

Educated Transformation:

The Differentiation, Modernization & Sustainability
of Post-Secondary Education in Ontario

August 2010



Submission to the Office
of the Premier of Ontario

OUASA

Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance

EDUCATED TRANSFORMATION:

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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've come together to develop solutions to challenges facing higher education, build broad consensus for our policy options, and lobby government to implement them.

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 have one of the highest post-secondary attainment rates in the world. 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 conducted by the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, entitled *Academic Transformation*. Since its release, its recommendations have generated considerable debate in the Province's higher education sector. With some of these recommendations being discussed and considered by the Government of Ontario, the need for a student voice in the debate is paramount.

Accordingly, the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance has developed the following response to the recommendations contained in the book *Academic Transformation*. Broadly speaking, students agree 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 students with an increased capacity to undertake knowledge production and innovation. However, this transformation will have a tremendous impact on students, and great care must be taken to ensure that the impact is not a negative one.

Where we disagree with the authors, we offer educated solutions based upon research, policy development, and consultation with students. The proposals herein should help the Government address how best to invest in and shape our post-secondary education system, and allow the Government to continue to build Ontario into the best place in the world to live, learn and work.

ACADEMIC TRANSFORMATION RECOMMENDATION #1:

Create a new sector of teaching-focused universities.

Students do not believe that creating a new sector of teaching-focused universities is an effective use of public resources. Not only would this course of action be more expensive than expanding current institutions, but new institutions would not address teaching quality or sustainability concerns in currently existing institutions. Instead, students believe the Government should implement measures to improve teaching system-wide and create a more student-centred culture at all of our institutions. Students propose that investments in mandatory PhD teaching training programs, professional development, and teaching chairs would be more effective uses of taxpayer dollars. Additionally, the student experience could be improved through investment in student support services.

ACADEMIC TRANSFORMATION RECOMMENDATION #2:

Create more tenured teaching-focused faculty positions.

Students support the implementation of tenured teaching-focused professors at Ontario universities. These professors would be free from the constant pressure to publish and, thus, may be more committed to the classroom experience than the typical researcher-teacher model. This measure would also allow skilled researchers to focus more on knowledge production and less on teaching. Finally, this initiative would result in cost savings for institutions and could be encouraged by the development of an envelope in the provincial funding formula for these teaching-focused positions.

ACADEMIC TRANSFORMATION RECOMMENDATION #3:

Devise a more comprehensive method for funding post-secondary education.

Students support the creation of a more comprehensive funding framework. Currently, government funding of public universities incentivizes constant enrolment growth without simultaneously requiring institutions to invest in the student experience and without any meaningful recognition of cost inflation. Additionally, there has been a lack of accountability, planning or oversight in the public funding framework, leading to a high rate of cost inflation in Ontario institutions. The net result has been increased pressure on students and government to increase financial support every year through tuition and public operating grants. It is imperative that the post-secondary education sector come together to discuss the drivers of

cost inflation and how to fairly finance the costs of the sector. 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. If a new funding framework necessitates tuition increases, it is vital that the Government increase student financial assistance to compensate.

ACADEMIC TRANSFORMATION RECOMMENDATION #4:

Expand degree-granting authority at colleges.

Students do not support change to the current levels of degree-granting authority in Ontario colleges. The authors of *Academic Transformation* point to the ability of colleges to attract students from low-income and underrepresented backgrounds as their rationale for increased college degree-granting. However, research shows that early outreach and distance education programs are already proven methods of improving university access for these groups. Rather than create colleges that grant degrees that would be considered second-tier, the Government should enhance support for initiatives like Pathways to Education, Contact North, and university dual credit programs in high schools.

ACADEMIC TRANSFORMATION RECOMMENDATION #5:

Improve student mobility.

Students support all efforts made by the Province to improve pathways for student mobility and credit transfer. Students recognize the commitments the Government has already made to this objective and will continue to participate in the ongoing dialogue surrounding a more robust credit transfer system in Ontario's post-secondary sector.

ACADEMIC TRANSFORMATION RECOMMENDATION #6:

Create a university with an open admissions policy.

Students believe the establishment of bridging programs at existing institutions is superior to and more cost effective than the creation of an open admissions university. If a student is admitted to an open university without the knowledge and skills necessary to succeed, the student may find themselves frustrated and withdraw from the program, costing them financially and lowering the likelihood they will re-enrol at a post-secondary institution. Furthermore, an open enrolment policy is likely to limit the value and prestige associated with a degree conferred by the open university. Bridging programs for those without adequate entrance requirements are already available at select universities in Ontario, and these should be instituted across the province.

ACADEMIC TRANSFORMATION RECOMMENDATION #7:

Improve quality assurance mechanisms at Ontario institutions.

There is currently a lack of congruency within the Ontario higher education sector surrounding the definition of "quality education", as well as appropriate ways to measure and hold institutions accountable for providing quality education. Because there has been no progress toward a common understanding, many conceptions of quality have emerged that are based not on evidence, but on anecdotes and philosophical inclinations. Students support the development of 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.

ACADEMIC TRANSFORMATION RECOMMENDATION #8:

Increase provincial leadership and direction-setting in the university sector to promote differentiation amongst institutions.

Students support some increased direction-setting from the Province. The authors of *Academic Transformation* propose 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, 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.

INTRODUCTION

In 2005, for the first time in a half-century, the Government of Ontario took bold steps towards investing in our economic future by recognizing that higher education is the key to the new global economy. An investment of \$6.2 billion into post-secondary education over five years 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 the benefits of this plan are beginning to become clear to Ontarians, one point is undeniable: more students than ever before have been empowered to access and excel in a post-secondary degree.

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 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 the government transfers.¹ However, given the current fiscal climate, 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 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. The Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance understands the reality that sought-for improvements, particularly to the quality of education, were unattainable in the university sector, 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.²

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 surrounding resource allocation for individual professors and institutions. 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.³ 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.

The obstacles that the system faces are well outlined by Ian Clark, Greg Moran, Michael Skolnik and David Trick in *Academic Transformation*, a 2009 publication sponsored by the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario. The recommendations that the authors of *Academic Transformation* propose have been controversial and well-debated in the post-secondary sector. While the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance does not agree with all of these recommendations, we absolutely agree that it should be a priority for this Government to ensure that the design of its higher education system is meeting its objective and is sustainable over the long term.



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OUSA'S VISION FOR HIGHER EDUCATION IN ONTARIO

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 of Ontario for the overall 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, Predictable, 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.⁴ With expenditures in higher education inflating at such a rate, it is worrying that even the corresponding dramatic increases in revenue have been found to be insufficient.

Students strongly believe 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.

Emphasis on Both 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 important considerations.

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 if it is to make a significant impact on 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.

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ACADEMIC TRANSFORMATION RECOMMENDATION #1:

Create a new sector of teaching-focused universities.

Due to record enrolment, as well as pressure from the Provincial and Federal Governments to increase research capacity, undergraduate teaching has ceased to be a priority at many institutions. Studies conducted over the past twenty years have concluded that the balance between research and teaching is severely weighted in favour of research.⁵ 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.⁶ Additionally, research evaluation processes are far more complex and rigorous at universities than teaching evaluations, which are often little more than the result of a single question from voluntary student surveys conducted at the end of an academic term.

The authors of *Academic Transformation* argue that the Federal and Provincial Governments have supported this trend through heavily incentivizing the expansion of graduate programs and research capacity at current institutions. In recent years, the amount of annual provincial funding available per PhD student is approximately ten times as high as funding per first-year arts student.⁷ The Federal Government has increased funding for research four-fold over the decade from 1997 to 2007.⁸ This dedicated focus on research has spilled over into the classroom as well. The average annual teaching load of a professor has declined on average from five courses to four, while the average class size has grown substantially.⁹

The prevalence of the research-focused university has meant that the growing numbers of undergraduate students in need of high-quality teaching have been under-served. 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 full-time faculty who are encouraged to be more focused on their research goals than their teaching, or by part-time instructors who are not expected to conduct research. 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.¹⁰

Book Recommendation: Create a new sector of teaching-focused universities.

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 per cent of their time in the classroom (with the remaining time being spent on curriculum and scholarly pursuits related to their field of instruction). The importance of creating several new institutions is emphasized in order to mitigate upcoming enrolment pressure on current institutions in the Greater Toronto Area, as well as avoid “mission creep” by creating only one institution that would compete with the other research universities.

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.¹¹ 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.¹² 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.¹³ 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 revenue 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).¹⁴

Ultimately, however, the creation of a teaching-focused university sector is a small solution to the system-wide problem of unsustainable undergraduate teaching. 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, undergraduate students at current institutions need the quality of their teaching to be addressed system-wide by the Provincial Government, and creating new teaching-focused universities will not directly address this need.

Student Recommendation: Improve teaching system-wide.

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."¹⁵ Students strongly disagree with this assessment and have been suggesting ways the Government could improve teaching for some time now.

1. 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.¹⁶

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, not widely accessed. This is a concern for OUSA, 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.

Ultimately, however, the creation of a teaching-focused university sector is a small solution to the system-wide problem of unsustainable undergraduate teaching.



With so little incentive for professors to focus on teaching, encouraging professional development in this regard is of the utmost importance.



The benefits of providing these incentives are clear. Teachers aware of effective teaching pedagogies in the United States have had positive results engaging students from diverse backgrounds with different learning styles.¹⁷ 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.”¹⁸ 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. Demonstrate a 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.” Furthermore, the Federal Government is currently funding 737 Canada Research Chairs in Ontario, while also providing significant funding through the granting councils and the Canada Foundation for Innovation that encourages faculty to focus on research.

However, 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 robustly 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. 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. If government action is required, it is preferable that it stem from a sector-wide recommendation. 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 Recommendation: Create a more student-centred culture at research institutions.

The authors propose that teaching-focused universities would create “learning environments that are more nurturing for undergraduates than that of the typical research-driven university.”¹⁹ OUSA believes that the Provincial Government could play a role in driving all universities in Ontario to be more student-centric.

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 supports, 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 if implemented on a large scale across the province.

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.



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.





There is no research to support the idea that a strong researcher is necessarily a better teacher.



ACADEMIC TRANSFORMATION RECOMMENDATION #2: Create more tenured teaching-focused faculty positions.

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 authors of *Academic Transformation* found that the number of part-time instructors teaching at Ontario universities has more than doubled in the past twenty years,²⁰ and this number excludes data from five large universities that chose not to disclose their numbers. According to *Academic Transformation*, at one university in particular, only 45% of undergraduate courses are taught by a full-time member of the professoriate.

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.²¹ However, due to greater unionization, the savings derived from temporary and sessional lecturers will surely decrease over time.

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

In order to meet current and future undergraduate teaching needs, as well as move away from the current paradigm of unionized part-time instruction, the authors of *Academic Transformation* advocate for the hiring of full-time 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. The authors emphasize that teaching positions should be tenure-stream.

The authors further posit 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.

Since part-time instructors teach on a course-by-course basis, hiring full-time teaching faculty to teach multiple courses (replacing part-time instructors) would be unlikely to increase net costs on institutions dramatically. The number of contract teaching positions would decrease, but would be replaced by more meaningful long-term teaching opportunities.

Another potential benefit of full-time teaching faculty could 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 authors' 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."²²

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.²³ 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 the teaching-focused faculty could continue to participate in some limited research with their research-focused colleagues, and that exposure to this research would limit the 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.

Student Recommendation: The Provincial Government should develop an envelope in the funding formula devoted to funding tenured teaching-focused faculty to encourage institutions to adopt this practice.

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There is also ample evidence to support that students are primarily interested in the teaching ability of the instructor.

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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.



ACADEMIC TRANSFORMATION RECOMMENDATION #3:

Devise a more comprehensive method for funding Universities.

The current funding framework utilized by the Government to finance universities was implemented in 1967 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 funding framework was amended in 1987 with the introduction of “corridor funding”. This framework ensured that each university’s share of total operating funding would remain constant, irrespective of short-term variations in enrolment levels. Since funding is provided per-student, this addition to the framework was intended to give universities stable funding and protection from other institutions’ enrolment decisions. Unfortunately, “corridor funding” has failed to provide an alternative incentive, due to the fact that applications to universities skyrocketed in the years since its introduction. To accommodate this growth, governments have consistently offered additional per-student funding to universities at year end beyond the maximum corridor.

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 no 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.

The authors of *Academic Transformation* 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 CPI.

Book Recommendation: The Government should develop a more comprehensive approach to funding universities.

In *Academic Transformation*, the authors advocate for a revision of the funding framework, as 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. Additionally, it can be clearly seen that the funding framework favours and incentivizes the expansion of graduate studies, which has been bolstered by additional government support at the provincial and federal level.

The authors recommend 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. The authors 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. Then, 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 high inflation rates.

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

The authors of *Academic Transformation* rightly state 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 can be funded.

A real and honest conversation on funding and cost inflation would be of great benefit to the sector. 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.

Student Recommendation: If tuition increases are included in the funding framework, the Government must ensure the availability of adequate financial assistance.

The authors argue that tuition increases should be a component of any new funding framework and should be included in the discussions around its design. The authors further discuss that as tuition costs increase, the Government will be required to continually adjust and revise its financial aid mechanisms to reduce financial barriers for disadvantaged students. OUSA strongly agrees with this analysis and has long been advocating for student financial assistance to be revisited yearly in order to ensure that it is meeting student needs. OUSA recommends that the following solutions be considered to improve the accessibility of higher education:

1. Raise the OSAP living allowance to the poverty line and ensure that geographic differences in cost-of-living is taken into account;
2. Reduce the parental contribution criteria in the loan assessment;
3. Reduce the cap required to receive the Ontario Student Opportunity Grant, ensuring that the price of university cost inflation is not paid for through student debt;
4. Fulfill the Government’s campaign promise to eliminate education and tuition tax credits, and replace them with up-front grants;
5. Include financial aid literacy in primary and secondary school curriculum.



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.





Simply making these institutions able to confer undervalued degrees is easily recognizable as a band-aid solution to university participation concerns.



ACADEMIC TRANSFORMATION RECOMMENDATION #4: Expand degree-granting authority at colleges.

There are several unique traits of Ontario's college sector that make the prospect of expanding the college role in the overall higher education system an interesting one. First, colleges are more successful than universities at attracting students from low-income backgrounds and underrepresented groups. In fact, it has been found that participation rates at colleges are not significantly related to socio-economic status.²⁴ Additionally, colleges intrinsically have a career-oriented teaching focus, which the authors suggest makes them well-suited to help deal with the large increase in demand for undergraduate spaces that is expected in the coming decade. Lastly, colleges would be easier to differentiate, since the Government has much greater authority under the Colleges Act to determine institutional missions. By 2021, the college sector is expected to grow by 50,000 students, compared to projected growth of 100,000 students in the university sector.²⁵

Book Recommendation: Expand degree-granting authority at colleges.

The ability of colleges to attract students from underrepresented groups and the increasing demand for career-oriented education are the primary reasons that baccalaureate education should be expanded at colleges, as cited by the authors.

There is substantial data demonstrating that future enrolment growth will necessarily be comprised of increasing numbers of students from underrepresented groups. Since colleges have been better at attracting these students, and that the demand for degrees will be double the demand for college diplomas by 2021, it follows that allowing colleges to meet some of the demand for university education might be beneficial from a system-sustainability perspective.

The authors acknowledge that there are concerns with this recommendation, especially in relation to the appropriateness of granting a degree for a more applied education, as well as the possibility that baccalaureate activity will divert resources from the core activities of Ontario colleges.

Student Response: Students support the status-quo of colleges granting degrees.

Currently, OUSA is comfortable with the limited ability of colleges to grant career-oriented degrees under strict quality assurance controls from the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. The authors make the assessment themselves that colleges do not have a history or demonstrable strength in provision of liberal arts or applied sciences education.²⁶ The resources that would be required to build these capacities would be better spent elsewhere in the system.

OUSA is also concerned that baccalaureate degrees from colleges would be considered second-tier to the arts and science programs of established universities. Though it is indisputable that colleges have been successful at attracting underrepresented groups, simply making these institutions able to confer undervalued degrees is easily recognizable as a band-aid solution to university participation concerns.

While students do not support greater degree-granting authority for Ontario's colleges, overcoming access barriers and increasing the participation of students from underrepresented groups is still a top priority. Students submit that a holistic, long-term access strategy is a better way to overcome these barriers.

Student Recommendation: The Provincial Government should implement a comprehensive access strategy.

This access strategy must expand support for early outreach and distance education programs such as Pathways to Education, university dual credit programs in high schools, and Contact North. These programs holistically address participation concerns in post-secondary education for traditionally underrepresented students. Additionally, bridging programs and student supports in post-secondary institutions must be established and strengthened. Finally, guidance counselling and parental involvement strategies in elementary and high schools should be enhanced to improve education pathway planning for youth. OUSA remains ready to participate in the development of a comprehensive access strategy should the Government choose to develop this further.

ACADEMIC TRANSFORMATION RECOMMENDATION #5: Improve student mobility.

Evidence suggests that the current state of college-university transfer in Ontario is not serving student needs. Surveys of incoming college students indicate that in certain programs, the majority of respondents report that they aspire to a degree. However, surveys conducted of graduating students indicate that only 7% of these students go on to degree programs.²⁷ On the other hand, university graduates are increasingly moving on to college programs to supplement their degree with more hands-on career training.²⁸

Much of the difficulty in finding transfer opportunities comes from the fact that most college courses are too specialized to have an appropriate corresponding university credit. This has led to trepidation on the part of the universities to participate in a broad-scale transfer regime.

Though attempts have been made to improve student mobility between colleges and universities in the past, little progress has been made. Much of the work of groups such as the College University Consortium Council (CUCC) has tended to avoid large-scale transfer, and instead focused on promoting small-scale collaborative efforts between colleges and universities.

Book Recommendation: The Provincial Government should take a greater role in improving opportunities for college to university transfer.

Since colleges have had greater success with attracting students from across the socio-economic spectrum, the authors propose that government involvement in credit transfer makes a great deal of sense from an access perspective. The system is currently not conducive to getting students from colleges to universities, meaning that the underrepresented groups who are more likely to initially attend college may be being denied an important opportunity to persist into baccalaureate education.

The authors argue that to truly improve mobility from college to university, the Provincial Government must cease leaving the question to institutions and must take a greater role. Other jurisdictions that have been more successful with encouraging college to university transfer have primarily relied on use of provincial committees and university-driven programs aimed at attracting college students. The authors point specifically to British Columbia and Alberta as examples of provinces where provincial committees designed to monitor and govern transfer arrangements have helped foster connections between colleges and universities. Additionally, the authors posit that the Provincial Government could do more to incentivize the creation of college-transfer programs at universities.

Student Response: Students support improved student mobility.

Students support all efforts by the Province to improve pathways for student mobility. The Ontario Government took important steps to address this issue with the announcement of new funding to support transfer opportunities in the 2010 provincial budget. A comprehensive solution to this has taken on even greater importance given the Province's move to establish the Ontario Online Institute, which will require institutional sharing of credits to be effective.

OUSA has been and will continue to be involved in the Government's Credit Transfer Steering Committee. We have also prepared extensive recommendations on the implementation of a university-to-university credit transfer system and are currently working with the Council of Ontario Universities to see them implemented. We intend to continue to participate in the credit transfer dialogue to secure a workable solution for students.



Students support all efforts by the Province to improve pathways for student mobility. The Ontario Government took important steps to address this issue with the announcement of new funding to support transfer opportunities in the 2010 provincial budget.





To provide assistance to those not fully prepared for enrolment, a full range of bridging programs and preparatory classes should be established at universities and colleges across Ontario.



ACADEMIC TRANSFORMATION RECOMMENDATION #6:

Create a university with an open admissions policy.

Book Recommendation: Ontario should establish an open university committed to open admissions and pedagogy catering to a wider variety of learning styles.

Another strategy the authors suggest to deal with the issue of college graduates not continuing to degree programs, as well as students who face access barriers to higher education, is the implementation of an “open university.” Such a university would not take high-school performance into account when considering prospective students and would likely be free to recognize credits from any college or university program, allowing students to use the open university in whatever way suited them best.

Student Response: Students do not support an open admissions university and instead believe that bridging programs should be established at existing institutions.

OUSA recognizes the flexibility and access benefits of an open university, especially for individuals who may find it difficult to enter into traditional campus environments. These benefits are particularly relevant to several underrepresented groups, including Aboriginal students, rural and northern students, students with dependants, and students with disabilities.

However, caution must be exercised when considering an open admissions policy. OUSA strongly believes that enrolment standards must not be dispensed with. Entrance requirements are necessary to ensure that students entering university have the skills required to succeed and persist. Removing these standards could potentially set students up for failure. Additionally, without admissions standards, an open admission university would surely be seen as second-class to students, parents and employers.

That said, life-long learning should be a priority for the Government, and under-qualified students must have the opportunity to prove themselves and to work toward a full degree. Mechanisms such as equivalency tests and personalized skills assessments should be used to assess a student’s academic merits to determine if they have the ability to succeed in their program of study. To provide assistance to those not fully prepared for enrolment, a full range of bridging programs and preparatory classes should be established at universities and colleges across Ontario. Bridging programs are already in use on a small scale, for instance at the University of Guelph where their University Preparation Programs allow students open access to the university and guaranteed admission to degree programs once they have completed a number of prerequisites. Additionally, the Bridges to Ryerson program offers preparation courses to mature students who lack the traditional entrance qualifications.

Open universities are oftentimes associated closely with online education. While online and open education are not intrinsically correlated, they share many benefits. Online universities break down barriers such as time, place, past educational experience, pace, and income. Access is ensured through flexible scheduling of courses and student services, through a variety of delivery methods, a progressive credential structure, and ladder curricula, which all allow students to move in and out of post-secondary education as their personal and professional needs dictate. In fact, OUSA believes that the newly announced Ontario Online Institute could play a key role in providing baccalaureate education to groups that face access barriers, as well as existing students by giving them a new way to supplement their education. These are the same benefits that an open university would provide. However, students must be able to graduate with a degree that is regarded as having similar value to one coming from an existing university. The maintenance of some form of admissions standard is necessary to this end.

ACADEMIC TRANSFORMATION RECOMMENDATION #7: Improve quality assurance mechanisms at Ontario institutions.

The authors point out that in Ontario, there are five separate agencies that concern themselves with quality of education, and that all of these agencies conceptualize it in a different way.²⁹ 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) focuses more heavily on student experience 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.

Book Recommendation: The Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario should initiate an open and honest dialogue amongst stakeholders about what quality means.

Due to the dysfunctional side effects of the current conception of quality, the authors of *Academic Transformation* suggest that the time has come for the entire sector to come together and discuss whether current quality assurance processes are appropriate to meet the needs of the 21st century. This discussion would be informed by current research on approaches to quality measurement and would seek to confront paradigms in the public conception of quality.

Student Response: Students support a dialogue on implementing a robust quality assurance process and stress that the student voice is of paramount importance in this discussion.

Students believe strongly that a strengthened quality framework should be implemented in Ontario universities and 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.

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.



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.



Inputs

- Percentage of instructors with a doctorate degree
- Student-to-student support staff ratio
- Percentage of students from underrepresented groups (gender, socio-economic status, first generation status, Aboriginal status, disability status)
- Physical 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)

ACADEMIC TRANSFORMATION RECOMMENDATION #8:

Increase provincial leadership and direction-setting in the university sector to promote differentiation amongst institutions.

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. Most research conducted on the relationship between research and teaching has concluded that the two missions do not co-exist naturally, which helps explain the strain that the system's current path is placing on institutional budgets. 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.

Book Recommendation: The Government must take a greater role in the overall direction and design of the university sector.

In response to the plethora of sustainability and differentiation issues facing the sector, the authors conclude that greater government oversight and policy guidance is required. Though higher education has required an increasing investment, the authors state that "from the perspective of stewardship of this expensive and strategic public resource, it is not apparent that anyone has been minding the store." Oftentimes, efforts to increase accountability or shift the dynamic of the system towards greater public involvement are drowned out by scepticism and hostility from sector stakeholders whose interests might be threatened.

Student Response: Students support some increased direction setting from the Province, but also 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 this expansion maintains a strong principle of stakeholder consultation and a renewed focus on students. Students also 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.

The differentiation process must be organic and allow institutions to focus on established and self-selected strengths.



It is the core belief of OUSA that Ontario universities must transform to provide a truly accessible, affordable, accountable and high-quality education.



OUSA believes that the Government must work with institutions to plan for future undergraduate and graduate 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 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 process 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.

More importantly, 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 the teaching quality and student experience at research-intensive institutions will continue to suffer. As discussed earlier, students encourage the Government to foster a supportive and high quality experience across the university system for all undergraduates. The fact that a university chooses to focus on research does not remove its responsibility to provide a high-quality undergraduate experience.

Finally, students believe that *Academic Transformation* has aptly articulated the concerns of many with the university system – that simultaneous pressures to rapidly expand undergraduate attainment, increase research and innovation capacity, and pay for inflation that is well above inflation levels in the economy as a whole 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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