that exposure to this research would limit possible concerns about antiquated curriculum. Furthermore, just as leading researchers infuse their institutions with the benefits of their work, teaching faculty would similarly promote the role of teaching and pedagogical development.

There are some considerable risks with this proposal. The use of full-time teaching-focused faculty has thus far been limited in Ontario, and no extensive research has been done on their effectiveness in the classroom. In an ideal scenario, it may still be desirable for all Ontario undergraduate students to be taught exclusively by teacher-researchers who excel at both disciplines. However, given the current reality at our institutions, OUSA feels the increased use of these full-time teaching-focused positions would mitigate some of students' concerns with part-time and research-focused faculty, while also having the potential to expose Ontario undergraduates to excellent teachers.

In OUSA's estimation, teaching-focused faculty is a solution that addresses student needs, as well as the cost inflation currently plaguing higher education in Ontario. Furthermore, students advocate for the provincial government to develop an envelope in the funding formula devoted to funding tenured teaching-focused faculty to encourage institutions to adopt this practice.

### **3) Recommendation: The Government should implement changes to the funding formula of universities and develop a more comprehensive approach to funding the institutions.**

The current funding framework utilized by the government to finance universities was implemented in 1963 and, though there have been small amendments, has remained relatively unchanged ever since. Funding is provided per-student and is weighted differently based on program and type of degree. The base funding per student does not rise with inflation and changes only on an ad-hoc basis, typically when non-base envelope funding is rolled into the base. This per-student funding framework provides a clear incentive to grow enrolment.

The core purpose of the current funding framework is to ensure that universities have independence and autonomy in how their operating funds are spent. The provincial government currently has little to any direct means of using the operating grants to shape the balance of teaching and research within institutions. Traditionally, proposals to alter the framework to allow greater government involvement have been met with stiff opposition from institutions, faculty and student groups.

Some point out that there has never been a public discussion of what the institutional costs are, should be, or what funding growth is needed to accomplish the goals of institutions and government. Additionally, there have been no explicit discussions of inflation, despite the fact that institutions claim that their costs inflate at a rate much higher than normal inflation.

Advocates for a revision of the funding framework argue there is considerable evidence to suggest that the current framework is reaching its limits. The government determines the total operating grant for the entire system, with portions allocated to different universities based on the formula. Universities then use this funding to fulfill their education and research missions and general operations. When expenses outpace revenues, universities tend to increase class sizes and hire additional temporary instructors.

The recommendation is that the time has come for an open and explicit conversation between the institutions and government about the rising costs of education. As a starting point, institutions must indicate exactly how much money is needed to simply maintain operations at the current levels. The drivers of cost inflation must be examined thoroughly, and there must be a decision made regarding how reasonable some of these drivers are. Some point to examples of high rates of salary inflation and increases to zero-sum competition between institutions as areas where the sector may want to re-evaluate its priorities. Next, the Government and universities must decide what will be priorities in the coming years and devise a plan to directly fund these priorities, rather than have increased funding consumed by breakneck cost inflation rates.

**Student Response: Students support the development of a more comprehensive approach to funding.**

The authors of *Academic Transformation* rightly purport that “in the absence of systemic change, [undergraduate teaching] will suffer more.” This is not news to the many students who have seen their universities rely more heavily on part-time instruction and large class sizes, despite yearly tuition increases. This has been largely due to the reality that increases in the transfers to universities have been consumed by cost inflation.

As a result, students who have witnessed announcement after announcement of increased government funding to universities are hard-pressed to describe how this increased funding has affected them. Until a more comprehensive approach to university finance is adopted, it is unlikely that this will change. In this regard, the status quo of rapid cost inflation is unacceptable to students and requires further examination. Additionally, students would welcome the government planning ahead for enrolment growth with institutions and subsequently projecting government expenditures such that both growth and reasonable inflation costs could be funded. A real and honest conversation on funding and cost inflation would be of great benefit to the sector.

Additionally, while students will support incremental funding being dedicated to government and student priorities and to encourage differentiation, students do not support a revision to the base funding formula or the concept that the base government funding for students in the same program should be altered at different institutions depending on the priorities of the university.

This conversation would not be complete, however, without the inclusion of students, particularly since it would necessarily involve discussion of student fees. In this vein, OUSA strongly believes that tuition must remain regulated by the government, and that progress must be made towards a 2:1 cost-sharing model between the government and students, where every dollar invested by students is matched by two dollars from the provincial and federal governments. Prior to deregulation in the mid 1990s, this was the ratio that was maintained.

## Quality and Performance Metrics

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There are five separate agencies that concern themselves with quality of education, and that all of these agencies conceptualize it in a different way.<sup>20</sup> Between universities, government, faculty and students, diametrically opposed values are applied to the definition of a “quality education”. For instance, the Ontario Council on Graduate Studies and the Undergraduate Program Review and Audit Committee focus on program selectivity and course design as indicators of quality. Conversely, the Higher Education Council of Ontario (HEQCO) has focused more heavily on student satisfaction and value-added benefits of education, as well as what learning outcomes are achieved.

Unfortunately, learning outcomes and quality metrics have been discussed far more than actually utilized. Very little effort has been made to measure or collect data on learning outcomes, meaning that the goal of a system that is judged and funded based on its quality has not come to fruition. A related trend in the quality debate has been that many basic assumptions have been accepted simply because they are believed to be true without any supporting evidence. The ideas that teaching and research are inherently complimentary and that lecture-style pedagogy is the best method of instruction are good examples of such assumptions.

Students believe strongly that a strengthened quality framework should be implemented in Ontario universities alongside the strategic MYAAs process and believe that HEQCO should play an increased role in its design. This would provide greater accountability and transparency to students and the public, provide superior data for government and institutional administrations to make improvements, and will be necessary should the government choose to have certain institutions focus on teaching quality as a key mission in a more differentiated university system. Furthermore, if differentiation is to be implemented, an enhanced quality assurance framework will be necessary to track progress towards differentiated missions.

As end users of the higher education system, and as a party that makes major financial contributions to fund its operations, students should be deeply involved in quality management. In order for institutions and the government to have an effective understanding of what students are learning and taking away from their education, student voices must be intimately involved in the development of a new quality assurance process and in its implementation.

Students also support a broadening of current quality assurance metrics, particularly with those metrics for teaching and the student experience. The Key Performance Indicator system measures only a handful of quality indicators, most of which are not directly related to a student’s experience at school. Performance funding is doled out mostly on the basis of post-graduate activity such as employment, and ignores student engagement, satisfaction and performance in-study.

Students suggest that three core categories of metrics be utilized to measure quality: inputs, processes, and outputs. Several metrics should be utilized in each category, and these metrics should also be reported by program and by faculty to allow for specific quality improvements to be measurable. Some preliminary suggestions of metrics that could be utilized are outlined below.

### *Inputs*

- Percentage of instructors with a doctorate degree
- Student-to-faculty ratio
- Student-to-student support staff ratio
- Percentage of students from underrepresented groups (gender, socio-economic status, first generation status, Aboriginal status, disability status)
- Entrance ability of incoming students (high school grades or standard testing measures)
- Student space inventory

### *Processes*

- Average class size
- Percentage of first year courses with a component that has a student-to-faculty ratio of less than 30
- Percentage of courses taught by tenured faculty
- Average course load per faculty member
- Percentage of courses employing active or collaborative teaching methods and the percentage of students enrolled in these courses
- Percentage of faculty that have undergone formal training in teaching and pedagogical methods and the average number of hours spent in training
- Results of external quality audits of curriculum design or learning outcomes

### *Outputs*

- Student satisfaction
  - Through the National Survey of Student Engagement
  - Survey of satisfaction with student support services
  - Post-graduation survey of employment success and skills match
- Teaching evaluations from student questionnaires and faculty peer review
- Retention rates
- Graduation rates
- 'Valued-added' outcomes (such as pre- and post-tests of cognitive abilities)

## Conclusion

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Several advocates in the Ontario university system have proposed that greater government leadership and policy guidance is required in higher education to ensure that institutions are accountable with public dollars, are providing high-quality education to undergraduates, and are pursuing differentiated missions. Students agree with greater government involvement in these areas, so long as the government is encouraging universities to differentiate rather than imposing differentiation on them. This more organic differentiation should be achieved through strategic growth planning, more effective accountability agreements, and funding of institutional priorities. At the same time, students stress that a basic level of quality in undergraduate education must be maintained across the system.

While it is the belief of students that the creation of new teaching-focused universities is not a responsible use of public resources, growth in the use of tenured teaching-focused faculty should be tried as both a cost-saving measure and as a way to encourage improvement in the quality of teaching for undergraduates. Students also support a dialogue amongst the stakeholders of Ontario universities on the topic of changes to the funding framework and how the government and students fund growth and inflation costs. Students remain adamant however that it is the responsibility of the government to fund both growth in enrolment and reasonable inflation costs incurred by universities. Students are also supportive of developing a common conception of quality and a more robust quality assurance process. As the recipients of higher education, students must be involved in any provincially-led discussion surrounding quality.

Finally, students believe that *Academic Transformation* has fittingly articulated the concerns of many with the university system – that simultaneous pressures to rapidly expand undergraduate attainment, increase research and innovation capacity and pay our professors amongst the highest in the world has strained our university system and set it on an unsustainable path. However, students are further concerned that many within the higher education sector have jumped to increased differentiation amongst universities as the sole solution, ignoring concerns about cost inflation and alternative solutions such as transformation of the professoriate or adequate public investment in the valuable research and education missions of Ontario's universities. Finally, students believe that increased government involvement in the priorities of students, such as improved pedagogy and student support services, would considerably improve the student experience across the province and may be a more effective use of incremental funding than encouraging differentiation. It is the core belief of OUSA that Ontario universities must transform to provide a truly accessible, affordable, accountable and high-quality education, and this transformation will require more leadership, resources and vision than merely an investment in institutionally-driven differentiation.

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August 2010