

**The Role of Academic Colleagues in the
Council of Ontario Universities**

by
George Fallis (York) and Marilyn Rose (Brock)
November 2007

Executive Summary for Council

The activities of the Council of Ontario Universities (COU) are governed by a Council made up of the President of COU, the Executive Head of each member university and the Academic Colleague from each member university. In the past, Council met five times per year. The President and Executive Heads would meet separately prior to a Council meeting, as would the Academic Colleagues, after which they would meet together as Council.

Beginning in 2006/07, the President and Executive Heads decided to convene meetings of the Council only twice per year. The President and Executive Heads continued to meet five times per year, as well as by conference call between meetings. Academic Colleagues were not consulted about the change in frequency of Council meetings, despite representing half of the Council membership, and this fact – both as a question of process and a question of substance – precipitated much discussion among the Academic Colleagues concerning their role on the Council. With only two Council meetings per year, there was concern that the business of Council would be increasingly conducted by the President of COU and the Executive Heads, with little involvement of the Academic Colleagues.

The attached Academic Colleagues' Paper was prepared to explore how Colleagues could better contribute to the work of Council and more broadly to all the activities of COU in light of the new arrangements. Colleagues are mindful of the ambiguity of their position on Council. They recognize that they are not Executive Heads. They do not have the experience of Executive Heads or their expertise, nor their duties and responsibilities. Colleagues have different expertise and responsibilities at their home universities. They bring the perspective of faculty members: teaching, doing research, and participating in the self-governance of their university. At the same time, Academic Colleagues are full members of Council. The overwhelming desire among Colleagues is to be helpful and participate fully in the activities of COU broadly construed. This working paper contains background on the historical development of COU, the current activities of COU, and the role of Academic Colleagues in these activities. The paper offers thoughts for further discussion and questions to be explored regarding possible roles for Colleagues.

The conceptual starting point for these reflections about the possible role of Colleagues was the idea that the universities should be represented at COU by both the senior administration and by faculty members (faculty members selected/approved by university Senates). The analogy is not exact, but in similar spirit the internal governance of each university is carried out by the senior administration and faculty members. Better outcomes ensue when the perspectives, experience, and interests of administration and faculty are combined in the deliberations. The question for

Council, then, is: how best to use the experience and perspective of faculty members – the Academic Colleagues – in the activities of COU.

After deliberating about possible roles, the Colleagues decided it was not the time to make definitive recommendations. Rather, it was decided that Colleagues would present the attached paper to the incoming President of COU, then later to Council, and seek input with respect to enhancing the role of Colleagues in COU.

The roles of Academic Colleagues in the Council of Ontario Universities can be grouped into eight areas, each of which has been discussed by the Colleagues during 2006/07:

- a. the role of Academic Colleagues on Council
- b. the role of Academic Colleagues' Papers
- c. their participation on COU Standing Committees, Task Forces, and Working Groups
- d. their participation in COU advocacy and government relations activities
- e. their interaction with COU affiliates (e.g. OCAV or OCUR)
- f. their role at their own university
- g. their interaction with organizations outside of COU and participating universities (eg SSHRC or HEQCO)
- h. other possible roles (e.g. conference organization or award adjudication)

During 2007-08, Colleagues will continue with the present format – with some modest enhancements. That is:

- Colleagues will meet five times per year, twice in the context of the meeting of Council as a whole, and three times separately
- Colleagues will continue to produce working papers
- Colleagues will attempt to ensure their representation on Task Forces and Working Groups of COU, urging that inclusion, where possible, reflect the Colleagues' areas of special interest and expertise
- Colleagues will press for clearer communication between Executive Heads' and Academic Colleagues' meetings, through sharing agendas and minutes
- Colleagues will participate in the planning of the Ontario Research Chairs Symposium
- Colleagues will explore opportunities to work collaboratively with affiliates of COU and with external agencies
- Colleagues will continue to press for substantial inclusion in all matters of importance to the academic mission of COU as it presses forward on the quality agenda on behalf Ontario Universities.

The Role of Academic Colleagues in the Council of Ontario Universities

by
George Fallis (York) and Marilyn Rose (Brock)

Introduction

In Ontario, as in other provinces and many jurisdictions across the world, universities are autonomous institutions, each established by a statute of government. The universities are publicly assisted: the provincial government provides operating grants and assistance for maintenance and new capital construction. Government agencies (the national granting councils) provide much support for research. Tuition paid by students is the other main source of revenue for universities. The provincial government regulates tuition and provides substantial student financial assistance.

Such a university ‘system’ is made up of two fundamental parts: the individual autonomous universities and the provincial government. Often the autonomous universities voluntarily form an organization to coordinate collective activity and to mediate and manage their collective interaction with government. The Council of Ontario Universities (COU) is such a voluntary association of Ontario universities. In addition, as has been the case at other times, the provincial government may establish an intermediating or “buffer” body between the autonomous universities and the government. The government-established buffer body provides advice to government on the distribution of grants to universities and other aspects of system planning and coordination.

The Council of Ontario Universities

The Council of Ontario Universities is a large and complex organization. An organization chart of the Council of Ontario Universities is presented as an Appendix and an overview of its diverse activities is available in *Council of Ontario Universities Biennial Report 2004-2006*.

For this discussion, there is an important distinction to be made between the *organization* and the *governing body* of the organization. In this paper, we shall use the term the Council of Ontario Universities (COU) to refer to the *organization* and the term Council to refer to the *governing body* of this organization.¹

¹ In 2007, the corporate structure of COU was revised to ensure that it conformed to the requirements of the Corporations Act and to ensure that its governance structure conformed to modern practice for non-profit corporations. In law, the organization is now called COU Holding Association Inc. The text above does not use the formal legal terminology for the governance of COU; rather it uses the generally understood and generally used terminology. The text captures the ‘in practice’ governance of COU.

The Council of Ontario Universities is an *organization* whose objects are:

- (a) Generally to work for the improvement of higher education for the people of Ontario;
- (b) To promote cooperation among its members, including the provincially assisted universities of Ontario;
- (c) To promote cooperation between its members and the Government of the Ontario;
- (d) To promote cooperation among its members by establishing an affiliation program, and to provide support, services, direction and advice to affiliated associations established by its members;
- (e) To facilitate access to higher education by operating a centralized application centre for its members. This application centre will be called the Ontario Universities Application Centre.

The *members of the organization* are the 18 provincially assisted universities in Ontario; there are two associate members: the Ontario College of Art and Design and the Royal Military College of Canada.

The Council of Ontario Universities provides a variety of services to members. The main revenues of COU are the fees paid by the member and affiliate universities.

The *governing body* of COU is the Council. The members of Council are the Executive Heads of the members (and associate members) of COU, the President of COU, and one Academic Colleague from these institutions, who is selected/approved by the Academic Senate or equivalent academic body of each institution.

For many years prior to 2006/07, the Council met five times per year. It was the practice that Executive Heads and Academic Colleagues would meet separately in the afternoon/evening, and then the next day meet together as Council.

COU has a Secretariat headed by the President of COU. The Senior Management Committee of the Secretariat includes the Executive Director of the Ontario Council of Graduate Studies (OCGS) and the Executive Director of the Ontario Universities' Application Centre (OUAC). Thus, OCGS and OUAC are components of COU.

There are a number of Standing Committees of Council: Executive, Government and Community Relations, Human Rights, Nominations, and Relationships with Other Postsecondary Institutions. There is an Academic Colleague on all Standing Committees.²

From time to time, COU convenes Task Forces and Working Groups. For example in recent years, there has been the Working Group on University Capacity, the Working Group on University Research, the Task Force on Quality Measurement, the Task Force on Access and Privacy Issues, and the Task Force on Student Financial Assistance as well as the Task Force on Graduate Enrolment Expansion. Typically, these Task Forces and Working Groups include Executive Heads, representatives of the Government of Ontario, and senior administrators and

² Academic Colleagues are also members of the Ontario Universities' Applications Centre Advisory Committee, as well as the Budget and Audit Committee of COU Holding Association Inc., and the Board of Directors of COU Holding Association Inc.

staff from member institutions with particular expertise on the subject. Academic Colleagues are sometimes appointed as members of Task Forces and Working Groups.

Overall, COU defines itself as having three primary functions:

- **self-management:** providing common services, promoting best practices, undertaking quality appraisals, facilitating resource allocation among institutions as required
- **developing advice to government:** through jointly staffed committees and working groups
- **advocacy:** advancing the cause of higher education publicly and with the provincial government.

COU has a number of “affiliates,” some closely connected to COU and supported by the COU Secretariat (for example the Ontario Council of Academic Vice-Presidents, OCAV, or the Ontario Council on University Libraries, OCUL) and some much less close and not supported by the Secretariat (for example the Council of Deans of Arts and Sciences). From time to time, the director/chair of the closely connected affiliates makes a presentation to Council.

During 2007, the relationship between COU and affiliates was reviewed and revised. Most of the less senior affiliates of COU are to be gathered into one of two blocks reporting either to the Ontario Council of Academic Vice-Presidents (OCAV) or to the Council of Senior Administrative Officers (CSOA). The Ontario Council on University Research (OCUR), the Council on University Planning and Analysis (CUPA), and the Ontario Universities’ Public Affairs Council (OUPAC) continue to have direct relationships with Executive Heads and Council.

Context: The History of COU within the Ontario System of Universities

COU was established in 1971, but can trace its origins to 1962 when the Presidents of Ontario’s publicly funded universities began to meet as a committee of presidents (CPUO).³ Academic Colleagues become part of the Council of COU at the time of its formal constitution in 1971, although in several academic papers about higher education in Ontario, COU is referred to as “the re-named committee of presidents.”

COU should be seen within the wider context of the ‘the governance’ of the system of publicly assisted universities in Ontario.⁴

3 A history of the COU is available in Monahan, Edward J. 2004. *Collective Autonomy: A History of the Council of Ontario Universities 1962-2000* (Waterloo:Wilfred Laurier University Press).

4 Much of the material in the text is taken from *OCUFA Research Report (September 2004, Vol. 5 No. 5)*, prepared for submission to the Rae Review; and much of that report was based upon Axelrod, Paul. 1982. *Scholars and Dollars: Politics, Economics and the Universities of Ontario 1945-1980* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press).

For as long as Ontario has been providing public support for its universities, the province has sought ways to reconcile the autonomy of universities with the need for system-wide planning and coordination and with the responsibility of the provincial government to be accountable for how public funds are spent.

The 1972 report of the Commission on Postsecondary Education in Ontario outlined the options this way:

First, we could establish a single system of colleges and universities, similar to that which exists in many states of the United States. This we shall call the University of Ontario model. Second, we could adopt the bureaucratic model, which would lead to the direct governance of all universities and colleges in Ontario by a provincial department or departments. Third, we could create a system in which relations between institutions and government were mediated by a third body or bodies with clearly delegated powers. This is the buffer model.

For most of the postwar period, Ontario has had some sort of ‘buffer model.’ The University of Ontario model has never found favour.

Immediately after WW II, each university would independently request funds from the government. There was no formula funding. This was the bureaucratic model. In 1951 R.C. Wallace, retired principal of Queen’s University, was appointed as a part-time adviser to gather and evaluate the universities’ requests for funding and report to the Minister of Education. In 1958, anticipating significant growth of universities, the government created a formal body to assess university needs for government funding, called the Advisory Committee on University Affairs (CUA). CUA was the first buffer institution.

At first, CUA was made up of officials from the provincial departments of Education, Treasury and Economics. Later, representatives of business were added, and in 1964, representatives nominated by OCUFA and by the Committee of Presidents of the Provincially Assisted Universities of Ontario (CPUO) were added. Here is where we first see university presidents and faculty representatives in the same organization. Both participated in the buffer agency. CUA had the responsibility to evaluate university demands and make funding recommendations to the minister. By 1967, a system of formula financing was put in place, using the FFTE and BIU concepts still used today. CUA was often the subject of criticism, and because its recommendations were being followed to the letter by the Government, some regarded CUA as simply the executive arm of the Government.

The 1972 Commission on Postsecondary Education in Ontario led to the dissolution of CUA and to the creation of the Ontario Council on University Affairs (OCUA) in 1974.

This was a second buffer model. After 1974, there were four main institutions involved in governance: the Ministry of Colleges and Universities (the government), the individual universities, OCUA (the buffer between them) and COU, the voluntary collective organization of the universities.

This buffer model continued until 1996 when the Harris Conservative government abolished OCUA. This left the government (specifically the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities or MTCU), the universities, and COU as the governance institutions with no buffer. At the time, universities were upset by the abolition of OCUA.

Since 1996, COU has come to play a more and more important role in the governance system, and the universities have come to prefer this model to the buffer model. In the Rae review consultations, COU argued against the buffer model.

OCUFA has been highly critical of the situation since 1996. OCUFA characterizes the situation as “direct bureaucratic governance” (see italicized quotation above). OCUFA wrote in its submission to the Rae review: “The experience of the past eight years has highlighted the defaults [sic] of the bureaucratic model, notably a perception of opacity and distance from those directly involved in the university experience, whether as students, faculty, staff, administrators or governors. Decisions emerged from government ministries without a clear sense of who might have been able to influence them, or how” (OCUFA, 2004).

It is noteworthy that faculty unions become widespread during the 1970s and 1980s. OCUFA became a significant voice for the concerns of faculty members in the governance system.

The Rae review considered the possibility of re-creating a buffer model and rejected it. “Both the government and institutions express a high level of satisfaction with their current working relationship.” Instead, the review (2004) recommended a new Council on Higher Education with responsibilities for both universities and colleges. Following the review, in 2005 the government established the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario – HEQCO – (which would cover both universities and colleges). The Chair and CEO of HEQCO have now been named, but it is too early to see what effect HEQCO will have on governance of the system.

The Current Role of Academic Colleagues in COU

Academic Colleagues are currently members of Council and individual Colleagues sit on the Standing Committees of Council, including the Executive Committee, as well as on some Task Forces or other Working Groups of COU.

The full Council meets twice yearly. Colleagues meet on their own, prior to the Council meeting. The Executive Heads also meet separately. The next day, the Executive Heads and Academic Colleagues meet together as Council. At their separate meeting, the Colleagues receive briefings from the Colleagues who sit on Standing Committees. They also receive an Issues Update from the Vice-President, Policy & Analysis of COU, who is a member of the Senior Management Committee of the COU Secretariat.

The Academic Colleagues also meet separately as a group three times per year in addition to Council meetings.

At the beginning of each year, the Academic Colleagues select a number of topics for short papers. Colleagues, singly or in small groups, volunteer to prepare the papers over the year. The authors prepare the paper, present it to a meeting of Academic Colleagues, and revise the paper in light of the discussion. The working papers are presented and discussed at a Council meeting and final versions are published on the COU website. The papers remain the work of the author(s) but reflect contributions from discussion among Academic Colleagues. It is hoped that the papers serve both COU and the university community (especially Senate and Faculty committees) by raising questions, providing a short analysis of issues, and providing a bibliography for further reading.

At the meetings of full Council, there is a full agenda but there has been a tendency to repeat what Colleagues, and indeed Executive Heads, have heard in briefings at their separate meetings. Substantive decisions about the activities of COU are frequently made by Executive Heads meeting on their own, although votes for formal acceptance of these matters or other consensus statements often occur or emerge at Council. Academic Colleagues in practice have exercised what might be called ‘observer status with full right to comment’ in regard to such decisions. Indeed the most important contribution of Colleagues in Council meetings has tended to be the presentation of the Colleagues’ papers. Occasionally Council has agreed to further action on the basis of a working paper presentation, should the topic be thought to be particularly topical or have specific applicability.

Academic Colleagues also play an important role within their own universities. In a recent survey of Colleagues (conducted during 2006/07), most Colleagues reported that they make a written and oral presentation to Senate about the activities of COU and about government policy. Most Colleagues have good relations with their Executive Heads. Most Colleagues announce and circulate the Colleagues’ papers, bringing them to the attention of Senate and Faculty committees where appropriate.

The Colleagues, for the most part, however, have no greater role than this in their institutions. Most report that they are well-regarded by faculty members, but that most faculty (other than those hearing their reports at Senate) have little knowledge of COU and even less of the role of Academic Colleagues.

Recently, the number of meetings of Council was reduced from five to two per year. The new arrangements greatly scale back the role of Council and the interaction between Colleagues and Executive Heads. With only two Council meetings per year, there has been considerable concern among Academic Colleagues that the business of Council may be increasingly conducted by the President of COU and the Executive Heads, with little involvement of the Colleagues. This concern led to much discussion among Colleagues and to the preparation of this paper.⁵

Colleagues are mindful of the ambiguity of their position on Council. They recognize that they are not Executive Heads. They do not have Executive Heads’ experience or expertise, or their

⁵ It is noteworthy that on other occasions in the past, Executive Heads undertook major initiatives without consulting Council and Academic Colleagues that led to similar concerns among Colleagues. See Monahan, *op. cit.* p. 146-150.

duties and responsibilities. Colleagues have different expertise and responsibilities at their home universities. They bring the perspective of faculty members: teaching, doing research, and participating in the self-governance of their university. At the same time, Academic Colleagues are full members of Council. The overwhelming desire among Colleagues is to be helpful and participate fully in the activities of COU broadly construed.

The conceptual starting point for these reflections about the possible role of Colleagues was the idea that the universities should be represented at COU by both the senior administration and by faculty members (the faculty member selected/approved by university Senates). The analogy is not exact, but in similar spirit the internal governance of each university is carried out by the senior administration and faculty members. Better outcomes ensue when the perspectives, experience, and interests of administration and faculty are combined in the deliberations. The question for Council, then, is: how best to use the experience and perspective of faculty members – the Academic Colleagues – in the activities of COU.

Thoughts for Discussion

The role of Academic Colleagues in the Council of Ontario Universities can be grouped into eight areas:

- a. the role of Academic Colleagues on Council
- b. the role of Academic Colleagues' papers
- c. their participation on COU Standing Committees, Task Forces, and Working Groups
- d. their participation in COU advocacy and government relations activities
- e. their interaction with COU affiliates (e.g. OCAV or OCUR)
- f. their role at their own university
- g. their interaction with organizations outside COU and participating universities (eg SSHRC or HEQCO)
- h. other possible roles (e.g. conference organization or award adjudication)

Thoughts and questions about each of the areas are presented below.

- a. **The role of Academic Colleagues on Council.** Colleagues continue to feel that they have a crucial role in “grounding” Executive Heads, in bringing a focused academic orientation and the perspective of faculty members engaged in teaching and research to Council.
- b. **The Role of Academic Colleagues' Papers.** Options include: retaining the current approach, but perhaps preparing and releasing working papers that have not been tabled at Council; producing fewer but more substantive papers, perhaps with specific recommendations, and/or embodying a systematic survey of the state of things across all universities in Ontario.
- c. **The Participation of Academic Colleagues on COU Standing Committees, Task Forces, and Working Groups.** The inclusion of Colleagues on Standing Committees continues. Is there a larger role that Academic Colleagues could play on Task Forces and Working Groups? How would this be arranged, given the fact that Task Forces and

Working Groups draw on many people other than Council members, that relevant expertise is necessary, and that there is a desire to ‘represent’ various institutions on COU committees when they are struck? How can we better align Colleagues’ research and administrative expertise with the mandates of COU Task Forces, Working Groups and other committees?

- d. **Academic Colleagues’ Participation in COU Advocacy and Government Relations Activities.** It has been suggested that Colleagues could play an explicit role (still to be defined) in COU’s advocacy and government relations. Academic Colleagues could be useful, for example, in the communities that surround their universities, as academic representatives making some of the case for greater public support of Ontario universities.
- e. **Academic Colleagues’ Interaction with COU Affiliates.** The most important affiliates to think about are OCAV (and perhaps OCUL within the OCAV group of affiliates) and OCUR. Might a Colleague attend OCAV or OCUR, or attend their joint planning meetings? Might a representative of OCAV or OCUR come on occasion to a Colleagues’ meeting? Might the Colleagues be asked to work on issues under discussion by these affiliates (e.g. through the preparation of a working paper or organizing a conference)?
- f. **Academic Colleagues’ Role at their own University.** The recent survey of Colleagues contained a few suggestions regarding possible changes to their role within their universities. In two universities, the Academic Colleague plays a special role that other institutions might want to consider. At U of T, the Colleague convenes a meeting (in consultation with the President) of all of those within U of T who are interacting with COU, to share information and to coordinate their activities. At York, the Academic Colleague is an *ex officio* member of the senior planning committee of Senate (the committee includes the President, VPs Academic and Research, and a representative of each Faculty). The Colleague brings a province-wide perspective to the deliberations.
- g. **Academic Colleagues’ Interaction with Organizations outside of COU and Participating Universities (e.g. SSHRC or HEQCO).** In 2007/08, the President of SSHRC made a presentation to a Colleagues’ meeting. Other such interactions might be suggested. Also the Colleagues might undertake some of COU’s interaction with HEQCO (perhaps through a joint conference). HEQCO would be a natural audience for some of the Colleagues’ working papers.
- h. **Other Possible Roles.** There is much to explore in this regard. An example might be that the Colleagues, in conjunction with others, organize an academic conference (perhaps growing out of a Colleagues’ working paper.) As well, Academic Colleagues might play a role in the adjudication of awards overseen by COU and its affiliates.

Going Forward

After considering and deliberating about recent changes at COU and possible roles for the Academic Colleagues, the Colleagues decided it was not the right time to make definitive, let alone radical, recommendations to Council. Rather, it was decided that Colleagues would present this paper to the incoming President of COU, then later to Council, and seek input with respect to enhancing the role of Colleagues in COU.

During 2007-08, Colleagues will continue with the present format – with some modest enhancements. That is:

- Colleagues will meet five times per year, twice in the context of the meeting of Council as a whole, and three times separately.
- Colleagues will continue to produce working papers.
- Colleagues will attempt to ensure their representation on Task Forces and Working Groups of COU, urging that inclusion, where possible, reflect the Colleague's areas of special interest and expertise
- Colleagues will press for clearer communication between Executive Heads' and Academic Colleagues' meetings, through sharing agendas and minutes
- Colleagues will participate in the planning of the Ontario Research Chairs Symposium
- Colleagues will explore opportunities to work collaboratively with affiliates of COU and with external agencies.

Colleagues will continue to press for substantial inclusion in all matters of importance to the academic mission of COU as it presses forward on the quality agenda on behalf Ontario Universities, and to look for ways in which to enhance COU's academic profile within the Province of Ontario and indeed within the larger national and international context.

COUNCIL OF
ONTARIO UNIVERSITIES

CONSEIL DES
UNIVERSITÉS DE L'ONTARIO

DRAFT
Organization Chart 2007-2008

