![OUSA - Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance]

POLICY PAPER

Accountability

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ABOUT OUSA

OUSA represents the interests of 150,000 professional and undergraduate, full-time and part-time university students at eight student associations 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.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As publicly assisted institutions, universities have a variety of accountability mechanisms to ensure that they are adhering to public goals and priorities. Over the years, there has been no question as to whether or not institutions should be held accountable, due to their use of public dollars. Taxpayers and politicians alike still feel the need for universities to be accountable to government, despite the decline in government funding. In an effort to attempt to address this, the government developed Multi-Year Accountability Agreements with each institution. These agreements were designed with the intention of holding universities accountable to their own strategic initiatives, however, the framework failed to see much success. As a result, the government revised their accountability plan and created the Strategic Mandate Agreements, which are currently entering their second iteration. To improve accountability in the sector, students recommend that the province restructure their quality assurance processes, review and improve upon the Strategic Mandate Agreement framework, increase student representation on governing bodies, and expand Ombudsman services for students both on campus, and within Ombudsman Ontario.

THE PROBLEM

Lack of Quality Assurance

Students believe that undergraduate degree expectations frameworks should adequately define what students should learn at each level of instruction. However, University Undergraduate Degree Level Expectations (UUDLEs) are too vague and subjective, not adequately defining what a student should have learned after each level of instruction. As such, students are concerned that undergraduate programs are not being developed to the highest possible quality. Furthermore, concerns have been raised around the mechanisms that are currently in place for measuring quality in post-secondary programs. Currently, the evaluation criteria utilized by the Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance is largely self-measured by the member institutions of the Council of Ontario Universities. As an arms length organization of Ontario's publicly assisted universities, students believe that the Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance has a perceived bias in program and course quality approval. Finally, the current program review cycle places newly created programs in the same category as previously established programs, running the risk of multiple cohorts of students receiving a lesser quality of education than their peers.

The Need for Improvement of the Strategic Mandate Agreements

OUSA believes that the Strategic Mandate Agreements (SMAs) have failed to improve upon the previous Multi-Year Accountability Agreement system. As such, students are concerned that the SMAs process has not been formally reviewed, resulting in the failure for the accountability mechanism to continuously adapt and maintain relevancy in Ontario's changing post-secondary environment. Additionally, students are concerned about the siloed approach towards the development of SMAs. As a stakeholder group, students feel that all members of university communities are not adequately engaged in the development of institutional strategic directions. Furthermore, students have raised concerns regarding the performance metrics of the SMAs, highlighting the need for a comprehensive set of sector-wide post-secondary SMA metrics. Finally, the lack of a centralized location where SMA report back data could be publicly stored leaves a significant gap in the broader concept of post-secondary accountability. At present there is no central, publicly accessible location where stakeholders, such as students, can easily access and compare each institution's progress towards their strategic goals.

Inadequate Student Representation

Students are an important stakeholder in post-secondary education and should have a place in university governance that matches this role. Despite this, students are consistently underrepresented on governing bodies, resulting in their voices being overpowered by community members, alumni, faculty and

administration. This concern is also reflected amongst governance committees, where the bulk of work for university senates and governing boards takes place. Furthermore, students are often required to declare a conflict of interest on matters such as tuition or ancillary fees due to the fact that they are responsible for paying these fees. These practices force students out of important conversations and decisions, despite their role as the current primary funders of Ontario's post-secondary institutions.

Insufficient Ombudsman Oversight

Students are concerned about the state of independent accountability processes in Ontario's post-secondary sector. In Ontario, there has been an increase in student complaints both concerning academic and non-academic matters. Additionally, many institutions do not have an institutional Ombudsman office that is available to all students. When institutions do have Ombudsman offices, students are often forced to burden a portion of the full cost of operating the office. Furthermore, there is no office on a provincial level that is tailored specifically to students that can provide guidance around issues/concerns within the post-secondary sector. Finally, students are concerned about the variance of reporting standards for institutional Ombudsman offices, and the lack of a formal connection between institutions and the Ontario Ombudsman.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Improving Quality Assurance Processes

High quality academic programs are essential to Ontario's university system. In order to better evaluate academic programs, the Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance should revise the UUDLEs to model Lumina Foundation's Degree Qualification Profile learning outcomes. During this process, OUCQA should ensure that students are afforded the opportunity to provide input. Additionally, in an effort to improve the impartiality of program quality assurance, the Government of Ontario should task the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO), to take on the quality assurance mechanisms of the current Ontario Universities Council of Quality Assurance. Furthermore, OUSA recommends that the body responsible for Institutional Quality Assurance Processes (IQAPs) should only approve IQAPs that provide province wide metrics based on the evaluation of learning outcomes. These bodies should also develop cyclical program reviews that require feedback from current students and graduates. Finally, in an effort to ensure that all students are receiving a high quality education, the government should mandate, through its quality assurance processes, that new programs be reviewed after the graduation of the program's first cohort prior to moving to eight-year cyclical reviews. In the case that a new program fails its initial review, it should go under a two-year cyclical review process until it passes. If a program is to fail this two-year cyclical review process twice, the body responsible for IQAPs should reject the program following the completion of all current cohorts.

Re-envisioning the Strategic Mandate Agreement Process

As the province continues to create additional iterations of the SMAs, it is important for the framework to be continuously reviewed and improved upon. In order to accomplish this, students recommend that the government advisory panel of students, administrators, faculty, and sector partners to review and guide the development and implementation of the third iteration of SMA. Additionally, the province should mandate that universities must provide meaningful opportunity for student association representation in the development of SMAs, while also establishing standards for consulting with the broader university community. Furthermore, as the government revises and reviews the Strategic Mandate Agreements, students believe that the province should adopt a model similar to the New Zealand Public Accountability Index model for the creation, review, and report-back processes of the SMA framework. Finally, the province should implement metrics that would provide a comprehensive measure of teaching excellence, research performance, community services, and general contributions, while also working with the broader post-secondary community to develop the mechanisms of an Ontario Public Accountability Index model. As institutions report back on the metrics outlined in their SMAs, the government should collect this data and centrally store it in a public manner.

Refining Governance Practices

As post-secondary institutions continue to rely on revenues from student ancillary and tuition fees, there needs to be a shift in the role that students play in institutional governance. In order to reflect this, OUSA recommends that the government mandate a minimum of 13% of the voting seats on university governing boards, and 25% of the voting seats on university senates be allocated to undergraduate student representatives. Additionally, the province should amend any applicable university acts to allocate one undergraduate seat on each governing body to a representative from recognized student associations. Furthermore, the government should mandate that institutions provide student representatives with a reasonable opportunity to engage in discussion when decisions are being made on university governance committees, including decisions on tuition or ancillary fees.

Expanding Ombudsman Mechanisms

Students believe that there is more that can be done as the province continues to extend accountability mechanisms over the post-secondary sector. Mirroring the creation of the Patient Ombudsman, students believe that the Government of Ontario should legislate the creation of a Student Ombudsman. Furthermore, students believe that the government should mandate that universities establish institutional Ombudsman offices on their campuses, and provide institutions with the funding necessary to adequately run those offices. OUSA also believes that the government should develop standardized reporting structures for institutional Ombudsman offices. Finally, Ombudsman Ontario should work with the Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development to formalize connections with institutional Ombudsman offices.

INTRODUCTION

As publicly assisted institutions, universities have a variety of accountability mechanisms to ensure that they are adhering to public goals and priorities. Over the years, there has been no question as to whether or not institutions should be held accountable, due to their use of public dollars. Taxpayers and politicians alike still feel the need for universities to be accountable to government, despite the decline in government funding. In an effort to attempt to address this, the government developed Multi-Year Accountability Agreements with each institution. These agreements were designed with the intention of holding universities accountable to their own strategic initiatives, however, the framework failed to see much success. As a result, the government revised their accountability plan and created the Strategic Mandate Agreements, which are currently entering their second iteration.

Of the gaps that exist in university accountability, one of the most predominant gaps lie with university funding. In response to tight university operating budgets, ancillary fees and tuition costs are rising. Institutions now rely on the fees they gather from students to operate; however, there has been little-to-no shift in the oversight that students have over their fees. As this reliance continues to grow, the government needs to re-evaluate its' accountability mechanisms and explore how institutions can continue to be appropriately accountable to both major revenue sources, government, and students.

The government has taken steps towards increasing the level of accountability within the sector. In 2014, the Government of Ontario extended the role of the Ontario Ombudsman to include municipalities, school boards, and publicly funded universities.[1] Additionally, the Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development is currently working with Ontario's universities to develop the second iteration of the SMAs, which will identify each institution's strengths and strategic priorities for the next three years.[2]

Despite these initiatives, there is still work to be done. Undergraduate representation on university governing bodies does not reflect the contributions they make to university operating budgets, and universities are shutting down campus Ombudsman offices due to tight fiscal situations. Additionally, the current system for measuring the quality of programs fails to have independent and unbiased reviewers, and the Strategic Mandate Agreements have failed to fill the gaps that were found in the Multi-Year Accountability Agreements. Issues such as these need to be addressed if Ontario is to truly have an accountable post-secondary education sector.

The purpose of this policy paper is to capture students' concerns about the current state of accountability mechanisms within the sector.

This paper will offer a series of recommendations that are representative of the principles and concerns of Ontario's undergraduate students. These recommendations will be aimed at the Ontario government and other sector stakeholders, with a respect for evidence-based policy maintained throughout. This paper will highlight and advocate for the following overarching goals: fair student representation on governing bodies, unbiased quality assurance mechanisms, strong accountability reporting systems, and independent and integrated institutional Ombudsman offices.

It is our hope that these evidence-based policy recommendations are seriously considered by the provincial government and that we can work together to improve the accessibility, affordability, quality and accountability of the university sector for students across Ontario.

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[1] Office of the Premier, "Strengthening Accountability and Increasing Transparency," March 6, 2014, https://news.ontario.ca/opo/en/2014/03/strengthening-accountability-and-increasing-transparency.html.
[2] Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations, "Faculty frustrated with lack of consultation on Strategic Mandate Agreements," June 15, 2017, https://ocufa.on.ca/blog-posts/faculty-frustrated-lack-consultation-strategic-mandate-agreements/.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

DEGREE EXPECTATIONS

Principle: Undergraduate degree expectations frameworks should adequately define what students should learn at each level of instruction.

Concern: University Undergraduate Degree Level Expectations (UUDLEs) are too vague and subjective, not adequately defining what a student should have learned after each level of instruction.

Recommendation: In order to better evaluate academic programs, the Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance should revise the UUDLEs to model Lumina Foundation's Degree Qualification Profile learning outcomes.

Recommendation: The Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance should ensure that students are afforded the opportunity to provide feedback during the tuning process of updating UUDLEs.

All students should be receiving valuable knowledge from their university degree. Regardless of what University a student chooses to attend, students should be obtaining the same level of knowledge from similar programs. The Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance has developed University Undergraduate Degree Level Expectations (UUDLEs), which act as a basic benchmark of what students should have learned in their bachelors and their honours bachelor degrees.[3]

As it currently stands, it is the job of universities to evaluate UUDLEs in the context of the programs that they offer. Due to the fact that the language is very vague this leads to a variety of interpretations by the Universities.

This vagueness can be viewed when looking at Section 4, "Communication Skills", in the UUDLEs framework. In a Bachelor's degree students must be able to demonstrate: "The ability to communicate accurately and reliably, orally and in writing to a range of audiences." Whereas a student with a bachelor's Honours degree must be demonstrate: "The ability to communicate information, arguments, and analyses accurately and reliably, orally and in writing to a range of audiences."[4] One can examine that there is little to no distinction between these two expectations outside of additional wording in regards to an honours bachelor's degree. In examining this wording being able to communicate accurately as laid out in a bachelor's degree could include having the ability to communicate information and arguments accurately as laid out in an Honours Bachelors Degree showing very little distinction between these degree levels.

In addition to the lack of differentiation between the two degrees using the UUDLEs Framework, the wording put in place does not give a concrete measure leaving much space to interpret the measure. For instance, in the example above, a bachelor's degree student must be able to communicate "accurately and reliability". There is no formal definition as to what makes a student's communication skills accurate or reliable leaving a great deal of room for interpretation which could lead to students not gaining the proper communication skills similar to those learned in a similar program at another University setting the student behind when they graduate from their respective program upon graduation and what next steps they may choose to take.

Lumina Foundation's Degree Qualification Profile (DQP) has been widely used in post-secondary institutions in the United States. The DQP works to provide a concrete definition of what proficiencies students should be able to demonstrate by the time they complete their degree. The DQP is split up into five sections: (1) Specialized Knowledge, (2) Broad and Integrative Knowledge, (3) Intellectual Skills, (4)

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[3] Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance, "Appendix 1: OCAV's Undergraduate and Graduate Degree Level Expectations" Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance, Accessed October 5, 2017, http://oucqa.ca/framework/appendix-1/.
[4] Ibid.

Applied and Collaborative Learning and (5) Civic and Global Learning. The DQP helps define what a degree means beyond the classroom.[5]

This program also uses "tuning" which is a process mainly conducted by the faculty of a university where all stakeholders (students, graduates, employers, etc.) are invited to provide input on learning expectations for students. By encouraging student input, this gives a holistic view to what students expect to achieve in their academic undergraduate experience. This process does not attempt to standardize curricula; instead it refines the learning objectives that are most important to all stakeholders within higher education. In addition, by giving faculty members the chance to help define these important learning outcomes, it gives them a better understanding of these expectations leaving less space for subjectivity. To further this point, if faculty members are more involved in the decision making process, they are likely to feel more engaged leading to greater dedication in ensuring that these expectations are met to better the higher education experience.[6]

One of the key factors that differentiates Lumina's DQP Framework from UUDLEs is that the measures put in place to ensure that students are achieving learning outcomes with demonstrable measures while encouraging active learning. The DQP framework not only provides better defined objectives to what students should be learning, but also gives University Stakeholders the chance to contribute to what these important learning objectives are increasing their personal investment in the education process.

QUALITY ASSURANCE MECHANISMS

Principle: Universities should ensure that their undergraduate programs are developed to the highest possible quality.

Principle: The province has a responsibility to ensure that Ontario's publicly assisted universities are providing quality programs to undergraduate students.

Concern: The evaluation criteria utilized by the Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance is largely self-measured by the member institutions of the Council of Ontario Universities,

Concern: As an arms length organization of Ontario's publicly assisted universities, the Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance has a perceived bias in program and course quality approval.

Recommendation: The Government of Ontario should task the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO), an unbiased third party, to take on the quality assurance mechanisms of the current Ontario Universities Council of Quality Assurance.

Recommendation: Bodies responsible for IQAPs should only approve institutional IQAPs that provide province wide metrics based on the evaluation of learning outcomes.

Recommendation: Bodies responsible for IQAPs should develop cyclical program reviews that require feedback from current students and graduates.

A student's post secondary experience is defined by the program they pursue, as such it is important that the programs developed by each respective university should be of high quality. Currently, the Ontario Council of Academic Vice-Presidents (OCAV) has put in place Institutional Quality Assurance Processes (IQAP) which is an internal check system for new and existing programs..[7]

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[5] Cliff Adelman, Peter Ewell, Paul Gaston, and Carol Geary Schneider, *The Degree Qualifications Profile*, (Indianapolis: Lumina Foundation, 2014), 5.
[6] Lumina Foundation, "What is Tuning?" Lumina Foundation, Accessed October 13, 2017, http://degreeprofile.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/What-is-Tuning.pdf.
[7] Brian Timney, *Quality Assurance Framework,* (Toronto: Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance, 2017), 2-3

In addition to an internal review system completed by Universities themselves, further measures to hold the university's accountable are conducted by the province. The Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance is responsible for the oversight for the Quality Assurance Framework explained above. Quality council further has the authority to approve or decline the changes made in during this review.[8]

Due to the fact that each University's IQAP is developed based off of University's mission statements and their specific University Degree Level expectations as well as with protocols of this Framework this leaves space for favourable interpretations to which the University believed it is effectively meeting these measures. These criteria are not only written in a biased manner but are conducted on an internal level causing an even greater amount of biased to occur. In addition to this, the body that performs the external review is chosen by the university itself again leaving much space for bias towards the institution.

Due to the fact that the OUCQA is a part of the Council of Ontario Universities (COU) questions can be raised about the validity of this process. When an audit is undergone, no auditors are chosen by the Executive Director of Quality Council and are of an arm's length to the organization. Due to this, it can be argued that this can be subject to institutional influence.

The Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO) is an extension of the Government of Ontario that brings evidence-based research in order to improve post-secondary education in Toronto. An area that HEQCO has focused its efforts on is the evaluation of learning outcomes with emphasis on reliable valid instruments for assessing and measuring these learning outcomes. In addition to being an unbiased third party as HEQCO is not a part of the creation and interpretation of IQAP, the council is able to provide valuable insight and judgement given their overall mandate.[9] Should the government task HECQO to evaluate quality assurance mechanisms, appropriate funding must be provided. In addition to proper funding, HEQCO must have staff that are qualified to review to review specialized programs such as Wilfrid Laurier University's Game Design and well as Brock University's sport management program.

NEW PROGRAM REVIEW

Principle: Program review cycles should operate in a manner that ensures quality in both programs and instruction.

Concern: Currently, new programs must wait eight years before being reviewed again, resulting in the possibility of multiple cohorts of students receiving a lower-than-expected quality of education.

Recommendation: The government should mandate, through its quality assurance processes, that new programs be reviewed after the graduation of the program's first cohort prior to moving to eight-year cyclical reviews.

Recommendation: In the case that a new program fails its initial review, it should go under a two-year cyclical review process until it passes.

Recommendation: If a program is to fail this two-year cyclical review process twice, the body responsible for IQAPs should reject the program following the completion of all current cohorts.

Whether a creating a new program or reviewing an existing one, a review must be done of these programs to ensure they are of high quality. The Quality Council runs eight-year Cyclical Program Reviews. Degree

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[8] Ibid.

[9] Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario. "About Us," Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, Accessed September 25, 2017. http://www.heqco.ca/en-ca/About%20Us/Pages/Home.aspx.

level expectation along with judgment of external scholars provide the benchmarks for assessing these programs.[10]

Over this eight-year time lapse, this allows for multiple cohorts to receive a low quality educational experience. In addition, there could be major identifiable issues in newly introduced programs that emerge early on in their inception and given this review process, multiple years would have to pass before fixing these substantial issues.

In reviewing the program given it's first cohort has graduated, this allows the University to observe all levels of progression throughout the program, giving substantial body of time to effectively evaluate the quality of the program. If the institution passes this initial four-year review, it should move to the typical eight year cyclical reviews. In the case that it does not, the university should re-evaluate the program every two years until it passes. This two-year time frame allows for the observation of the corrective action that has been taken, while limiting the number of students who undergo deficient programs. This being said, this system would be ineffective in the case that the program is given an unlimited number of attempts to pass this cyclical review. This practice would allow the program to continue to run over an infinite amount of time despite serious shortcomings. In order to combat this, Quality Council should reject the program altogether following two failed review cycles in which case the program will be eliminated from the university once all existing cohorts have graduated.

[10] Brian Timney, *Quality Assurance Framework,* (Toronto: Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance, 2017), 19-24.

STRATEGIC MANDATE AGREEMENTS

The strategic mandate agreement (SMA) is a policy instrument that creates a chain of account between institutions and the province. Currently the SMA is a negotiated process, with institutions proposing their self-identified strengths and potential collaboration with other universities to the Ontario Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development (MAESD) for the review. The ministry then mediates between all 21 universities to create individual agreements with a view to moderate differentiation, and maximizing declared strengths of each institution. SMAs last three years, with the government currently finalizing the second round of agreements.

In 2005, the Ontario government introduced the Multi-Year Accountability Agreement (MYAA) framework to create an institutional driven reporting cycle for strategic differentiation objectives, improvements to student access, engagement and satisfaction information, and undergraduate student retention rates. The MYAA system was eventually replaced by the SMA framework, with many institutions absorbing the publication of MYAA metrics into core reporting activities. However, many institutional actors noted a lack of guidance from the province in the creation of MYAAs, and that the relationship created was merely a rhetoric symbolism of accountability[11]. This was the primary flaw of the MYAAs.

The SMAs have not improved upon the flaws of the MYAAs. They are merely vision statements that publish openly the university's perceived strengths in the Ontario system from an academic pursuit and institutional culture perspective. There is no factual basis to the statements, or an opportunity to scrutinize or challenge the assumptions of the framework. The SMA process does little to strategically differentiate or improve the quality of Ontario's institutions. Instead, it has become a manifestation of the institution's opinion of itself, with little opportunity for critical feedback that would produce accountability to public expenditures and better governance. Therefore, OUSA proposes the four broad thematic changes to the SMA framework:

- Review of the SMA Framework
- Improving the SMA Framework
- SMA3 Metrics
- Data Collection

These themes are guided by three principles: (1) the provision of public funds to universities creates an obligation for oversight by the province of those expenditures; (2) accountability is viewed as the stewardship of Ontario universities by their governing bodies, as publicly supported institutions, with a view to openness, justification, and independence; and, (3) accountability mechanisms should clearly define the objects, standards, agents and means for universities. These principles provide the justification for an independent and open system of account for universities.

REVIEWING THE SMA FRAMEWORK

Principle: Accountability mechanisms require regular review and renewal to adapt and maintain relevance in the changing post-secondary context.

Concern: SMAs have not been reviewed since their introduction, and no assessment has been made of their effectiveness in delivering government funding or policy.

Recommendation: The province should establish an advisory panel of students, administrators, faculty, and sector partners to review and guide the development and implementation of SMA3.

If the province wishes to continue with the current Strategic Mandate Agreement (SMA) system, at minimum it requires review and eventual improvement. Currently, the SMA framework does not clearly define the objects, standards, agents, and means for universities. The province's guidance does state that

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[11] V.E. Díaz, "Accountability Agreements for Ontario Universities: The Balancing Character of a Policy Instrument", *Revue Gouvernance* 131 (2016): 40–70.

SMAs will identify the strengths of each institution, and the steps to be taken to differentiate institutions at a provincial level.

The province should review the principles discussed above, with a view to improving the accountability chains between university and government. In addition, the evidence discussed in the following sections would provide an excellent foundation for the creation of performance instruments that are meaningful and extend public accountability into the post-secondary sphere[12].

Therefore, the province should establish a stakeholder advisory panel to review and suggest improvements to the SMA framework, to provide better public policy value, and create a meaningful accountability tool. The involvement of universities, students, and private enterprise will build ownership of the model, and create a made in Ontario tool that all stakeholders can be proud of in their respective places across the system. Returning to the Auditor General's report may be helpful in the development of the objectives for this review. [13]

IMPROVING THE SMA PROCESS

Principle: SMAs should be structured to provide deference to the expertise of universities, while opening avenues for peer review and public scrutiny.

Principle: All members of university communities should be engaged in the development and management of their SMAs.

Concern: SMAs do not adequately differentiate, guide, or set strategic direction for Ontario universities.

Concern: At some institutions faculty, students, and alumni are not adequately engaged in the development of their institution's SMAs.

Recommendation: The province should adopt a model similar to the New Zealand Public Accountability Index model for the creation, review, and report-back processes of the SMA framework.

Recommendation: The province should mandate universities provide meaningful opportunity for student association representation in the development of SMAs.

Recommendation: The province should establish standards for the engagement of university communities on SMAs.

Public accountability is composed of three main principles: openness, justification, and independence. Openness requires the clear and accessible transfer of information between principal funders and university agents, as well as all relevant stakeholders. Justification means that any system that holds agents to account must be composed of a common standard, and allow for agents to justify their actions to principals. Finally, the independence of agents must be respected, however, recognizing that independence cannot exist without the presence of an accounting framework. Principals must not interfere in the independent authority of agents less they reduce the operational effectiveness of having managers in the first place. Consequently, agents must not unduly obstruct the ability of principals to hold decisions to an account, lest they erode the trust and independence invested in them as managers of publicly funded institutions[14]. Therefore, it is important to extend funding accountability beyond the narrow definition of finances to a holistic definition of activity[15]. Finances are one small component of university decision-making, and do not adequately capture the outcomes of financial resource allocation

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[12] S. Khoo, L.K. Taylor, and V. Andreotti, "Ethical Internationalzation, Neo-Liberal Restructuring, and 'Beating the Bounds' of Higher Education," in *Assembling and Governing the Higher Education Institution: Democracy, Social Justice, and Leadership in Global Higher Education*, ed. L. Shultz and M. Viczko, Palgrave Studies in Global Citizenship Education and Democracy (London: Springer, 2016), 85–110.

[13] Office of the Provincial Auditor, "Accountability Framework for University Funding," *1999 Annual Report,* (Toronto: Queen's Printer of Ontario, 1999), http://www.auditor.on.ca/en/content/annualreports/arreports/en99/313en99.pdf

[14] D. Coy, M. Fischer, and T. Gordon, 'Public Accountability: A New Paradigm for College and University Annual Reports', *Critical Perspectives on Accounting* 12 (2001): 1–31.

[15] Harvey S. Rosen, Jean-Francois Wen, and Tracy Snoddon, *Public Finance in Canada*, 4th Canadian Ed. (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 2012).

decisions[16]. A broader and more holistic system of assessment would document universities' teaching excellence, research impact, community service, and general contributions to the sector.

Building from the earlier discussion of university accountability instruments, improvements to the SMA framework process could be implemented by using the already well-established, reliable and proven New Zealand Public Accountability Index (PAI)[17]. The PAI system requires a vision statement over multiple years (ie. SMAs), an annual report, and an audit mechanism. This system of account is a tool to improve the overall excellence of universities by capturing:

- The main goals of the institution
- The strategic objectives in teaching, research and community service
- The resource allocation plan to meet these goals and objectives
- The strengths and weaknesses of the institution
- The opportunities and threats of the institutional environment
- The common system-wide metrics that will create a chain of account

This content provides a holistic system of measuring university performance and meeting strategic goals in an open and transparent manner[18]. In the Ontario context, the absence of negatives in the SMAs means little to no opportunity for meaningful positives. Both must exist in a balanced manner to provide any opportunity for improvement. In addition to this review, the province should publish guidance for institutions on how to best engage their respective communities in the development and maintenance of SMAs. Since it is a strategic document that outlines the institutional strengths and avenues for change, all stakeholders have a role in implementing the objectives of the SMA. In particular, the university senate, having been invested with academic control of institutions, should be the primary guiding direction of SMAs[19]. Universities should lead the improvement of comprehensive SMAs, demonstrating leadership on provincial policy.

The current report back structure for SMA metrics provides no opportunity for government commentary, or the comparison of institution to institution. This situation is counter to the principles of openness and justification, as the SMA feedback structure is trapped within the institution, and differences of action between institutions cannot be strategically justified on a common scale. Furthermore, the independence of each institution is harmed as they are unknowingly relegated or promoted in the context of government funding decisions. Smaller universities do not know their standing in comparison to larger institutions, and the hope of providing a level institutional field is harmed as power relationships are buried in unique contexts of each institution.

Therefore, the publication of an annual accountability report under the New Zealand PAI model would create a feedback mechanism for the public and government to judge the expenditure of public funds, while creating a new communication channel for universities to factually state the rationale for decisions, and conditions of their affairs with the province. The next section will provide more detail on the potential metrics that could be incorporated into a more comprehensive and accountable form of the SMA process.

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[16] T.H. Beechy, "'Improved" Accounting for Universities," in *The University as a Business?*, ed. P. Rondo-Brovetto and I. Saliterer (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2011), 53–64.

[17] Chenbo Guo, Zahir Uddin Ahmed, Humayun Kabir, and Anil Narayan, "Use of Public Accountability Index (PAI) to Assess the Accountability Practices of New Zealand," (8th Asia-Pacific Interdisciplinary Research in Accounting Conference, Melbourne, 2016).

[18] P. Eichorn, "Determinants for University Excellence," in *The University as a Business?*, ed. P. Rondo-Brovetto and I. Saliterer (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2011), 33–38.

[19] M. Viczko and L. Shultz, 'Conclusion: Reflections on Assemblage in the Governance of Higher Education', in *Assembling and Governing the Higher Education Institution: Democracy, Social Justice, and Leadership in Global Higher Education*, (London: Springer, 2016), 439–44

SMA3 METRICS

> **Principle:** Performance metrics should clearly define the inputs, outputs, current state, and desired outcomes of the measured entity.
>
> **Principle:** SMA3 metrics should capture provincial policy objectives for the Ontario post-secondary environment, while providing deference to institutions to build from their academic strengths.
>
> **Principle:** There should be a comprehensive set of sector-wide post-secondary SMA3 metrics, while providing an opportunity for institutions to commit to unique metrics.
>
> **Concern:** Currently the only system-wide metrics for SMAs focus on graduate employment.
>
> **Concern:** The SMA1 and SMA2 metrics focus solely the strengths of each institution, counter to the broad definition of public accountability.
>
> **Recommendation:** The province should implement metrics that would provide a comprehensive measure of teaching excellence, research performance, community services, and general contributions.
>
> **Recommendation:** The province should work collaboratively with institutions, community members, students and private enterprise to develop the guiding principles of an Ontario public accountability index model for SMAs.
>
> **Recommendation:** The province should establish an advisory panel of sector stakeholders to develop the metrics, methodology, and audit mechanisms of an Ontario PAI model.

Public accountability is composed of three main principles: openness, justification, and independence. Openness requires the clear and accessible transfer of information between principal funders and university agents, as well as all relevant stakeholders. Justification means that any system that holds agents to account must be composed of a common standard, and allow for agents to justify their actions to principals. Finally, the independence of agents must be respected, however, recognizing that independence cannot exist without the presence of an accounting framework. Principals must not interfere in the independent authority of agents less they reduce the operational effectiveness of having managers in the first place. Consequently, agents must not unduly obstruct the ability of principals to hold decisions to an account, lest they erode the trust and independence invested in them as managers of publicly funded institutions[20].

Of the current SMA metrics only two are collected at a system-wide level: graduate employment[21]. The province is currently developing other metrics with the sector, but these should be in concert with a comprehensive review of the SMA process. All other metrics are institutional level, and thus cannot be compared to other institutions, nor used to create a baseline for the discussion of strategic movements that would establish a roadmap for differentiation.

The reliable and proven New Zealand PAI model judges institutions along the following system-wide metrics:
- Overview of university activities
- Financial expenditures and breakdowns by funding source
- Attainment of SMA goals and indicators
- Description of meeting general strategic goals
- Description of meeting teaching strategic goals

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[20] D. Coy, M. Fischer, and T. Gordon, 'Public Accountability: A New Paradigm for College and University Annual Reports', *Critical Perspectives on Accounting* 12 (2001): 1–31.

[21] Government of Ontario, "College and University Strategic Mandate Agreements," Government of Ontario, accessed October 13, 2017, https://www.ontario.ca/page/college-and-university-strategic-mandate-agreements.

- Description of meeting research strategic goals
- Description of meeting community service strategic goals[22]

These items build from already existing activities undertaken by universities such as establishing strategic plans, creating and monitoring performance metrics under the SMA process, and meeting other government obligations. A stakeholder advisory panel would develop the common metrics, methodology and audit mechanisms for the SMA3 process. Institutions could then proposed additional metrics that would provide justification for their strategic directions. This approach would provide the desired independence for institutions, while maintaining broad system accountability. These metrics would then lead into an annual report published under the pretext of the agreed SMA.

This report would then be reviewed by MAESD, and judged against the PAI criteria (Table 1) as adapted to the Ontario SMA framework, with universities receiving an aggregate score as well as sub area scores. While the current weighting criteria is backed by multiple consultations and research studies in New Zealand, it may be helpful for Ontario to establish their own weighting of the sub areas given our unique post-secondary context. OUSA has provided potential metrics that could be used for each sub area in Table 1 for illustrative purposes.

Table 1 - Component breakdown of the Public Accountability Index[23]

Sub Area	Potential Metrics	Score
Timeliness of submission	Submission deadline met (/5) Completeness of submission (/5)	/10
Overview	Description of university activities and goals (/2) Description of university environment threats and opportunities (/5)	/7
SMA goals & indicators	Progress on unique SMA indicators (/10)	/10
Financial	Provision of adequate financial statements (/15) Description of links between goals and financial allocations (/10)	/25
General service	Provincial general service metrics (/4) Institutional general service metrics (/4)	/8
Teaching	Provincial teaching excellence metrics (/15) Institutional teaching excellence metrics (/10)	/25
Research	Provincial research performance metrics (/10) Institutional research performance metrics (/3)	/13
Community service	Institutional community service metrics (/2)	/2

These scores could be used as an immediate feedback mechanism for the province to hold appointees and university boards to account on their strategic goals. The province establishes common system metrics, while allowing institutions to develop their own metrics that fit their unique institutional context. The annual report and index score should be linked to the SMA process, with three annual reporting cycles composing one SMA cycle. Thus, the annual report would then feed into recommendations for improving the PAI score of institutions, and aligning the strengths of institutions given their annual performance, over the course of the next agreement.

Wilfrid Laurier University (WLU) provides an excellent example of what an annual accountability report would look like within the context of an expanded SMA framework. [24] Not only does WLU report on SMA

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[22] Chenbo Guo, Zahir Uddin Ahmed, Humayun Kabir, and Anil Narayan, "Use of Public Accountability Index (PAI) to Assess the Accountability Practices of New Zealand," (8th Asia-Pacific Interdisciplinary Research in Accounting Conference, Melbourne, 2016).
[23] David Coy and Keith Dixon, "The Public Accountability Index: Crafting a Parametric Disclosure for Annual Reports," *The British Accounting Review* 36, no. 1 (1 March, 2004): doi:10.1016/j.bar.2003.10.003.

metrics, but also reports on their finances, governance structure, institutional community context, teaching and research objectives in a centralized location. This informational structure should be used as a model in developing a new strategic mandate agreement and annual accountability report system.

Good reporting will improve public trust in universities, and generate a positive dialogue that depoliticizes the narrative surrounding provincial oversight of institutions. As Cutt *et al* note:

> Experience elsewhere suggests that the universities must do it or have it done for them, and if it is done to them, it probably will not be done well. Of course, it is difficult, but the universities are in the business of addressing difficult problems, and could and should make the development and continuing refinement of such a framework a major research priority.[25]

Recognizing the sentiment expressed in these statements, justifies that a system of better accountability is needed in the province, but one where the entire sector is empowered to develop the methodology and standards of reporting, while the province is mandated to establish the guiding framework and establish a relationship of account between universities and stakeholders. Universities should not be fearful of a system of account they have the authority to design. Instead, they should relish in the opportunity to justify their decisions to the province, and demonstrate their valid concerns with the established state of provincial and university funding relationships.

DATA COLLECTION

Principle: Data collection from the SMA report backs should be utilized to ensure continuous improvement in Ontario's post-secondary education system.

Principle: Data collected from the SMAs should be made publicly available.

Concern: SMA report back data is not centrally stored in a publicly accessible manner.

Recommendation: The government should, publicly by default, centrally store data collected by the SMA report backs.

There is a trend in Ontario's post-secondary sector around the lack of centrally accessible data. In regards to Strategic Mandate Agreements, all data collected and reported back are stored on institutional websites, many of which are difficult to navigate. There is no public report from the government on the information they gather, and there is no public way of reporting that the data collected from the SMA report backs is being utilized to ensure that Ontario's post-secondary institutions are continuously improving.

Recently, there have been efforts to some aspects of university data. In 2015 Etobicoke Centre MPP Yvan Baker introduced Bill 127, the *Pathways to Post-secondary Excellence Act (Post-secondary Educational Report), 2015*, which was reintroduced in 2016. This bill calls for the collection of a variety of university data, such as the total cost of education at respective institutions, or the admission requirements for every program in the province, all of which would be published in a centralized manner.[26] Bills such as this highlight the data gap that currently exists in the post-secondary education sector, and emphasize the need for centralized data.

As such, this kind of initiative needs to be reflected directly in the Strategic Mandate Agreement process. Researchers and students should not have to go to individual university websites to see what each

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[24] Wilfrid Laurier University, "Public Accountability," Wilfrid Laurier University, accessed October 8, 2017, https://www.wlu.ca/about/public-accountability/index.html.

[25] J. Cutt, L. Trotter, and C. Lee, "Performance Measurement and Accountability in Canadian Universities," *Financial Accountability and Management* 9, no. 4 (1993): 266

[26] Colin Aitchison, "Continuing the Push for Accessible University Data: or what Bill 127 could have accomplished," *Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance*, September 19, 2016, accessed October 13, 2017, http://www.ousa.ca/blog_continuing_the_push_for_accessible_university_data

institution reported back to the province as a result of their SMAs. The government should ensure that all the data they collect from the SMAs is centrally stored in a publicly accessible manner, in order to increase the transparency and accountability of the SMA process. The public, as funders of universities, deserve access to the information on the successes and failures of Ontario's publicly assisted universities' strategic initiatives.

UNIVERSITY GOVERNANCE

GOVERNING BODY REPRESENTATION

Principle: Students are an important stakeholder in PSE and should have a place in university governance that matches this role.

Concern: Students are not adequately represented on university boards of governance and senates.

Concern: Low student representation results in students not having the same ability as other students to contribute to the debate at the board level

Concern: Boards can increase membership without consideration for proportion of student representation.

Recommendation: The province should mandate a minimum of 13% of voting seats on university governing boards for undergraduate student representatives by amending applicable university acts.

Recommendation: The province should mandate a minimum of 25% of voting seats on university senates for undergraduate student representatives by amending applicable university acts.

Recommendation: The province should amend applicable university acts to allocate one of the undergraduate seats on boards of governance and senates to a representative of recognized student associations.

Students are important stakeholders in any post-secondary institution and deserve a place in the governance of the institutions at which they study. Student representation allows universities the opportunity to engage with students and involve them in their internal decision making process at an institutional level. Students, being the ones who are the 'consumers' of the products and services of universities, are best placed to voice issues that are negatively affecting students so they can be addressed, or highlight opportunities to enhance the student living and learning experience.[27] Too often student representation on university boards of governance and senates is at a level where students cannot effectively contribute to this process.

As can be seen in Table 5 representation on boards of governance at Ontario universities can vary between 2.8% and 8.5%. In almost all cases the low representation prevents students from being able to effectively contribute to this process. With only approximately 2-3 students on each board, which can have upwards of 30 members, the student's perspective is often overlooked or forgotten. This difference is especially notable when formal votes are required.

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[27] Luescher-Mamashela, Thierry M., "Student representation in university decision making: good reasons, a new lens?" *Studies in Higher Education* 38, no. 10 (2013): 1442-1456.

Table 5 - Student representation on OUSA member institution governing boards[28]

Institution	Undergraduate	Total (% undergraduate students)
Brock University	2	32 (6.3%)
Laurentian University	2*	25 (8.5%)
McMaster University	1	35 (2.8%)
Queen's University	2**	25 (8.0%)
Trent University	2*	26 (7.7%)
University of Waterloo	3	36 (8.3%)
Western University	2	30 (6.7%)
Wilfrid Laurier University	2	34 (5.9%)

*Student seats not specified as graduate or undergraduate
**Includes Rector, who can be a graduate or undergraduate student. The current Rector is an undergraduate student.

In comparison, student representation on university senates is higher, but still inadequate. As shown in Table 6 student representation at our member institutions ranges between 10% and 22%. Even at these numbers students are underrepresented at most institutions. The role of senates makes a higher student representation important because their positioning makes them the most appropriate individuals to be able to provide insight into current teaching and learning practices in the university setting – one of a university senates foremost mandates.

Table 6 - Student representation on OUSA member institution senates[29]

Institution	Undergraduate	Total (% students)
Brock University	6	71 (8.5%)
Laurentian University	13	74 (18%)
McMaster University	6	66 (9.1%)
Queen's University	14	68 (21%)
Trent University	10	49 (20%)
University of Waterloo	8	91 (8.8%)
Western University	14	102 (13%)
Wilfrid Laurier University	7	77 (9.1%)

To ensure proper student representation at the highest levels of governance OUSA recommends that the province mandate a minimum proportion of undergraduate student seats on boards of governors and university senates. Implementing student membership as a proportion of the full board population would prevent 'dilution' of student membership in the case of an increase in the board and senate composition. Two examples in the Canadian context for boards of governance are Alberta and British Columbia, who have both implemented minimum student representation on boards of governance. Alberta has mandated 2 out of 16 seats on the boards of its technical institutions for student representatives selected by the student unions.[30] BC has adopted a proportional representation model where there are two students on a 15-seat board, except for the University of British Columbia, which has 3 student representatives out of 21 members.[31] In both cases this representation affords students approximately 13% of the seats on the boards of governance of their institutions.

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[28] Information gathered from respective institutional websites.
[29] Information gathered from respective institutional websites.
[30] *Post-Secondary Learning Act,* Statutes of Alberta, 2003, Chapter P-19.5, http://www.qp.alberta.ca/documents/Acts/p19p5.pdf
[31] *University Act*, RSBC 1996, Chapter 468, http://www.bclaws.ca/civix/document/id/complete/statreg/00_96468_01#section19

Increased student representation allows institutions an opportunity to listen to the student voice and identify university-wide issues proving an earlier opportunity to address student concerns. Additionally, the inclusion of student voices in the development of institutional policies and procedures ensures they are informed by the experiences of students, and moving into implementation, have the continued support of students and student unions.[32]

Finally, recognizing the responsibility of student unions to represent and advocate for their members, recognized student unions should be allocated one of the student seats on boards of governance and senates. The presence of student unions representatives would afford them the opportunity to represent their members at the highest level of governance. Their connections with other student groups and clubs on campuses would also allow them the opportunity engage other students in the governance process of the university where appropriate.

In all cases, to ensure that student representatives can effectively participate, institutions should provide training for students elected or appointed to boards of governance and university senates. This training should seek to provide the necessary background for students on the budget process, governance processes, committee responsibilities and additional topics as made necessary by an institutions governance structure.

GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE REPRESENTATION

Principle: The bulk of university governance work happens at the committee level and students should have the ability to contribute meaningfully at that level.

Concern: Students are not adequately represented on university board and senate committees.

Concern: Students schedules are often not taken into account in the planning of board and senate committee meeting times.

Recommendation: The province should amend the university acts to require voting undergraduate student seats on university governance committees.

Recommendation: The province should amend the university acts to require universities to provide a reasonable opportunity for student presence when decisions are made on university governance committees.

Much of the detailed work that is required to inform the discussion and decisions of boards of governance and senates is often delegated to committees and subcommittees. Often the work prepared and debate conducted at this level result in the final version of recommendations that move forward to the full governance body. In many cases the large size of boards of governance and senates does not allow for a full debate on a motion that has already been debated and amended by those with specific knowledge of each project.

Currently the ability of students to participate at this committee level of governance is limited. First, with only 2-3 student board members at most institutions there are not enough students to cover the numerous committees that are a part of the complex governance structures of universities. Additionally, students are often not consulted in the preparation of meeting schedules and agendas; making it difficult to allow student participation even when they are granted a position on a university governance committee.

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32 Higher Education Funding Council for Wales, "Why students are involved in the governance of institutions providing higher education in Wales," Higher Education Funding Council for Wales, accessed October 27th, 2017, https://www.hefcw.ac.uk/documents/policy_areas/learning_and_teaching/Final%20impact%20document.pdf

To allow for student participation the province must adopt recommendations allowing for a minimum proportion of students on boards of governance and senates and in addition require universities to allocate a voting seat on each governance committee to a student representative. In all cases decisions should not be made without a reasonable opportunity for the presence of this student member to ensure that they can contribute to the debate and exercise a vote. In cases where it is not possible to be present they should be afforded the opportunity to participate via telephone or provide comments through the secretary of the committee in question.

VOTING RIGHTS

Principle: Students should be considered full members of institutional governing boards with all applicable rights and responsibilities.

Concern: Student representatives on governing boards are often not able to vote on issues such as tuition, which have a large effect on the operations of the university.

Recommendation: The province should amend Ontario University Acts to state a governor who is a student may take part in discussions and vote on matters relating to student issues, including but not limited to tuition and ancillary fees.

In some cases, student membership on boards of governance have been subject to limitations in terms of their ability to access and vote on relevant materials that have a large impact on the operations of the university. One of the most important areas in which student members see their rights limited is during discussion on tuition and fee changes as it is often declared a conflict of interest. This is an area where boards have effectively limited students' ability to contribute even when the reasons behind tuition and fee changes are often related to the provision of services on university campuses. As previously stated, students as 'consumers' of these services and programs are often the most appropriate group to provide input on why such changes may or may not be necessary.

Some universities have already taken steps to ensure that students are able to contribute to discussion around issues such as tuition and fees by clarifying their conflict of interest guidelines. For example, Queens University Board of Trustees Code of Conflict states: "a conflict arises when the interest, direct or indirect, of a Trustee, his or her spouse, partner, sibling or child (personal interest), conflicts or appears to conflict with the duty owed by the Trustee to the University."[33]

The Code of Conflict however additionally recognizes the importance of allowing students to participate in important decisions that can affect the boarder operations and provides a clarification that states "A Trustee who is a student may take part in discussions and vote on matters relating to tuition"[34]

The province should provide guidance to other universities through an amendment to university acts that it is not a conflict of interest for students to vote on tuition as a member of boards of governance because along with all other trustees they have a duty to contribute to the larger conversations around the operations and financial sustainability of the institution and should have the same opportunity to contribute as any other member of the board.

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[33] Queen's University, *Queen's University Board of Trustees Code of Conduct*, (May 6, 2016),
http://www.queensu.ca/secretariat/sites/webpublish.queensu.ca.uslcwww/files/files/trustees/Code%20of%20Conduct%20%26%2
0Conflict%20of%20Interest%202016-17.pdf
[34] Ibid.

OMBUDSMAN OFFICES

CREATION OF A STUDENT OMBUDSMAN

Principle: Students attending publicly assisted universities should have a provincial option to address issues they believe were addressed inappropriately on their campuses.

Concern: There is no office on a provincial level that can provide guidance to students around issues/concerns within the post-secondary sector.

Recommendation: The Government of Ontario should legislate the creation of a Student Ombudsman.

The current Ontario Ombudsman expanded its oversight of post-secondary sector in 2016 to oversee the MUSH Sector (Municipalities, Universities, School boards, and Hospitals); therefore overseeing 21 publicly assisted universities.[35] From the first full year of the Ontario Ombudsman oversight, 175 complaints were made about 19 different universities.[36] The Annual Report of the Ontario Ombudsman found that the most number of complaints came from academic appeals processes. The Ontario Ombudsman also received a variety of other common concerns relating to fees, admissions, and program requirements.[37]

There is currently no office in the office of the Ontario Ombudsman that focuses solely on post-secondary education. For better focus and accountability, creating a Student Ombudsman in the Office of the Ontario Ombudsman would benefit student dispute processes.

A Patient Ombudsman position was created in December 2014 as part of Bill 8, the Public Sector and MPP Accountability and Transparency Act, 2014.[38] This position was created to help people who have an unresolved complaint about their care at a hospital or other health care services.[39] The Patient Ombudsman helps patients who have not had their concerns resolved through existing complaint mechanisms in a way that meets their needs.[40]

It would be beneficial to develop the same model for a Student Ombudsman in the Ontario Ombudsman Office. The current Ontario Ombudsman oversees a range of matters such as labour, municipalities, health, employment, etc. It would be more effective if there were a Student Ombudsman to specifically investigate complaints about post-secondary institution processes around disputes and resolution.

The selection for the Student Ombudsman position should be similar to the Patient Ombudsman three-stage process:

> Stage 1: The Student Ombudsman will identify key skills, competencies and training. This stage will include a public consultation.
>
> Stage 2: Assess, select and recommend a Student Ombudsman.

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[35] Office of the Ombudsman of Ontario, *2016-2017 Annual Report,* (Toronto: Office of the Ombudsman of Ontario, 2017), 47.

[36] Ibid, 49.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, "Ontario's First Patient Ombudsman," Government of Ontario, accessed October 28, 2017, https://news.ontario.ca/mohltc/en/2015/07/ontarios-first-patient-ombudsman.html

[39] Ibid

[40] Ibid

Stage 3: Finalize appointment of a Student Ombudsman. [41]

Just like the Patient Ombudsman, the Student Ombudsman should be appointed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council and then housed in the Ontario Ombudsman Office.[42] This would ensure that the holder of the office of Student Ombudsman is decided on by experts and has the applicable expertise to take on cases.

OMBUDSMAN OFFICES ON UNIVERSITY CAMPUSES

> **Principle:** Every post-secondary institution should have an Ombudsman Office on campus.
>
> **Principle:** Students attending university should have access to dispute resolution processes on their campuses.
>
> **Concern:** There has been an increase in student complaints both concerning academic and non-academic matters,
>
> **Concern:** Some universities do not have an Ombudsman office that is available to all students.
>
> **Recommendation:** The government should mandate that universities establish Ombudsman offices on their campuses.

The Ontario Ombudsman expanded its oversight of post-secondary sector in 2016. The Ontario Ombudsman oversees 21 publicly assisted universities.[43] From the first full year of the Ontario Ombudsman oversight, 175 complaints were made about 19 different universities.[44] The Annual Report of the Ontario Ombudsman found that the most number of complaints came from academic appeals processes. The Ontario Ombudsman also received a variety of other common concerns were relating to fees, admissions, and program requirements.[45]

The Annual Report of the 2016-2017 of the Office of the Ombudsman of Ontario recommends that "all universities establish independent and impartial ombudsman offices"[46] It is important that the government mandates universities to establish Ombudsman offices on all Ontario campuses. It is more accessible for students to file disputes on issues surrounding their educational experience.

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[41] Ibid
[42] Ibid
[43] Office of the Ombudsman of Ontario, *2016-2017 Annual Report,* (Toronto: Office of the Ombudsman of Ontario, 2017), 47.
[44] Ibid, 49.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Office of the Ombudsman of Ontario, 2017, 49.
[46] Ibid.

FUNDING OMBUDSMAN OFFICES ON UNIVERSITY CAMPUSES

Principle: Students should not have to burden the cost of dispute resolution mechanisms on their campuses.

Concern: At many institutions, students are forced to burden either the full cost or partial cost of dispute resolution mechanisms on university campuses.

Recommendation: The provincial government should provide institutions with the funding necessary to adequately run Ombudsman offices on university campuses.

Only 10 of 21 universities currently have an interdependent ombudsman office on their campus, and their powers differ greatly. Table 1 details the funding and jurisdiction of each of the 10 ombudsman offices. Those not listed do not have an ombudsman office.

Most ombudsman offices are joint ventures between undergraduate student associations, graduate student associations, and university administrations, funded trilaterally or bilaterally to ensure distance from the administrative machinery of either organization. Every ombudsman office remains independent of university structure in order to provide objective and impartial advice to those with a grievance. Some ombudsman offices report to advisory committees, academic vice-presidents or provosts, presidents of universities, or governing bodies of the institution.

Table 7: Funding arrangements of Ombudsman offices at OUSA member institutions

Funded By	Institution
University	Queen's University
Student Associations & University	Brock University McMaster University Western University
N/A (No Ombudsman Office)	Laurentian University Trent University University of Waterloo Wilfrid Laurier University

Every ombudsman office remains independent of university structure in order to provide objective and impartial advice to those with a grievance. An ombudsman typically has the power to investigate and report on various kinds of interactions or errors in operation of an organization. This will allow students, staff and faculty to have recourse to solve any grievances they might have through an objective, independent body with in-depth knowledge of their institution.

Some institutions removed their ombudsman office. This means that a sudden shortfall of funds could result in the closure of this essential service. This was the case at the University of Windsor, when the ombudsman office folded into the human rights office. The Algoma University Students' Union (AUSU) board announced the removal of the ancillary fee for the Algoma University Ombudsman Fee ($3) due to a decrease in enrolment rates that could not sustain the funding of the ombudsman office.[47]

Wilfrid Laurier University also removed their ombudsman office and hired a Dispute Resolution and Support staffer instead. This office is funded solely by the administration. While the public can trust that the vast majority of university interactions are performed in good faith, mistakes and personal biases sometimes enter usually fair and balanced processes. There can be criticisms that being hired by the university can cause more biased compared to having an independent Ombudsman Office. This is the case for all large organizations, and universities are no different. But as universities are unique they must be

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[47] Hyderman, Eva and Matt Siklosi, "AUSU Annual General Members Meeting Called," *The Sentient,* (March 8, 2017), http://www.ausu82.ca/the-sentient/ausu-annual-general-members-meeting-called

held accountable to their stakeholders, and as such they must subject to their practices to independent review.

Students should not have to miss out on having an Ombudsman Office on campus because there are not enough students to cover the operating cost.

While it is a testament to student association and university initiative that so many have joined together to create ombudsman offices, they should not be forced to do so. Neither have an abundance of funds with which to finance the operations of ombudsman offices. Universities like Windsor, Algoma, and perhaps Laurier should not have to remove their ombudsman office because it is more cost effective to have a human rights or dispute resolution office – which are hired by the university and tend to have a bias.

The Annual Report of the 2016-2017 of the Office of the Ombudsman of Ontario recommends that "all universities establish independent and impartial ombudsman offices"[48] Funding for ombudsman offices must come from a reliable, external source. Only the government can provide such a guarantee. The government should provide each university with the necessary funding to create their own ombudsman office. An ombudsman typically has the power to investigate and report on various kinds of interactions or errors in operation of an organization. This will allow students, staff and faculty to have recourse to solve any grievances they might have through an objective, independent body with in-depth knowledge of their institution. This funding should stipulate that the office will have authority over all matters and may make non-binding recommendations to the appropriate institutional authorities. These offices should provide annual reports to whomever they report to, which contain recommendations for solving systemic institutional challenges. These recommendations should be available to the community at large.

Having an Ombudsman Office on every campus is preferred in contrast to other forms of dispute resolution offices because of it is an independent and impartial body, which will hold post-secondary institutions accountable for their systemic administrative problems.

FORMALIZED CONNECTION WITH THE ONTARIO OMBUDSMAN

Principle: Institutional Ombudsman offices and the provincial Ombudsman offices should have a formalized connection.

Principle: Regardless of institution, students should expect the same reporting standards at on campus Ombudsman offices.

Concern: There is currently no formal connection between the Ontario Ombudsman and institutional Ombudsman offices.

Concern: Ombudsman office reporting standards vary from institution to institutions.

Recommendation: Ombudsman Ontario should develop standardized reporting structures for Ombudsman offices on university campuses.

Recommendation: Ombudsman Ontario should work with the Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development to formalize connections with institutional Ombudsman offices.

A concern that exists amongst students is the lack of standardized reporting between institutional Ombudsman offices. Currently, institutions that have their own Ombudsman office have no formal connection to the Ontario Ombudsman. Instead, these offices operate in silos, and form their reporting structures based on internal institutional policy. As a result, this current set-up can prevent institutional Ombudsman offices from serving as an unbiased accountability mechanism.

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[48] Office of the Ombudsman of Ontario, 2017, 49.
[48] Ibid.

McMaster University found a route around any perceived bias by creating the Ombudsman office as an independent body "governed by a group of stakeholders none of whom it was expressly stated in the policy were the employers of the Ombudsman."[49] While this is one solution, a more streamlined solution would be to develop a formalized connection between campus Ombudsman offices and Ombudsman Ontario.

By creating a standardized connection between Ombudsman Ontario and institutional Ombudsman offices, the University Ombudsman system would be able to benefit from standardized reporting structures. Additionally, there would be a confirmed level of independent oversight from the campus offices, removing any perceived bias from the office due to ties to the specific institution. This would allow for students to feel more comfortable utilizing the office and provide them with the confidence that they are receiving fair and equal judgement.

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[49] Agree, "Creating the Office of the Ombudsman," Agree Dispute Resolution, accessed October 7, 2017, http://www.agreeinc.com/ombudsman.html.

POLICY STATEMENT

ACCOUNTABILITY

Whereas: Undergraduate degree expectations frameworks should adequately define what students should learn at each level of instruction.

Whereas: Universities should ensure that their undergraduate programs are developed to the highest possible quality.

Whereas: The province has a responsibility to ensure that Ontario's publicly assisted universities are providing quality programs to undergraduate students.

Whereas: Program review cycles should operate in a manner that ensures quality in both programs and instruction.

Whereas: Accountability mechanisms require regular review and renewal to adapt and maintain relevance in the changing post-secondary context.

Whereas: SMAs should be structured to provide deference to the expertise of universities, while opening avenues for peer review and public scrutiny.

Whereas: All members of university communities should be engaged in the development and management of their SMAs.

Whereas: Performance metrics should clearly define the inputs, outputs, current state, and desired outcomes of the measured entity.

Whereas: SMA3 metrics should capture provincial policy objectives for the Ontario post-secondary environment, while providing deference to institutions to build from their academic strengths.

Whereas: There should be a comprehensive set of sector-wide post-secondary SMA3 metrics, while providing an opportunity for institutions to commit to unique metrics.

Whereas: Data collection from the SMA report backs should be utilized to ensure continuous improvement in Ontario's post-secondary education system.

Whereas: Data collected from the SMAs should be made publicly available.

Whereas: Students are an important stakeholder in PSE and should have a place in university governance that matches this role.

Whereas: The bulk of university governance work happens at the committee level and students should have the ability to contribute meaningfully at that level.

Whereas: Students should be considered full members of institutional governing boards with all applicable rights and responsibilities.

Whereas: Students attending publicly assisted universities should have a provincial option to address issues they believe were addressed inappropriately on their campuses.

Whereas: Every post-secondary institution should have an Ombudsman Office on campus.

Whereas: Students attending university should have access to dispute resolution processes on their campuses.

Whereas: Students should not have to burden the cost of dispute resolution mechanisms on their campuses.

Whereas: Institutional Ombudsman offices and the provincial Ombudsman offices should have a formalized connection.

Whereas: Regardless of institution, students should expect the same reporting standards at on campus Ombudsman office.

Be it resolved that: In order to better evaluate academic programs, the Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance should revise the UUDLEs to model Lumina Foundation's Degree Qualification Profile learning outcomes.

Be it further resolved that: The Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance should ensure that students are afforded the opportunity to provide feedback during the tuning process of updating UUDLEs.

BIFRT: The Government of Ontario should task the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO), an unbiased third party, to take on the quality assurance mechanisms of the current Ontario Universities Council of Quality Assurance.

BIFRT: Bodies responsible for IQAPs should only approve institutional IQAPs that provide province wide metrics based on the evaluation of learning outcomes.

BIFRT: Bodies responsible for IQAPs should develop cyclical program reviews that require feedback from current students and graduates.

BIFRT: The government should mandate, through its quality assurance processes, that new programs be reviewed after the graduation of the program's first cohort prior to moving to eight-year cyclical reviews.

BIFRT: In the case that a new program fails its initial review, it should go under a two-year cyclical review process until it passes.

BIFRT: If a program is to fail this two-year cyclical review process twice, the body responsible for IQAPS should reject the program following the completion of all current cohorts.

BIFRT: The province should establish an advisory panel of students, administrators, faculty, and sector partners to review and guide the development and implementation of SMA3.

BIFRT: The province should adopt a model similar to the New Zealand Public Accountability Index model for the creation, review, and report-back processes of the SMA framework.

BIFRT: The province should mandate universities provide meaningful opportunity for student association representation in the development of SMAs.

BIFRT: The province should establish standards for the engagement of university communities on SMAs.

BIFRT: The province should implement metrics that would provide a comprehensive measure of teaching excellence, research performance, community services, and general contributions.

BIFRT: The province should work collaboratively with institutions, community members, students and private enterprise to develop the guiding principles of an Ontario Public Accountability Index (PAI) model for SMAs.

BIFRT: The province should establish an advisory panel of sector stakeholders to develop the metrics, methodology, and audit mechanisms of an Ontario PAI model.

BIFRT: The government should, publicly by default, centrally store data collected by the SMA report backs.

BIFRT: The province should mandate a minimum of 13% of voting seats on university governing boards for undergraduate student representatives by amending applicable university acts.

BIFRT: The province should mandate a minimum of 25% of voting seats on university senates for undergraduate student representatives by amending applicable university acts.

BIFRT: The province should amend applicable university acts to allocate one of the undergraduate seats on boards of governance and senates to a representative of recognized student associations.

BIFRT: The province should amend the university acts to require voting undergraduate student seats on university governance committees.

BIFRT: The province should amend the university acts to require universities to provide a reasonable opportunity for student presence when decisions are made on university governance committees.

BIFRT: The province should amend Ontario University Acts to state a governor who is a student may take part in discussions and vote on matters relating to student issues, including but not limited to tuition and ancillary fees.

BIFRT: The Government of Ontario should legislate the creation of a Student Ombudsman.

BIFRT: The government should mandate that universities establish Ombudsman offices on their campuses.

BIFRT: The provincial government should provide institutions with the funding necessary to adequately run Ombudsman offices on university campuses.

BIFRT: Ombudsman Ontario should develop standardized reporting structures for Ombudsman offices on university campuses.

BIFRT: Ombudsman Ontario should work with the Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development to formalize connections with institutional Ombudsman offices
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