



# EDUCATED REFORM

*Striving for higher quality of education  
at Ontario universities*

**OUSA**

Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance





**IS IT POSSIBLE TO INCREASE  
THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION  
IN ONTARIO UNIVERSITIES  
WITH LITTLE OR NO NEW  
COST TO THE SYSTEM?**

# *executive summary*

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It is entirely possible that a common definition of quality in education is an impossible goal. This is puzzling, since everyone knows what it looks like. It is the transfer of enthusiasm for knowledge and discovery from professor to student. It sparks the desire in a new generation to push the envelope of human understanding further than it has ever been pushed. It teaches the weight of responsibility to conduct this discovery responsibly, ethically and with future generations in mind.

Educated Reform adopts the attitude that the methods used to achieve these outcomes are in constant need of further perfection. Ontario's universities and colleges are world-class institutions by many standards, but the quality of the experience for students can always be improved.

However, not every improvement to quality of education can be bought; it will never be that easy. Quality is too complex, rich and subjective a concept to be boiled down to a commodity that could be bought or sold. It must be paid for, but it cannot be achieved through a simple transaction. A good classroom must be well funded, but must also have the right culture and attitude amongst students and teachers.

This understanding is particularly important in Ontario's current climate of economic uncertainty. There is much that can be done to improve the student experience without a large infusion of new funds from student tuition or government grants. Educated Reform proposes low-cost, cost-neutral and savings proposals that not only achieve the Government's stated goals of improved productivity and innovation, but also addresses the responsibility of a creative economy to those being educated: a demanding, engaging, high quality student experience.

None of the enclosed reforms fundamentally change the structure of higher education in Ontario, nor do they propose removing any financial resources from the system. While the road to implementing even

minor change is never smooth, OUSA believes the following reforms are reasonable and implementable. As the conversation on reform in higher education continues, we look forward to hearing the concerns and opinions of our partners and stakeholders.

The report focuses on four key issues in higher education in need of address.

## WHAT WE PUT INTO AND GET OUT OF THE CLASSROOM

### ***Implement Teaching Chairs***

Imagine if every university campus in Ontario had a recognized teaching expert, whose primary responsibility was to implement a grassroots initiative to improve teaching quality campus-wide. The reality is that every campus already has experts in teaching. A province-wide teaching chair program would allow universities to leverage the strengths of these professors for the benefit of all students. Selected faculty would be allocated a small grant from the province of Ontario and a release from traditional research responsibilities to implement an initiative that would help other faculty teach more effectively.

### ***Gradually Create a Larger Teaching Focused Faculty Stream***

Unlike regular faculty, who are often hired for both research and teaching strengths, teaching focused faculty would be hired primarily based on their ability to engage students and provoke learning. As a result, they would be expected to teach more classes than traditional faculty. This means that if a number of current professors were to become teaching focused, faculty who excel at teaching could teach more classes and students. Make no mistake, full-time faculty growth is critical to the future of post-secondary education in Ontario, but expanding the number of teaching focused faculty would provide the dual benefits of improved productivity and enhancement to the student experience. The growth

in teaching faculty should be organic, conducted over a number of years. Furthermore, these professors should not be expected to be teaching-only, should not be required to teach an unreasonable number of courses and should be able to negotiate their way into regular appointments if they need to.

***Learning Outcomes Assessment***

The last two recommendations in this section relate to the assessment of learning outcomes. Learning outcomes refer to the skills and knowledge gained by students after completing their studies. First, the province should invest in a mechanism to assess learning outcomes. Second, Ontario universities should work to improve the current framework for undergraduate degree level expectations. Having clear goals for student learning, as well as the ability to assess the achievement of these goals will allow students to see the full value of our investment in post-secondary education.

EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION  
AND HOW WE PAY FOR IT

***Expanding Experiential Education Opportunities***

Experiential education is a style of teaching and learning that infuses direct practical experience with the traditional theoretical content of a classroom. OUSA believes that every undergraduate student should experience at least one high impact, non-traditional or experiential classroom in his or her time at university. However, in a time of shrinking discretionary resources, the road to paying for the achievement of this ambitious goal must be made clear.

Experiential education can be grown both productively and efficiently. Undergraduate research opportunities could create a new labour pool to assist in the achievement of Ontario’s innovation agenda. Co-op programs or community service learning

opportunities could free up campus classroom space for other purposes. However, it must be recognized that expanding these sorts of programs is not a cost-neutral proposal. By using current funding more efficiently, opportunities to devote more resources to experiential education may become available.

***Repurposing Performance Funding***

Ontario’s current performance funding envelope has failed to meaningfully incentivize improvement in any of the indicators tracked. Moreover, the amount of performance funding available isn’t enough to incentivize much in the way of anything. Rather than continue to spend this money on unrestricted funding on the achievement of indicators not directly controllable by institutions, this funding should be reallocated towards the implementations of programs that would enhance the student experience.

***Slowing Growth in Merit Scholarships***

If universities are going to have resources in the future to support new styles of teaching, care must be taken in the present to ensure that cost growth is contained as much as possible. Merit-based entrance scholarships have grown considerably in size over the last decade as universities compete for student enrolment. They tend to go to students from more affluent backgrounds, while most students lose them after their first year. Students do not want these scholarships clawed back, but would rather future resources be directed to more pressing priorities.

IMPROVING STUDENT MOBILITY

***Adopting the Pan-Canadian Protocol on the Transferability of Credits.***

Students who seek to transfer their credits outside of established pathways face an uncertain, unclear process. Students often do not know how many of their credits will transfer to new degree programs, as well as how many of those courses will count towards

degree requirements. Establishing a standard where any first or second year credit will transfer between similar programs will allow students a maximum amount of clarity when making decisions on transfer. Furthermore, each credit a student is forced to repeat comes at an additional cost to students and the government. Increasing the proportion of recognized credits will help achieve savings that can be directed to other priorities.

### ***Setting per-course minimum grade requirements to the passing grade***

Students expect to have to meet admissions standards when entering a new institution. What they don't expect is to meet a second set of grade requirements when their credits transfer. This second set of requirements is often above the passing grade, particularly for students transferring from college programs. It seems reasonable that transfer students should be subject to a competitive admissions process. Once through this process however, they should be subject to the same academic standards as existing students.

## **EXPAND AND ENHANCE ONLINE LEARNING**

### ***Finalizing a Vision for Ontario's Online Institute***

Advances in technology have stimulated great strides in distance learning and an Ontario Online Institute could provide students the flexibility to fit their education comfortably within their individual circumstances. This could greatly expand access to Ontarians who are currently left out of the system and the promise of a bright future. It could also allow for greater flexibility for students studying on a campus, but who want to expand their horizons by taking courses from other institutions. Several models have been debated over the years as the Ontario Online Institute has been developing, but students maintain that an organized collection of current Ontario online course offerings makes the most sense.

Some have argued that such a model would not allow online learning to be accessible to students who do not meet traditional university entrance requirements. These non-traditional students could be accommodated through funding creation of new, competency-based courses at current universities.

Finally, the question of who would grant the final degree looms large in a co-operative of university courses. Furthermore, online courses are not fully transferrable, meaning that it is currently impossible for online students to complete online degrees with offerings from multiple institutions. Both of these situations could be addressed if the institute itself were given degree-granting status, but students believe that this should only be done as a last resort.

## **OTHER REFORM IDEAS**

Aside from the proposals in the report, OUSA is well aware of the existence of other proposals to increase productivity and innovation in Ontario higher education. Students are eager to discuss proposals such as increasing the amount of differentiation in the system, creating teaching-only universities, implementing three-year degrees and year-round learning further. However, caution should be exercised before considering these proposals for implementation. Each carries a number of benefits and drawbacks that could be amplified or mitigated depending on how these would be implemented.

- **Differentiation:** Universities should be allowed to differentiate naturally, with students being actively involved in the process of setting strategic mandates.
- **Satellite Campuses:** Students support the government creating a satellite campus policy that would control growth. These campuses should not be given strict research or teaching missions, but should be required to demonstrate minimum standards of investment in student support services and library infrastructure.

- Teaching Only Universities: Students do not support the creation of teaching-only universities. These campuses would carry substantial start-up costs and would not allow students to be involved in research opportunities, despite how limited these are currently.

- Three-Year Degrees: There are a number of benefits and drawbacks to three-year programs that have been implemented around the world. Decreased cost to students and increased time-to-degree completion are appealing to students. However, some other jurisdictions have demonstrated low student demand for three-year options. Additionally, care must be taken to ensure that three-year degrees do not unnecessarily create increased demand for expensive graduate enrolment.

- Year-Round Learning: The ability to complete a degree faster by taking a full course-load over the summer months carries definite benefits from a completion perspective. However, year-round learning programs should be examined where they have been implemented. In many such programs, student demand for year-round learning is low.

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# PREAMBLE

Since 2008, government spending on university per-student operating grants has largely flatlined, meaning that increased spending has occurred largely through tuition increases that have outpaced the growth and purchasing power of families. Simultaneously, class sizes have increased, campuses have grown more crowded, and teaching capacity has been constrained by research intensiveness.

From a student perspective, quality has declined while the price of education has increased. Annual tuition increases at more than double the rate of inflation are not sustainable for Ontario's students and families, nor are students particularly excited about paying for further increases while quality continues to slip. This lack of excitement is not because the current student experience is bad; rather, we expect it to be better given the increased commitment students have made to finance the system in recent years.

A university education is one of the most valuable investments an individual can make, with an earnings premium that can exceed one million dollars over the course of a lifetime. Like all investments, students attend university because they believe that the fruits of their labour will be worthwhile. Students hope that higher education will help them compete and thrive in the economy of the future. Similarly, the government hopes that a highly educated workforce will ensure Ontario's long-term prosperity. So long as these two goals remain in place, Ontario's higher education system should strive to produce the best possible educational experience for students it possibly can; a tall order when the province has left little financial room to manoeuvre.

The 2012 Ontario Budget announced that university funding will not keep pace with enrolment growth moving forward, and that the government has committed to finding \$55 million in savings in Ontario's universities by 2014-15 "to enhance innovation and productivity to support efficiency targets while supporting education quality for students." This 1.5% reduction in provincial funding could not come at a worse time for post-secondary education in Ontario. With costs that increase well above the rate of inflation, universities will face severe challenges to the maintenance of quality in coming years. Ontario already has the lowest per-student funding in the country, with the highest tuition. Recent protests around the world and in Canada demonstrate that students' willingness to subsidize government underfunding through tuition increases is not limitless. Increasing government funding at a rate commiserate to the needs of the sector is an action that can perhaps be delayed in the short term, but would have devastating consequences in the long term.

Ontario's deficit would seem to suggest that critical funding increases could be delayed. While unfortunate, this environment also presents an opportunity to enact reforms that will make Ontario's university sector more cost-efficient. Earlier this year, the Drummond commission began this dialogue Ontario-wide. This report is intended to further this discussion, providing context specific to the university sector. The reforms proposed here will build on those of the Drummond commission, helping ensure that higher education remains a sound investment for students and the provincial government. Most of the recommendations in this report can be achieved in a cost-neutral fashion, while others would free up resources to be directed towards more pressing needs.

**THERE IS NOTHING ABOUT THE  
CURRENT FISCAL CLIMATE IN  
ONTARIO THAT IS IDEAL, NOR  
SHOULD ANY OF OUR ANALYSIS OR  
RECOMMENDATIONS BE CONSTRUED  
AS IMPLYING THAT UNIVERSITIES ARE  
NOT BADLY IN NEED OF INCREASED  
PUBLIC SUPPORT. IN FACT, THERE ARE  
FEW INVESTMENTS, IF ANY, THAT A  
GOVERNMENT CAN MAKE THAT HAVE  
A BETTER RATE OF RETURN THAN THE  
INVESTMENT IN AN ACCESSIBLE &  
HIGH-QUALITY UNIVERSITY SYSTEM.  
WHILE ALL EFFORTS SHOULD BE MADE  
TO INCREASE PUBLIC INVESTMENT,**

**UNIVERSITIES MUST ENSURE THAT  
THE FUNDS THAT ARE CURRENTLY  
AVAILABLE ARE BEING BEST UTILIZED.**

**WHAT FOLLOWS IS A VISION FOR A  
MORE PRODUCTIVE, HIGH QUALITY  
EDUCATION SYSTEM.**



## HELPFUL TANGENT

### *Cost Pressures at Ontario Universities*

*Before exploring the question of how universities should increase quality while keeping costs affordable, it is worth exploring the current financial condition of Ontario's universities.*

*While total per-student revenue increased by nearly 20 per cent in constant dollars between 1980 and 2010, this increase has come almost exclusively from increases in tuition, as per student government funding has fallen considerably in real terms.<sup>1</sup> Many institutions have argued that universities face severe constraints in delivering high-quality post-secondary education. The crux of these arguments hinges on two issues: the need for increased resources to accommodate rising enrolment; and that costs in the university sector increase at a faster pace than the broader economy. At the same time, current deficits at both the federal and provincial levels have resulted in*

*a reluctance to increase per-student funding for higher education.*

*To an observer unacquainted with the Ontario university system, this trend would appear to be deeply troubling. A public university system with sharply rising costs, combined with an ongoing government deficit, would foreshadow difficult times: downsizing, cuts, tuition increases or controversial attempts to control cost inflation. Indeed, much of the conversation on the finances of higher education centres on the tuition vs. government funding debate; if the government is not willing to increase per-student funding to meet institutional demands, then tuition fees should be allowed to increase at a rate that will compensate. Student groups, including OUSA, have significant concerns with such proposals. This is due largely to the impact that tuition increases have on the*

*affordability and accessibility of higher education for low- and middle-income students and their families, in addition to the fundamental concerns about continued downloading of costs from the public to students. Attention has necessarily begun to shift to how to do more with existing resources (see Figure 1, opposite).*

*While many institutions face serious capacity issues with regard to classroom space, residence accommodation and student support service capability as a result of substantial enrolment increases, universities are not operating with less revenue per-student than was previously the case. Institutional costs rising faster than the general rate of inflation is the primary reason why many universities are in dire financial straits. Indeed, over the past five years, university expenditures have outpaced the general rate of inflation by 2.4 per cent (See figures 2 and 3, opposite).*

*By far, the largest increases in institutional expenditure have been increases to salary and benefits for faculty and administrators, merit-based student financial assistance, and capital projects. Many of these inflationary pressures have been necessary and unavoidable. For instance, high-quality university education relies on instruction from fairly compensated professors. Capital projects are necessary to ensure that campuses have the facilities to house and educate a growing student population. Finally, while students have real concerns that merit-based entrance scholarships do little to increase the accessibility of higher education, institutional financial assistance is an important tool for helping students afford rising costs.*

*If none of the major components of cost inflation are easily controllable and government resources do not increase, then the upcoming budget crunch could have a significant impact on the quality of*

*education experienced. In many ways, quality is already being squeezed by rising costs.*

*With few realistic alternatives for maintaining quality in an environment of shrinking discretionary resources, the only option left for universities is to reform how existing funding is used. In the coming years, students hope that the higher education sector will demonstrate an ability to contain costs in a fair and progressive manner that improves the quality of the learning experience. Together, Ontario universities and government will need to find efficiencies in the delivery of higher education if we are to preserve quality and affordability.*

FIGURE 1: TOTAL OPERATING REVENUE BY SOURCE PER STUDENT IN CONSTANT 2010 DOLLARS

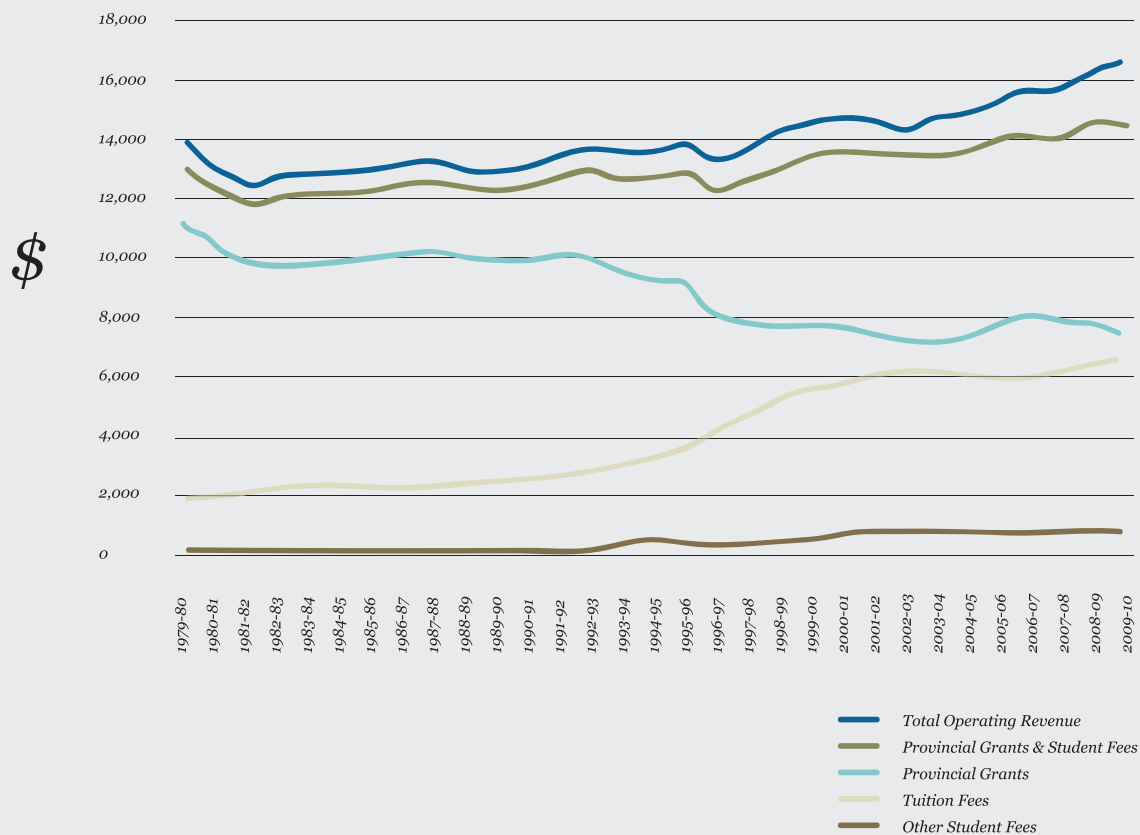


FIGURE 2: DISTRIBUTION OF OPERATING FUND EXPENDITURES 2009/10

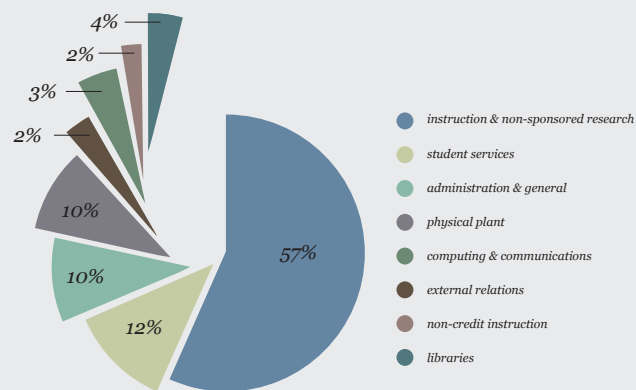
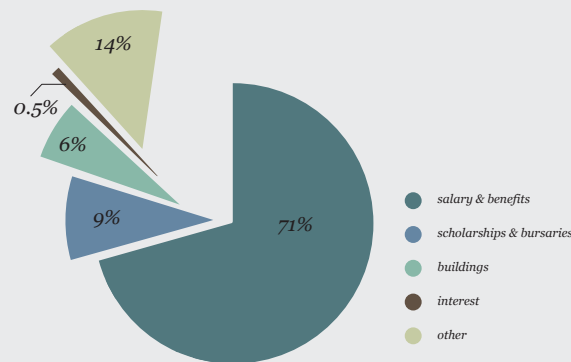


FIGURE 3: INCREASE IN TOTAL EXPENDITURE PER-STUDENT FROM 2004/05 TO 2009/10







# AN APPROACH TO REFORM

*Does Ontario offer a  
high quality university  
experience for students?*

# A BASIS FOR QUALITY IMPROVEMENT IN ONTARIO

Persistent tuition increases above the rate of inflation have caused many students to ask what specific returns they are receiving for their investment in higher education. This question is particularly pertinent to the increasingly large number of students who accrue significant debt to finance their education. Though educational quality has traditionally been a term that has evaded precise definition or measurement, most complete understandings reflect that there are at least two stages and components in a quality education. At the very least, a quality education must have quality inputs, defined as “the institutional financial resources, material inputs and the organization of those resources which thus comprise the determinants and characteristics of individuals’ learning experiences.”<sup>2</sup> Second, a quality education must have tangible learning outcomes, defined as the skills, knowledge and other “ultimate ends” of the education system attained by graduates.<sup>3</sup> Though detailed data on both the quality inputs and learning outcomes of Ontario universities are in short supply, the information available paints a worrisome picture.

## QUALITY INPUTS

Learning inputs have a large effect on the student experience. Students have demonstrated dissatisfaction with current trends in class size and instruction time. While many students enter university imagining that tenured faculty who are leaders in their field will be instructing their classes, the reality is often very different. The ratio of full-time equivalent students to full-time faculty has increased from 17 to 25 over the last two decades.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, over the same time frame the average instructional load for full-time professors has declined. In 1988, full-time faculty in Ontario taught an average of six half-courses per year; a number that has shrunk to four in recent years.<sup>5</sup> Hours spent teaching per full-time faculty member is also considerably lower in the sciences than in liberal arts disciplines.<sup>6</sup> Over the last decade, the growing demand for undergraduate teaching has been increasingly met through the hiring of sessional contract instructors, who are

generally less experienced than tenured faculty, paid substantially less, have lower job satisfaction, and tend to be less integrated in the institutional community.<sup>7</sup> It is not difficult to determine the outcome of more students and fewer courses taught for each professor: class size has risen considerably in recent years. The effects of this trend are obvious in student responses to educational surveys; a majority of students selected that they would rather their university hire six sessional instructors than two top research-oriented professors.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, the academic calendar has become shorter at many institutions, from a system-wide average of 13 weeks per term three decades ago to 12 weeks currently.<sup>9</sup> Less time spent in the classroom is troubling from a quality perspective, particularly when universities in peer jurisdictions have maintained an average of 13 to 14 weeks per academic year.<sup>10</sup>

However, students also know from experience that class size and instruction time are an imperfect measurement of quality. Studies have found that student interaction and discussion are limited in large classes.<sup>11</sup> However, it is also true that class size is less of a priority for students than the teaching ability of the instructor at the front of the class.<sup>12</sup> The quality of the educational experience can depend more on the teaching methods, instructional technology and attitudes of students more than the number of bodies in the room. In fact, a 2011 survey of Ontario undergraduates showed that students would direct resources to training for instructors over smaller class sizes by a wide margin.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, though teaching loads, student-to-faculty ratios and class size certainly matter as quality inputs, their prominence in discussions of quality likely stem in part from the fact that they are the most visibly changing and measurable indicators.

## QUALITY OUTPUTS AND OUTCOMES

Quality outputs and learning outcomes are actually defined differently, but both serve to discuss the end results of a post-secondary education. These end

results can be the skills, knowledge or attributes of graduates; they can be the employment rates, job satisfaction and employer satisfaction of post-secondary graduates; they can even be less tangible outcomes such as enhanced civic participation and engaged citizenship.

With regards to the employment outcomes of graduates, a number of measures are used including the percentage of recent graduates employed in their field, and graduation rates. Ontario universities fare quite well with regards to post-graduate employment, with an overall employment rate ranging between 90 and 97 per cent depending on field of study, two years after graduation.<sup>14</sup> Ontario also can boast high employer satisfaction with post-secondary graduates. Additionally, many studies have confirmed that the earnings premium associated with post-secondary credentials has grown in recent years, particularly for graduates of computer science, technology and engineering fields.<sup>15</sup> Certainly, these trends are cause for celebration. However, high employment rates do not necessarily mean that universities are educating students in a manner commensurate to the needs of the labour market. A study released by HEQCO last year indicated that across fields of study, growing earnings differences indicate that “there is cause for concern about the university sector’s propensity to respond to changes in the skill needs of the labour market.”<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, one in five graduates report being over-qualified for their jobs, given their education, experience and training, and these graduates have significantly lower average earnings.<sup>17</sup> Finally, recent data from the Labour Force Survey has indicated that the average weekly wage of a bachelor’s degree holder has increased at a slower pace than skilled trades or college diploma holders between 2000 and 2011.<sup>18</sup>

With regards to skills and knowledge acquisition, many students and educators claim that universities teach students how to think critically, communicate

clearly and argue rationally. These outcomes are central to quality assurance processes, which typically assesses university programs on the basis of an agreed upon set of learning outcomes. In Ontario, these learning outcomes are set in the Undergraduate Degree Level Expectations (UDLEs), approved by the Ontario Council of Academic Vice-Presidents in the 2010 Quality Assurance Framework.<sup>19</sup>

The major problem with these sorts of learning outcome frameworks is that direct measurement of learning outcomes is very difficult and rarely attempted. Though Ontario has defined a set of outcomes in the UDLEs, these outcomes are open to a variety of interpretations, acting as more of a guideline for program assessment rather than a metric by which to understand what students actually learn. There have been a variety of assessment techniques for learning outcomes, particularly critical thinking skills, that have been pioneered worldwide, but many have been yet to be implemented system-wide in Ontario. As such, it is difficult to know exactly what effect higher education is having on the critical thinking or communications skills of students.

A study released last year of learning outcomes in the United States examined if students improved their performance on a critical thinking and writing test called the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA) after attending university. The CLA is intended to test general thinking and writing skills, and not discipline specific knowledge. Results indicated that, despite the claims of many institutions, students’ performance on a test of critical thinking increased by only seven percentile points after three years of university.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, the gains were smaller for students from under-represented backgrounds. The test required that students fill out a survey at the end of their evaluation detailing study habits, course requirements and faculty expectations. Unsurprisingly, all of these factors affected student test scores. Perception of high faculty expectations

*“Critical thinking increased by only seven per cent after three years of university.”*

accounted for a 27 per cent increase in performance, while more rigorous reading and writing assignments accounted for a 23 per cent increase.<sup>21</sup> One of the most revealing aspects of the American learning outcomes study was that institutional selectivity only accounted for a five per cent difference in CLA scores, indicating that the ‘research or teaching’ orientation of a university mattered very little in comparison with classroom factors such as faculty expectations or course assignments.

Given the substantial differences between America’s and Ontario’s university systems, it is difficult to know whether Ontario students would show similar gains on learning outcomes assessments. However, there is reason to be concerned that Ontario students may not be fully developing their critical thinking and writing skills in university. For instance, many faculty members have complained about reduced student engagement, lowered expectations for coursework, and generally low writing and study skills among students.<sup>22</sup>

According to the National Survey on Student Engagement (NSSE), Ontario scores lower than peer jurisdictions in the United States in measures of academic challenge, active learning, student faculty interaction and enriching educational experience.<sup>23</sup> Perceived lower levels of academic challenge, which correlated with lower learning outcomes in the American CLA, could indicate that there is reason to be concerned about the degree to which Ontario universities are providing tangible learning outcomes.

#### THE REFORM CONVERSATION

With university costs rising at a rapid rate and signs of trouble regarding university quality, the road forward for building an accessible, affordable and high quality post-secondary system in Ontario is unclear. The recent provincial budget committed to increasing operating support for universities by 2.2 per cent next year, while also allowing tuition revenue

to increase by 5 per cent. With overall revenue rising at a rate relative to the rate of enrolment growth and inflation next year, universities will likely be able to maintain the status quo with regards to quality, but will be hard pressed to direct new resources to quality enhancement.

Beyond 2012-13, the revenue picture becomes unclear. Public support is projected to slow below the rate of enrolment growth, and the rate at which tuition will be allowed to increase is unknown. Meanwhile, post-secondary participation has never been more important to an individual’s employment or earnings prospects.

This set of circumstances has prompted the provincial government to begin a conversation on productivity and innovation in Ontario’s post-secondary sector. With the release of a discussion paper on *Strengthening Ontario’s Centres of Creativity, Innovation and Knowledge*, the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU) will be engaging institutions, faculty, staff and students on a road forward for Ontario Post-Secondary. MTCU asks the question “How do we further strengthen the culture of innovation in the sector in order to enhance quality and productivity?” Several proposals are put forward that could help Ontario achieve this proposal, including expanding three-year credentials, improving Ontario’s credit transfer system, promoting year-round learning and many more.

OUSA supports the government’s action to engage post-secondary stakeholders in a discussion on productivity. Students agree that higher education must drive creativity, innovation, knowledge and community engagement. Students also agree that it must be affordable and financially sustainable for students and government. *Educated Reform* is OUSA’s first step into this discussion; it is a vision for a high quality, productive and innovative university sector. However, for this conversation to be as worthwhile as possible, no participant will



be able to approach it with a narrow, unchanging perspective. OUSA will be listening to the ideas of other stakeholders and releasing a response in late August. As dialogue begins in earnest throughout the summer of 2012, it will be important for the discussion to accommodate new ideas and perspectives. Not all the ideas contained in *Educated Reform* are named in the recent discussion paper, but they will all help Ontario achieve the goals of greater productivity, financial sustainability and quality.

*Educated Reform* is divided into two sections. The first covers recommendations that students believe will help Ontario achieve the goals of innovation and productivity. The second provides some context, research and discussion on ideas that have been proposed in the government's paper, as well as those proposed by other stakeholders. There are no recommendations in the second part of the report, largely due to the fact that students are not yet convinced of the need to recommend or criticize these proposals. As the proposals begin to take shape, OUSA's positions on them will take clearer shape as well.

As Ontario navigates its way through troubling economic times, careful attention to the details of reform proposals should guide policymaking. While the university system is in dire need of quality and efficiency reforms, in the absence of thorough research and thoughtful consideration, reforms could end up raising costs rather than mitigating them. Increasingly, Ontario's higher education system has come to be relied upon to best prepare students to meet the demands of the challenging twenty-first century labour market. To this effect, students have a great deal of interest vested in very pragmatic, realistic and high-impact reforms being implemented on university campuses to drive quality improvement.

*“Access versus quality arguments neglect to account for the tremendous importance of a highly educated workforce.”*

## REFORM PRINCIPLES

### ***i. Accessibility and quality are not mutually exclusive goals***

Too often, accessibility and quality are seen as two solitudes in higher education; opposite objectives that cannot be pursued in tandem. Oftentimes, this view manifests itself in frustration within the academy at the last decade's emphasis on expanding the number of spaces within higher education. Many in post-secondary lament the fact that growth has consumed many of the available financial resources, as well as the increase in student-to-faculty ratios. A more extreme manifestation of this view is that the expansion in enrolment has resulted in declining quality in the academic qualifications of students. According to *Campus Confidential*, a recent book by two former Ontario university administrators, “accessibility is entrenching academic mediocrity,” and is working to undermine academic quality.<sup>24</sup> They blame an influx of “lackadaisical students” for declining quality in the classroom.

Students could not disagree with this viewpoint more. First, it fails to consider that much of the enrolment growth in the immediate past has been a result of population growth, rather than a dramatic increase in the proportion of youth attending university.

Second, access versus quality arguments neglect to account for the tremendous importance of a highly educated workforce to Ontario's economic future. The proportion of the workforce that will require post-secondary education is expected to rise to 77 per cent by 2031, while our current attainment rate is closer to 65 per cent.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, university graduates pay considerably more income tax than non-university graduates, while receiving far fewer government transfers. In 2011, 25 per cent of the population with a university degree paid over half of the income tax.<sup>26</sup> They also tend to live longer, healthier lives, commit fewer crimes and volunteer more of their time to community initiatives. Of

course, it is not university education in isolation that is responsible for of these outcomes. Rather, there is very strong evidence to support that a university education opens economic doors that otherwise would not be open.

Finally, the view that increasing participation will erode quality presumes that teaching practices could (or should) not change to better accommodate increasing numbers of students. Many innovative and alternative teaching practices exist that could allow classrooms to be reorganized. Professors trained in the practice of teaching large classes could mitigate declining student engagement. Many of these strategies are being explored at Ontario universities currently in select programs and departments, but have yet to be implemented on a broad scale.

Given the tremendous importance of accessibility to Ontario's future, as well as the general lack of evidence that increased participation cannot be adequately accommodated by universities, students remain unconvinced that accessibility and quality are, in fact, solitudes. Rather, they are two highly important goals that must be pursued together in order for Ontario to remain competitive in the economy of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. As such, the recommendations that follow are all intended to increase quality without limiting the number of students that attend post-secondary institutions in Ontario.

## ***ii. Expenditure and Quality are Not Always Linked***

Educational quality is not necessarily correlated with the amount of money spent on an education program. A high-quality education system must be well resourced, of course, but it also must have skilled educators and engaged students. Effective teaching and learning requires engagement on the part of students, professors who are passionate about teaching and facilities that can facilitate collaboration, discussion and debate. Any good teacher or student knows that a good classroom is

as much about attitude and culture as it is about the resources in the classroom. In the absence of skilled professors, staff and administrators committed to excellence, financial resources could never create a quality education environment.

Therefore, while students continue to advocate for increased government investment in higher education, the recommendations that follow are all intended to promote a culture of excellence in Ontario's universities without significantly increasing costs.

## ***iii. Higher Education Must Remain an Affordable and Sustainable Investment***

Higher education will always be important to securing a bright future for the province. There will never come a day when Ontarians will not need to be educated in the lessons of the past, develop critical thinking, problem solving and analytical reasoning skills, or learn to be better citizens. Therefore, Ontario has no choice but to ensure that university education is always an affordable investment for students and the government.

With current cost inflation and tuition rates rising well above inflation annually, higher education is becoming an increasingly expensive endeavour. Academics and stakeholders have pointed out that this path is not sustainable, even with robust financial assistance.<sup>27</sup> Students agree and believe that the time for action is now. The government must ensure that we are simultaneously increasing quality and accessibility. As such, all the recommendations follow either would create savings, be revenue neutral or be achievable with savings from other recommendations.

## ***iv. Higher Education Must Provide Students with Valuable Learning Outcomes***

Though higher education has never been more crucial to economic success, many recent graduates complain

that they are not entirely sure of the academic and practical applications of their university degree. The tired stereotype of a philosophy major working in a fast-food restaurant is perhaps the metaphor that best captures this sentiment. The response to this stereotype is often that university education is not intended to “get students a job.” Rather, it is to furnish them with critical thinking skills, discipline-specific knowledge and problem-solving abilities that allow for engaged and informed citizenship.

Students believe the “academy versus economy” debate over the purpose of university education is a distraction. A university education should serve both purposes to some degree. Ontario universities should endeavour to structure the educational experience in such a way that students take responsibility for their own learning and graduate with the knowledge that their accomplishments will help them succeed in the economy of the future. To do this, policymakers, university administrators and professors need a better idea of what actually happens in the classroom. As a result, the recommendations of this report are geared towards dispensing with performance metrics that do not work and implementing ones that do.

#### ***v. University Teaching and Research Must be Equally Valued***

Too often, the relationship between teaching and research is discussed in ideological terms, rooted in personal beliefs about the purpose of higher education. Whether it is a faculty member who views research as their primary responsibility, or a student who believes that responsibility should be teaching, neither of these perspectives considers the complicated relationship between teaching and research. Students fundamentally believe that universities must remain places where both research and teaching takes place.

However, the balance between teaching and learning at Ontario universities must be addressed. Particularly in a context where university rankings, tenure and promotion systems, and federal grant programs tend to heavily reward excellence in research, excellence in teaching must also be valued. Teaching must be elevated in terms of importance in the culture of the academy and in the tenure and promotion process, so that passionate teachers are able to devote more of their resources toward excellence in the classroom.

At the same time, research must come to be better integrated in undergraduate classrooms, where it can instil a deep attachment to the pursuit of inquiry and discovery in students. For this reason, the recommendations below seek to restore the balance and mutual respect between teaching and learning at Ontario campuses.

*“Any good teacher or student knows that a good classroom is as much about attitude and culture as it is about resources...”*





# QUALITY TEACHING & LEARNING OUTCOMES

*What we put into - and get  
out of - Ontario university  
classrooms*

A common recommendation for reform, mostly recently from the 2012 Commission on the Reform of Ontario's Public Services, is to increase the teaching capacity of Ontario post-secondary institutions. Over the last decade, federal research funding has increased by over 400 per cent, nearly half of which has been allocated to new research programs.<sup>28</sup> These incentives have contributed to a strong need for universities and individual faculty members to pursue research objectives. At many institutions, faculty members are incentivized to continuously apply for and earn external research grants, and their ability to attract research grants factors heavily into their chances for tenure and promotion. While research is very important to both the mandate of the university sector as a whole and in Ontario's innovation and economic development agenda, many observers, including students, have argued that it has contributed to an imbalance in the prestige associated with teaching and research; an imbalance which has come at the expense of undergraduate teaching.

Specifically, the Drummond commission's recommendation is that the government should encourage universities to pursue flexible teaching and research workloads, which should allow "top-performing teaching and research [professors to be] recognized with the appropriate workloads and rewards."<sup>29</sup> The report references the creation of teaching-focused faculty stream, but does not provide a road map to achieving a university system that rewards teaching to the same degree as research. As students are the most affected by poor-quality teaching, OUSA has been working to provide just such a road map. Considering that academic faculty are the single largest expense of our universities, there should be no higher priority than ensuring this investment is made in a way that maximizes both teaching and research excellence. Students know that that excellence in teaching is not a straightforward objective to achieve. Renowned Author John Steinbeck once said "every great teacher is also a great artist, perhaps the greatest of artists since they work

with the mind and spirit." Just as a simple investment in the arts does not create a corresponding number of great artists, a simple investment in teaching will not simply create excellent teachers.

However, the creation of rewards for excellence in teaching could move academic culture towards greater valuation of teaching. The following few pages will present some recommendations that are intended to change the culture of universities to value teaching to a greater extent. We believe that the creation of low-cost incentives can enable a culture of teaching excellence to grow over time. Our vision of a balanced culture of research and teaching at Ontario universities is one that provides space for individual faculty to play to their strengths; for strong researchers to conduct more research, but also for passionate teachers to have the opportunity to focus more heavily on teaching without limiting their career prospects.

## HELPFUL TANGENT

### *How much teaching currently takes place in Ontario's university system?*

*One variable that is undoubtedly related to the productivity of a university system is how much teaching takes place within the system. In Ontario, some commentators have called for an increase in the amount of teaching, either through constructing teaching-only campuses or hiring more teaching-focused faculty, arguing that these steps will enable universities to educate more students without additional public operating funding or tuition revenue.<sup>30</sup> Some peer jurisdictions have begun to examine faculty productivity more closely. A controversial report on academic instruction at the University of Texas at Austin found that well over half of the instructional activity was conducted by approximately 20 per cent of the total number of faculty employed by the institution, and that increases in teaching productivity could save the state nearly \$77 million.<sup>31</sup>*

*In Ontario, many stakeholders have noted that as teaching loads for full-time tenured faculty have declined in the face of growing research obligations, institutions have hired a growing number of part-time and contractually limited instructors to educate growing numbers of students. Unfortunately, there is little publically available, quantitative evidence to verify the extent to which this trend is occurring. The authors of a recent book *Academic Reform* cite that teaching responsibilities in Ontario have declined from 3+3 courses per academic year to 2+2, or three and two full-course equivalents (FCE) expressed in collective bargaining terms, respectively.<sup>32</sup> These numbers can also be expressed as six and four half-course equivalents (HCE). For the purposes of clarity, this report will express all measures of*

*teaching using the FCE measurement.*

*More detailed and thorough data on this matter is necessary for implementing evidence-based reforms to Ontario's universities. However, students believe it is a worthwhile endeavour to examine what the available data tells us about the amount of teaching currently taking place in Ontario's post-secondary system. Ontario universities publically report data on faculty headcounts and the number of individual courses taught on the Common University Data Ontario (CUDO) database. Theoretically, dividing the number of faculty equivalents by the number of courses taught could yield some measurement of the amount of teaching that takes place system-wide. Unfortunately, several factors complicate this calculation. First, many universities do not publish Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) counts that include both full and part-time faculty, making it impossible to track the extent to which universities have come to rely on part-time instruction to take on increased teaching responsibilities. Second, university course data does not track individual credit-courses, but rather course sections. This means that a large lecture of 600 students may show up in the CUDO reports as three courses of 200 students, since large classes are typically organized into sections.*

*Fortunately, twelve institutions do track part-time faculty headcounts, making it possible to measure the number of courses per faculty member at these institutions. It is important to note that this measure does not include contractually limited appointments, which have also been increasingly used to meet rising demand for*

*university teaching. In addition, little can be done to rectify the data issues caused by CUDO's course counting methodology. Due to these issues, it is not our intention to present the data as a holistic and complete measure of university teaching. Such a measure will be impossible to reach until more complete data is made publically available. Rather, it is simply the number of faculty divided by the number of courses they teach, as reported by their respective universities.*

*Between the twelve Ontario universities that publish part-time faculty numbers, 11,995 faculty full-time equivalents taught 21,686 courses in the fall term of 2009-10, the most recent year for which comprehensive data is available on all of the necessary variables. This yielded a teaching load for each faculty member of approximately 1.8 courses per term. Operating expenditures at these universities totalled approximately \$4,080,543,000 in 2009-10, meaning that each course taught cost these universities approximately \$188,169 per credit course. While the limited nature of the data available on faculty course instructions means that 1.8 courses per-term should be treated as an estimate, it provides support for the 2 full-course equivalent average teaching load reported in Academic Reform.*



# ONTARIO TEACHING CHAIRS

*cost: \$2 million over five years*

30 /

The first step to creating a system that values high-quality teaching is to ensure that current leaders are recognized and rewarded. McMaster University recognized this when it placed “recognizing and rewarding excellence in teaching and learning” as the top recommendation of the report of its Task Force on Teaching and Learning.<sup>33</sup> The good news is that rewarding excellence does not have to mean expensive financial incentives. Formal recognition and opportunities to pursue professional interests can be just as important as financial remuneration at universities. As such, this recognition and these opportunities have a tremendous ability to change the culture of institutions without a great deal of new investment.

In 2005, the provincial government created research chairs at universities across the province. These prestigious appointments are given to researchers who are “acknowledged by peers as a world leader in the field.”<sup>34</sup> The money for research chairs is provided to allow professors the ability to focus on research alone during the time of their funding. These positions have contributed greatly to the prestige associated with research excellence in Ontario. However, in addition to research excellence, Ontario’s faculty are also developing leading edge curriculum and pedagogy that will have an immeasurable positive impact on the next generation of students. For this reason, students propose that the government fund a limited number of low-cost teaching chairs on campuses across the province, similar to the way that research chairs were implemented in 2005.

Teaching chairs would be individuals responsible for spearheading programs to improve the quality of teaching and learning at their institution, acting as ambassadors for quality improvements. Additionally, teaching chairs could be responsible for advancing the scholarship of teaching and learning, advancing

and discovering innovations that would help Ontario provide high quality learning experiences to future generations of undergraduates. As teaching chairs, these professors would be relieved of some traditional research responsibilities so they could focus efforts on these objectives.

Seeing the need for quality improvement in teaching, universities in Ontario and across the country have already created teaching chair positions, utilizing different structures to accomplish similar goals.

Figure 4 displays several models of teaching chairs across the country. All of these models serve the purpose of empowering faculty members to educate their peers and promote effective teaching practices on local campuses. Additionally, all of the models utilize a competitive application process, where professors must demonstrate histories of leadership in teaching and learning before attaining the position. However, these models differentiate with regard the scope of responsibilities and the costs and compensation associated with teaching chairs. Most notably, some provide personal stipends to successful applicants, whereas others only provide money for the purpose of fulfilling the applicant’s proposed project.

*“Queen’s University and the University of Alberta fund teaching chairs for less than \$30,000 per year.”*

OUSA’s preferred teaching chair would be a combination of the above models. The government would redirect existing funds to fund teaching chair positions at each institution. Universities would then create selection committees and open the positions to faculty. Interested applicants would propose ideas for improving the quality of teaching at an institution and would be judged based on their records as teachers and the merits of their proposal. After being awarded a position, the chair would use the grant money to implement their project, much like the model at Queen’s University. However, like Ryerson University’s teaching chairs, Ontario Teaching Chairs would ideally be responsible for producing action plans and outcome reports. The



**FIGURE 4: TEACHING CHAIRS AT CANADIAN UNIVERSITIES<sup>35</sup>**

<b>Institution</b>	<b>Structure</b>	<b>Responsibilities</b>	<b>Program cost</b>
<i>McMaster University</i>	<i>Lifetime appointment, one teaching fellow per year. Candidates apply, selection committee assesses quality of project, their history in the classroom and quality of proposal beyond initial appointment</i>	<i>Develop &amp; implement a proposal leading to a tangible outcome to enhance long term teaching and learning campus-wide.</i>	<i>One-time award of \$40,000, cannot be used for remuneration. Up to 50 per cent may be used to release a faculty member from traditional responsibilities.</i>
<i>Queen's University</i>	<i>3-year, non-renewable appointment, one new chair selected annually. Candidates apply to selection committee with idea for campus-wide teaching improvements.</i>	<i>Chairs are responsible for implementing their proposed idea to improve teaching quality. Past proposals include development of workshops to equip professors with the skills necessary to teach large lectures, online databases and journals on active pedagogy and strategies for counteracting student disengagement. Facilitate an engaging public lecture.</i>	<i>\$20,000 per annum to be used in the development of the chair's proposed project.</i>
<i>Ryerson University</i>	<i>Undefined term of appointment. Seven chairs currently serving, one for each academic faculty. Selection committee assess faculty member's skill and interest in teaching.</i>	<i>Chairs a faculty teaching committee with representatives from each department. This committee prepares an annual action plan and outcome report on teaching quality improvements. Provides training and mentorship to fellow faculty and teaching assistants. Evaluates grant proposals for teaching and learning initiatives. Development of a proposal to enhance teaching quality campus-wide. Over the course of a term, chairs are expected to use the awarded financial resources to implement their proposal</i>	<i>Personal stipend and a release from a single course.</i>
<i>University of Alberta</i>	<i>Undefined term of appointment, six total positions. Candidates apply to selection committee who assess the professor's history and successes in the classroom.</i>	<i>Development of a proposal to enhance teaching quality campus-wide. Over the course of a term, chairs are expected to use the awarded financial resources to implement their proposal.</i>	<i>\$27,000 per annum, \$12,000 of which serves as a personal stipend to the chair to incentivize applications and \$15,000 to support programs &amp; initiatives of the chair.</i>

government should also set parameters on eligible project proposals, with an eye to ensuring that Teaching Chairs focus their efforts on improving the teaching practices of their peers, large class sizes, or any other priority deemed necessary. This will avoid the potential problem of innovations that sit on the shelf, only to be adopted by those already interested in becoming better teachers.

Ontario Teaching Chairs would not have to be expensive. While Ontario committed to spending \$500,000 per annum on two new Research Chairs in 2010, Queen's University and the University of Alberta fund teaching chairs without government support for less than \$30,000 per chair, per year.<sup>36</sup>

At a comparable rate, the provincial government could fund the creation of five teaching chairs at each institution for \$2 million. One chair could be introduced at every university each year for an annual incremental cost of \$400,000. Institutions with existing teaching chair programs could simply receive financial support for initiatives they are already undertaking.

Compared with the millions of new dollars invested in research each year at the provincial and federal level, teaching chairs would be a relatively small investment. However, universities with prestigious recognition systems for excellent teachers have found them to be tremendously valuable, often utilizing

them for student recruitment. Students want to know that they will be taught by excellent teachers; past studies have established that students would prefer that their professors be trained in teaching methods rather than be star researchers.<sup>37</sup> More importantly however, they provide aspiring professors who value teaching tangible recognition for their contributions their universities, which would leverage the capacity of professors across the university system.

A province-wide teaching chair program would have the same effect, on a much larger scale. It would send a strong signal the Ontario government expects teaching excellence from its universities. While it would not address system-wide capacity issues, a teaching chair position is something a professor who wanted to make a difference at their university could aspire to. Currently, for professors such as this, the opportunities are few and far between.

..... **Why Ontario is Ready for This:** Teaching chairs are a low-cost initiative that would promote the stature of teaching at universities, something the Drummond commission recommended explicitly. Also, they're an initiative nearly everyone can agree on. Universities get to promote their excellent teachers to incoming students. Professors receive financial and reputational benefit. Students would know that efforts to improve teaching campus-wide were underway.

# MORE TEACHING-FOCUSED FACULTY

*savings: more than \$100 million in productivity gains*

While the creation of teaching chairs would be an excellent first step towards changing the culture of existing universities towards greater teaching orientation, the system must still grapple with significant capacity issues. The 2005 review of post-secondary education by the Honourable Bob Rae estimated that 11,000 new faculty members would need to be hired to meet the Ministry's enrolment projections.<sup>38</sup> This increase did not come to fruition despite enrolment growing even beyond the projections, meaning that student to faculty ratios have increased from 18:1 to 27:1 over the last two decades.

While student-to-faculty ratios have increased, the instructional responsibilities of faculty have declined from an average of six half-course equivalents per annum to four (see Figure 5).<sup>40</sup> While a culture change brought about through the implementation of teaching chairs might incentivize greater enthusiasm towards the pursuit of teaching, it is clear that a more systemic change is needed to effectively teach the growing numbers of students in a cost-effective manner. Currently, enrolment pressures are being abated through a combination of contractually limited appointments and part-time faculty, and ballooning class sizes.

In an environment where government spending is constrained, while cutbacks and efficiencies are being found in other areas, the prospect of hiring massive numbers of new faculty seems distant. Though not ideal, constrained government funding and tuition rising above the rate of inflation makes it seem only prudent to examine whether or not the system can become more productive with current resources. However, productivity can be a loaded word. Students do not believe that productivity gains should be realized at the expense of quality for students, fair working conditions for faculty or the number of full-time professors in the system. When all of these provisions are taken into account, one solution rises to the top: allowing some professors flexibility to take on a greater responsibility for

**FIGURE 5: STUDENT TO FACULTY RATIOS, 1990-2009<sup>39</sup>**

Year	No. of Full-Time Faculty	Student FTE per Faculty
1990	13,717	18
2000	11,700	22
2009	14,679	27

teaching, preferably those who already excel at it. Through creating or expanding a stream of faculty hired specifically for teaching proficiency, while assuming slightly less research responsibility, the system can realize substantive cost savings through the increased teaching loads these professors would assume.

Teaching-focused faculty appointments exist in Ontario currently, and are designated in collective agreements as teaching-track, teaching-only or teaching-focused; their agreements treat them as tenure stream, continuing or permanent.<sup>41</sup> Teaching-focused faculty would be paid at the same rate as other faculty, offered the same benefits, may pursue tenure in a similar fashion and would be an equally desirable academic career path for professors more interested in teaching than research. Currently, eight universities in Ontario offer over 500 teaching stream appointments, averaging approximately 5.5 per cent of total faculty appointments (see Figure 6).<sup>42</sup> Of these eight universities, seven offer tenure-stream teaching positions.<sup>43</sup>

**FIGURE 6: TEACHING-STREAM FACULTY APPOINTMENTS IN ONTARIO, 2011<sup>44</sup>**

Institution	Number of Teaching Stream Appointments	Percentage of Full-Time Faculty
Carleton	86	10.1
Guelph	Not Available	Not Available
Laurentian	8-12	2.8
McMaster	51	5.5
Toronto	309	12.9
Waterloo	29	2.8
Windsor	8	1.5
York	40	2.7
Average		5.5 %

In a recent survey of these appointments, teaching-focused faculty indicated that, though just 57 per cent of them had originally aspired to be teaching-focused, 87 per cent were either satisfied or very satisfied in their current job, with 70 per cent indicating they would choose to remain teaching-focused even if a traditional appointment were to arise.<sup>45</sup> In terms of activity, teaching-focused faculty reported spending just over 60 per cent of their time teaching, just under 10 per cent conducting research, with the remaining time devoted to service and other contributions to the university community.<sup>46</sup> Teaching stream contracts averaged approximately 70 per cent teaching, 5 per cent research and 25 per cent service, indicating that incentive to conduct research exists even in teaching-stream appointments. Additionally, teaching-focused faculty viewed lack of value placed on them by the academy and their peers as the largest drawback to their appointment, perhaps speaking to the extent to which research intensiveness is valued system-wide.

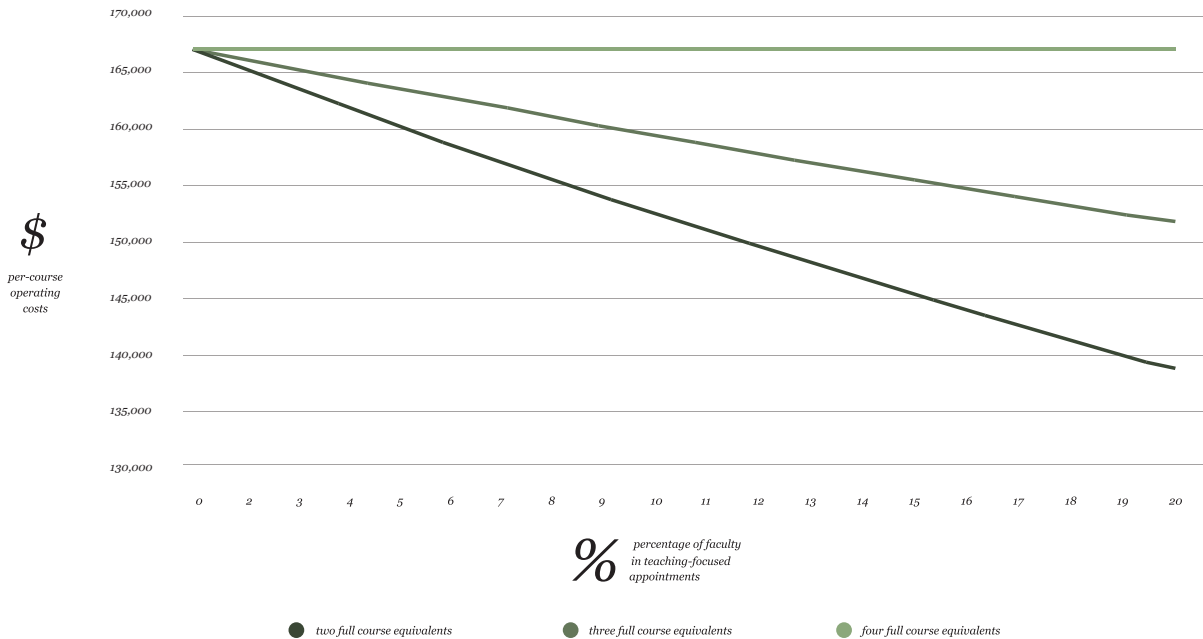
Though teaching loads associated with teaching stream faculty are not public, a 2009 discussion paper from the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations places the average teaching load

for teaching-only faculty at three to five full course equivalents per year, while the average for regular professors is two and a half full course equivalents.<sup>47</sup> For the purposes of assessing the productivity gains associated with increasing the numbers of teaching-focused faculty, OUSA constructed a model utilizing public university data. With the 2009/10 faculty, course and financial data described in the earlier *Helpful Tangent* estimating teaching-loads, converting greater percentages of existing faculty to teaching-stream appointments yields considerable savings on a per-credit course basis.<sup>48</sup>

Though the operating costs per-course are to be treated as estimates, it can be seen that productivity gains grow considerably as teaching loads associated with teaching-stream appointments increase, or as the percentage of faculty in teaching stream appointments increase.

Despite the obvious benefits of teaching-focused faculty, the implementation of teaching stream appointments would not be an easy or apolitical process. Given the role that research plays in the tenure and promotion process, many in the

FIGURE 7: PER-CREDIT COURSE OPERATING COSTS GIVEN A CERTAIN PERCENTAGE OF TEACHING FOCUSED FACULTY, 2009-10<sup>49</sup>



academy have raised concerns that teaching-focused appointments may not be offered benefits and opportunities for advancement and professional development. The Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations (OCUFA) expressed its concern over teaching-only positions in a 2009 discussion paper, highlighting that teaching-only positions can face lesser pay, fewer career advancement opportunities and lesser job security.<sup>50</sup> Later, OCUFA published a series of principles for teaching-focused appointments, including:

- *They should have job security and equal pay;*
- *They should not be prevented from moving to the research stream if they so choose;*
- *There should be preservation of space in teaching stream appointments for scholarship.*<sup>51</sup>

Students wholeheartedly agree with these principles. Just as the dual teaching and research missions of universities should be equally valued and rewarded, so too should professors in the teaching and research streams. At the University of Toronto, the faculty association suggests that a teaching stream appointment should be expected to have no more than 60 per cent of their workload be devoted to instruction, with the remaining 40 per cent divided equally between scholarship and service.<sup>52</sup> This seems eminently reasonable, and would serve to make the higher education system more productive than the current 40 per cent research, 40 per cent teaching and 20 per cent service norm.

If every university in Ontario were to convert 10 per cent of their full-time faculty positions into teaching stream appointments teaching three full course equivalents per academic year, OUSA estimates that the system could increase its productivity equivalent to a new investment \$300 million in new faculty. If twenty per cent were to teach three full course equivalents per academic year, the productivity gains would be closer to \$600 million (See Figure 7, opposite). This increased productivity would allow the system to produce more research, allow class sizes to drop, as well as empower excellent teachers to devote

the majority of their time to teaching. Increasing teaching loads for certain faculty would have many of the same benefits as hiring more professors; it could just be done with existing resources.

There are several avenues universities could pursue to achieve an increased number of teaching-focused appointments. The easiest but expensive way would be to hire an increased number of teaching-focused faculty. Though this would result in increased productivity in the long term, it would require a substantial up-front investment. Alternatively, the government could realize productivity gains over time through encouraging universities to hire teaching-focused faculty as existing faculty retire until a certain target is met. Finally, the government could encourage universities to seek new agreements with existing faculty that would allow for a certain portion of the professoriate to move to teaching-focused positions if they desire.

The Commission on the Reform of Ontario's Public Services recommends a road forward in its recommendation to "encourage universities that do not presently have flexible provisions regarding teaching and research workloads in their collective agreements with faculty to consider such provisions in future bargaining." Providing that these positions maintain the standards articulated by OCUFA above, students support this recommendation.

....✧ **Why Ontario is ready for this:** Allowing some existing professors to take larger teaching loads is the most effective way to improve productivity system-wide. If improved productivity is truly to be a goal for this province's university system, teaching responsibility must be explored in earnest. A small, stable stream of faculty who would carry a greater teaching focus than traditional faculty has worked to improve productivity at some Ontario universities already, including the University of Toronto. It has also failed at a few, giving policymakers a rich backdrop of information to assess how an effective faculty teaching stream could be implemented without adversely affecting quality.

# LEARNING OUTCOMES ASSESSMENTS

cost: \$130,000

36

The Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA) is a learning outcomes assessment tool that has become widely used in the United States. 500 institutions have adopted the CLA, reaching 250,000 students across the US.<sup>53</sup> The CLA administers two tests: the Performance Task, and the Analytic Writing Task. The Analytic Writing Task is further divided into “Make an Argument” and “Critique an Argument” prompts (see Figure 8). The Performance Task is 90 minutes long, and the sections of the Analytic Writing Task are 45 minutes and 30 minutes long, respectively. The tests are administered online and assessed electronically. Each task presents students with information followed by a written response. The field into which the response is entered has no character limit, that is, they are entirely open-ended and so the length of the response is up to the student.<sup>54</sup> The student’s answers are subject to a scoring rubric that evaluates different criteria for different sections, as per the following table:

A recent book, *Academically Adrift*, uses longitudinal data from the CLA to show that many American students are not measurably improving their writing and critical thinking skills from the first to third years of college. Recently, the OECD has begun to pilot the use of an adapted version of the CLA in order to assess learning outcomes across participating countries, indicating that interest in the project is global.<sup>55</sup>

Currently, the Higher Education Council of Ontario (HEQCO) is piloting a study to test the validity of the CLA in the Ontario context across a range of academic disciplines. Should positive results from this assessment be yielded, students would advocate the implementation of the CLA across the province, with results being reported in each institution’s Multi-Year Accountability Agreement (MYAA).

There are several reasons why students are interested in an assessment of learning outcomes. First and

**FIGURE 8: COLLEGIATE LEARNING ASSESSMENT MARKING SCHEME**

Section	Structure	Skills evaluated
<i>Performance Task</i>	Student is presented with a scenario wherein they must prepare an analysis on the strengths and weaknesses of an argument provided by the test, utilizing supporting documentation also provided to them in the test.	Analytic Reasoning & Evaluation Writing Effectiveness Writing Mechanics Problem Solving
<i>Make-an-Argument</i>	Students are provided with a statement that they must agree or disagree with, utilizing examples taken from readings, coursework or personal experience.  <i>Example: “Government funding would be better spent preventing crime than indealing with criminals after the fact.”</i>	Analytic Reasoning & Evaluation Writing Effectiveness Writing Mechanics
<i>Critique-an-Argument</i>	Students are provided with an argument purposefully designed with flaws. The student must explain the flaws of the argument, drawing attention to assumptions, missing information and inconsistencies.	Analytic Reasoning & Evaluation Writing Effectiveness Writing Mechanics

primarily, it has the potential to allow policymakers in Ontario to assess the skills universities often claim to be offering students: critical thinking, analytic reasoning, problem solving, writing mechanics and communication. The CLA tasks are non-discipline specific, meaning it could be applied in a consistent fashion across disciplines. Implementation of the CLA in the United States has led to a plethora of valuable studies on learning outcomes and the processes affecting them. For instance, higher CLA scores were found to be directly related to certain kinds of classroom activity; greater reading, longer writing assignments and increased faculty-student contact.<sup>56</sup> According to the National Survey on Student Engagement (NSSE), Ontario scores below American universities on several of these benchmarks, particularly faculty-student contact.<sup>57</sup> This indicates that there may be a need to assess if students in Ontario are experiencing similarly low gains as a result.

*“Higher CLA scores were found to be directly related to certain kinds of classroom activity.”*

Even more interesting, CLA results from the United States revealed that students from under-represented backgrounds often experienced smaller gains than students from more privileged backgrounds, leading to further investigation on educational inputs such as the academic preparation of students from under-represented backgrounds.<sup>58</sup> This finding challenges traditional conceptions of education as inherently equalizing, and points policymakers to areas where practice could be improved to better meet the needs of under-served students.

Lastly, the costs of implementing the Collegiate Learning Assessment would be low in comparison to other quality assurance mechanics. The cost of implementation, according to the Council for Aid to Education (CAE), is \$6,500 per institution, which is inclusive of the hundred student sample typically evaluated by the CLA. This would make the system-wide costs of implementing the CLA negligible in comparison to the wealth of information it would

provide to higher education stakeholders on student learning.

....✧ **Why Ontario is ready for this:** The CLA is a highly promising measure of student learning outcomes. Though it isn't perfect, nor does it measure every aspect of the student experience, no single instrument is capable of this. At a mere six-digit cost, the dataset that would be yielded by system-wide implementation of the CLA would come cheaply, yet yield long-term rewards.



# ADJUST LEARNING OUTCOME EXPECTATIONS

cost: \$0

38/

It is oftentimes not fully recognized that Ontario universities have been developing a more robust quality assurance process for quite some time. As of March 2010, quality assurance processes for both graduate and undergraduate programs in the Province of Ontario has been the responsibility of the Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance (referred to as the Quality Council), an arms-length group comprised of academic and administrative representatives from the members of the Council of Ontario Universities (COU). The Quality Council's mandate is to ensure the quality of degree programs in Ontario as well as the integrity of each institution's individual quality assurance processes. The Quality Council uses a centralized Quality Assurance Framework that sets standards for quality assurance at all Ontario universities.<sup>59</sup>

This framework lays out the expectation that each university will set out individual Institutional Quality Assurance Process (IQAP) that will be consistent both with its mission statement and the Quality Council's Quality Assurance Framework.

Institutional Quality Assurance Processes must all be based on a set of University Undergraduate Degree Level Expectations (UUDLEs) established in the quality framework, developed by the Ontario Council of Academic Vice-Presidents (OCAV). There are six UUDLEs<sup>60</sup>:

- i. *Depth and breadth of knowledge;*
- ii. *Knowledge of methodologies;*
- iii. *Application of knowledge;*
- iv. *Communication skills;*
- v. *Awareness of limits of knowledge; and*
- vi. *Autonomy and professional capacity.*

The framework provides explanations on what each learning outcome means, as well as how it is differentiated between general bachelor's degrees

and four-year honours programs. The descriptions are vague, however, and differ only slightly between the two categories. See Figure 9 (opposite) to learn about the the communications expectations.

The difference between the two is merely between the general ability to "communicate" and the ability to communicate "information, arguments and analyses." There is arguably little but semantics to distinguish these two requirements. Moreover, the requirements themselves offer no concrete means of measuring how it is that students are communicating "accurately and reliably" or how they are able to make their knowledge available to a "range of audiences."

While students support the continuation of the current Quality Assurance Framework, Ontario's qualifications framework requires revisiting. Several other jurisdictions have developed qualifications frameworks that are more detailed, while avoiding the pitfall of over-prescription. In the United States, the Lumina Foundation has developed a qualifications framework that has been recommended by the authors of *Academic Reform*.<sup>61</sup> The profile outlines expectations for associate, bachelor's and master's degree levels.

The difference in robustness between the two profiles is evident (see Figure 10). While Ontario's qualifications framework relies on semantic interpretation, Lumina suggests competencies that more clearly differentiate between degree levels and areas of learning. Furthermore, the Lumina profile is constructed in a cumulative fashion, where the skills at each degree level come in addition to the skills at the previous level, allowing for each degree level to focus on a different set of skills.

Students are not advocating that Ontario wholly adopt the Lumina profile, but it serves as evidence that more comprehensive degree profiles exist.

*"A strengthened degree profile will help Ontario emphasize learning as the proper determinant of the quality and value of degrees."*

**FIGURE 9: UNDERGRADUATE DEGREE LEVEL EXPECTATION DETAILS – COMMUNICATION SKILLS**

<b>Baccalaureate/bachelor's degree</b>	<b>Baccalaureate/bachelor's degree: honours</b>
The ability to communicate accurately and reliably, orally and in writing to a range of audiences.	The ability to communicate information, arguments and analyses accurately and reliably, orally and in writing to a range of audiences.

**FIGURE 10: LUMINA DEGREE PROFILE – COMMUNICATION SKILLS**

<b>Bachelors Level</b>	<b>Masters Level</b>
Constructs sustained, coherent argument or presentation on technical issues or processes in more than one language and in more than one medium for general and specific audiences; and works through collaboration to address a social, personal or ethical dilemma.	Creates sustained, coherent explanations and reflections on the student's own work in two or more media or languages to both general and specific audiences.

Critics also point to Australia’s degree profile or the European Qualifications Framework as further examples of more descriptive and comprehensive quality frameworks. Students support the government working with the Council of Ontario Universities to update the Undergraduate Degree Level Expectations to better define what the learning outcomes of each degree should be. A strengthened degree profile will help Ontario emphasize learning as the proper determinant of the quality and value of degrees, allow for a limited degree of alignment amongst schools and between programs, and bring Ontario institutions in line with international standards for quality frameworks.



# EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION

*And how Ontario  
can pay for it*

# INCENTIVIZE EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

*cost: variable*

A quality education is derived not only from the amount of contact hours between professor and student, but also how this time is structured, the learning activities a student partakes in, the expectations a student is required to meet, and the opportunity to engage in experiential education.

Experiential education is defined as “a philosophy and methodology in which educators purposefully engage with learners in direct experience and focused reflection in order to increase knowledge, develop skills and clarify values.”<sup>62</sup> It can encompass a wide variety of planned instructional activities, including learning communities, first-year seminars, service learning, senior capstone projects, undergraduate research opportunities, study abroad opportunities, and many more styles of teaching that go beyond the traditional, passive, lecture-style class. In contrast, experiential learning is active, requiring students to invest more time and effort to problem solving and analysis.

In a 2010 study on effective teaching practices, Julia Christensen Hughes and Joy Mighty note, “much is known about effective pedagogical practice in higher education, yet many faculty members continue to use methods that are at odds with this evidence. It is time to identify the forces behind these practices of convenience and work collectively to transform our students’ learning experiences.”<sup>63</sup> Students agree with this assessment, and urge the government to consider an expansion of incentives for universities to offer more experiential learning opportunities, particularly in undergraduate research, community service learning and co-operative education. Not only would such an expansion enhance quality, but these particular forms of learning could also allow universities to utilize physical and human resources more effectively.

## *Undergraduate Research Opportunities*

Many studies have concluded that teaching and research are stronger when integrated, but only

when this integration is the result of purposeful integration into classroom curricula. However, the majority of research at universities is conducted in isolation from undergraduates. This has created an environment where some of the most exciting and innovative activities taking place on a campus are not being leveraged to enhance undergraduate learning.

One way this could be achieved would be through the creation of Undergraduate Research Opportunities (UROPs). UROPs are opportunities for students to engage in research in return for course credit. While thesis or lab projects that span a semester or academic year already represent an opportunity to engage in research for course credit, these projects are largely limited to the final year of study, do not engage students earlier in their university careers, and are often not available to all students. UROPs attempt to change this by involving undergraduates in scholarly research throughout their academic journeys. These programs are an integral part of university life in many American universities, but these opportunities have not been fully developed in Ontario. Recently, McMaster University started a pilot project for undergraduate research that is believed to be the first university-wide UROP.

UROPs typically have the following characteristics:

- Undergraduates submit proposals outlining their research plan, subject area and faculty sponsor;
- Once approved, students work with faculty researchers on selected projects of shared interest, on projects they devise themselves, or on an ongoing research project from one of the academic departments, professional schools or research centres;
- Students can either complete a full-credit over a full year, or a half-credit by participating in the program for a term;
- During the course of the UROP, students work

a set number of hours each week, and produce documentation and/or work reports similar to those completed during a co-op term;

- The work should be relevant to a student's studies and academically challenging;
- The research results are presented to the public or can appear in academic journals.

These programs allow students to develop highly transferable skills in research, writing, analysis and communication. There is a clear benefit to all students, whether they wish to pursue further education or other opportunities outside academia. UROPs also create a substantial labour pool from which to draw support on research, providing students with a valuable research experience in return for course-credit.

Most importantly, UROPs can increase research capacity while enhancing the quality of education for undergraduate students. Many universities brand themselves "research intensive" while also claiming to be focused on the individual student. Funding this type of initiative allows institutions to increase their research capacity without compromising their commitment to undergraduate education.

Students propose that the province incentivize universities to create campus-wide UROPs for which students would be able to achieve academic credit. This step would be a critical step in fostering greater integration between the research and teaching missions of Ontario's universities.

#### *Community Service Learning & Co-operative Education*

Service learning is an approach to experiential education that integrates volunteerism and community service into post-secondary education.

*"UROPs can increase research capacity while enhancing the quality of education."*

This is a model that has gained popularity at a number of Ontario institutions, since it has both learning benefits to students and economic benefits to the community. It is widely considered to be an educationally purposeful activity.<sup>64</sup> This kind of learning represents an opportunity for students to become engaged in learning both in and outside the classroom. More fundamentally, this type of involvement is shown to be positively correlated with persistence.<sup>65</sup>

In 2005, the J.W McConnell family foundation distributed a series of grants that allowed for the creation of community service learning departments at recipient universities across Canada.<sup>66</sup> Unfortunately, there are no guarantees that these departments will be continued when the grants stop. Service learning workers have expressed concern across Canada that funding will not be sustained over the long term.<sup>67</sup> Additionally, many service-learning departments do not have the financial resources to reach out to faculties and implement service learning in the classrooms, severely inhibiting the effectiveness of these centres.<sup>68</sup>

The advantage of an expansion of community service learning to the productivity and efficiency of Ontario universities could be many and varied. For instance, rather than having a faculty member spend time each week preparing lectures and marking tests and exams, they would instead co-ordinate with community groups in order to develop curricula and evaluation consistent with the learning experience of the student. Furthermore, since the nature of community service learning is such that it encourages students to remove themselves from the bubble of a campus, greater student participation could be a boon to those campuses concerned with physical space.

The same principles of physical space effectiveness and applies to co-op programs, already in place at

many Ontario universities. Co-op programs are those that enable students to gain relevant work experience while applying and refining the knowledge and skills acquired in the classroom.<sup>69</sup> These programs offer enormous benefits to students. Co-op graduates have better post-graduate earnings and employability than non-co-op graduates, suggesting that the programs provide an effective bridge into the workplace.<sup>70</sup> However, with the exception of the University of Waterloo, co-op participation is generally contained to a small fraction of the student body at the schools that offer it. Furthermore, they are often concentrated in more technical disciplines, such as engineering and commerce.<sup>71</sup>

An expansion of work-integrated learning opportunities would benefit students, as well as the post-secondary sector itself. Many have recently highlighted that existing facilities could be better utilized year-round. Getting more students off-campus and into communities through structured work-integrated learning experiences would ease some of the existing burden on crowded campuses, while enhancing student engagement and employability. A funding envelope should be created for universities that expand the number of work-integrated learning opportunities, and incentives for employers to take on students throughout the year should continue and be expanded with time.

.....✧ **Why Ontario is ready for this:** Experiential learning is well known to provide high quality learning experiences to students, providing something not achievable through a sit-down lecture. They also provide students with tangible skills that can be carried into the workplace. Ontario is already home to a vast array of experiential programs, which simply need to extend to more students.



**OUSA BELIEVES THAT EVERY STUDENT SHOULD HAVE AT LEAST ONE NON-LECTURE, EXPERIENTIAL OR HIGH IMPACT CLASSROOM EXPERIENCE AT SOME POINT IN THEIR UNIVERSITY CAREER. HOWEVER, IMPLEMENTING SYSTEM-WIDE EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION WILL NOT COME CHEAPLY. AT THE VERY LEAST, INVESTMENTS MUST BE MADE IN FACULTY TRAINING AND COURSE DEVELOPMENT.**

**THE FOLLOWING RECOMMENDATIONS TRY TO ANSWER THE QUESTION OF PAYING FOR THIS IMPORTANT IMPROVEMENT TO QUALITY.**

# REDIRECT PERFORMANCE FUNDING

*savings: \$23 million*

46 /

Performance funding refers to a funding model where institutions are provided with the opportunity to obtain funding if they meet a certain threshold in their outcomes and outputs, as defined by a set of key indicators. Proponents of performance funding argue that it promotes greater awareness of campus performance, integrates public and institutional priorities, enhances transparency and accountability, and incentivizes improved productivity.<sup>72</sup> Detractors argue that performance indicators paint a limited portrait of university performance. Furthermore, it has been argued that performance funding can reduce diversity in institutional missions and reduce support to the institutions that need it most.

In Ontario, the current performance-funding regime was implemented in 2001 to promote awareness of campus performance. The idea was to create a market-based approach to financing higher education through the provision of greater information to the “buyers” of higher education, as well as incentivize institutions to improve performance on the indicators assessed.<sup>73</sup> The fund initially split universities into three tiers based on their graduation rates, as well as the employment of their graduates six months and two years after graduation. The top tier received two-thirds of the fund, the middle tier received one-third of the fund, and the bottom tier received no funding at all. Arguably, this system did not fairly distribute funds; often, the performance difference between the

top and bottom third was within the statistical margin of error. The formula was quickly changed to more fairly assess university performance. The Ministry set a benchmark for each particular indicator at 10 per cent below the system average. In order to be eligible for funding, the institution must have met the benchmark. The amount of funding for eligible institutions was then calculated using a formula that takes both size of the institution and their success in achieving high rates. This system remains in place today. In 2010-11, the government spent \$23.3 million on performance funding for Ontario’s 20 universities.<sup>74</sup>

While Ontario’s performance funding regime may have been founded with the best of intentions, Ontario’s system is currently not accomplishing any of its original objectives. First, while performance funding was originally meant to act as a financial incentive for improved productivity and to reward institutions with excellent graduation and employment outcomes, the envelope began as less than a single percentage point of university operating funding. Currently it only comprises 0.70 per cent of total government funding to institutions – and is declining each year (see Figure 11).<sup>75</sup>

Given the size of the performance-funding envelope in comparison to nearly every other type of government spending on post-secondary education,

**FIGURE 11: PERFORMANCE FUNDING AS A PERCENTAGE OF OVERALL UNIVERSITY SPENDING<sup>76</sup>**

Year	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
KPIs as % of funding	0.94%	0.86%	0.82%	0.77%	0.75%	0.72%	0.70%

**FIGURE 12: RANGE OF PERFORMANCE INDICATOR SCORES AT ONTARIO UNIVERSITIES<sup>77</sup>**

	Highest	Median	Lowest	Average
<b>Graduation Rates</b>	90.0% (Nipissing)	78.6 (Brock) and 76.8% (Guelph)	57.7% (OCAD)	78.3%
<b>Employment - 6 months</b>	100.0% (Hearst)	94.0% (Ryerson) and 93.7% (Windsor)	89.5% (Algoma)	94.1%
<b>Employment - 2 years</b>	100.0% (Algoma, Hearst and UOIT)	96.3 (Nipissing) and 96.2% (Trent)	93.5% (OCAD)	95.7%

it is hardly able to meaningfully impact university behaviour. Moreover, as the latest data indicates, there is very little variation between institutions in both the employment and graduation KPIs.

The second drawback of Ontario's current performance funding regime is that the measured Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) are not directly related to factors controllable by institutions. While institutions can provide students with skills that might lead to employment, it is a factor that is also heavily dependent on the broader economy. Graduation rates are controllable, but are also dependent on the students admitted by the university and student performance. Many have argued that rewarding higher graduation rates can encourage poor academic quality or lowered expectations.<sup>78</sup>

Furthermore, measuring aggregate employment rates recently after graduation gives no indication of whether the graduate is working in a job related to their studies, how the graduate is doing further into their careers, or the relative success of graduates compared to those that did not attend post-secondary studies. If a student graduated with a degree in political science, but ends up working at a fast food restaurant, the students had very different types of employment outcomes. Such a graduate likely would not be satisfied by the relationship between their field of study and employment result.

The third indication that Ontario's performance funding regime is fundamentally flawed has been the lack of progress made on key performance indicators over the lifespan of the program. Data on the cohort of students entering in 2000, the first year Ontario's performance funding envelope was active, indicates that Ontario's students had a seven-year graduation rate of 78.3 per cent.<sup>79</sup> The most recent data indicates that this has only increased to 79.7 per cent. Employment rates experienced an even more miniscule change.

The \$23 million the government spends on

performance funding is currently unrestricted, meaning that most institutions utilize simply as a small top-up to their unrestricted operating funding, which is largely absorbed by cost pressures of post-secondary institutions. While twenty-three million dollars pales in comparison to the enormous salary and benefit obligations universities hold, it could go a long way to funding the resources needed to support experiential education, implement a learning outcomes assessment, hire teaching chairs, or a number of other measures that would serve to enhance quality on a system-wide level. Students propose that the performance-funding envelope be converted into targeted funding envelopes to support specific quality enhancement at each institution. Any of the proposals in this submission would be suitable for such funding.

..... **Why Ontario is ready for this:** Ontario's performance funding regime has not worked effectively since its inception. As will be explored below, a simple change to the indicators would not be enough to make it work without considerable additional investment. However, this envelope of \$23 million could fund substantial quality improvements if invested directly in those improvements.

## HELPFUL TANGENT

### *Could performance funding work if Ontario adopted international standards?*

Performance-based funding is a concept that has been debated and explored for many decades already. It is premised on the notion that “changes in resource availability will threaten organizations and encourage adaptation for continued existence.”<sup>80</sup> Performance funding has been pursued in many jurisdictions, most recently by the Obama administration in the 2012 State of the Union address, which advocated that states explore performance-based funding in order to improve college completion rates and reduce the overall cost of higher education. Though Ontario’s performance funding regime has achieved mixed results in the past, one might legitimately ask whether the system could be improved through reforms to indicators or funding formulae.

The reality is that performance-based funding has had mixed success where it has been implemented, with success being predicated on a few key factors. Broadly, performance funding has been shown to have some impact on university behaviour,

and a small impact on indicators of student success. However, to date, no jurisdiction that has implemented performance funding has achieved results that have been directly attributable to the performance funding system itself.

In Canada, both Alberta and Ontario currently have performance-funding systems; however, over time both provinces have proportionally reduced their overall funding allocations to performance envelopes in favour of enrolment based funding to meet university costs.<sup>81</sup> In the United States, twenty-six states implemented performance-funding regimes between 1979 and 2007, with just over half of these states abandoning the plans within this time frame.<sup>82</sup> Several lessons can be learned from the states where performance funding has survived as a model over the long-term. The chart below compares Ontario with two states where performance funding has been a stable component of university finance since its inception.

**FIGURE 13: PERFORMANCE BASED-FUNDING OF FOUR-YEAR UNIVERSITIES IN THREE JURISDICTIONS**

Jurisdiction	Year Performance Funding Established	Peak Performance-Based Share of Higher Education Funding	Indicators Tracked	Progress on Key Performance Indicators	Future Direction of Performance Funding
Ontario	2000	1%	Graduation rates; Employment rates (6 months, 2 years)	No quantitative improvement	Unknown
Tennessee	1979	4.4%	Accreditation; student performance on two standardized tests; instruction evaluation; program evaluation; transfer rates; retention rates; graduation rates; campus-specific indicators; participation in state-wide initiatives	Participation, assessment & accreditation. No state-wide quantitative improvement in graduation, transfer, retention rate	Replaced enrolment funding with outcomes-based funding in 2009
Ohio	1995	9%	Timely degree completion; campus share of third party sponsored research	Mean graduation times: 4.7 to 4.3 years for bachelor students	Replaced enrolment funding with outcomes-based funding in 2010

## CASE STUDY: TENNESSEE

*The state of Tennessee is home to one of the world's oldest university performance funding systems. Originally implemented in 1979, the system was implemented with broad support from universities, stakeholder groups and government.<sup>83</sup> This support was possible due to the fact that the system was developed almost entirely from within the state's higher education community, making it a uniquely bottom-up approach. Unlike Ontario's system, the share of post-secondary funding allocated on a performance basis in Tennessee has increased substantially over time.<sup>84</sup>*

*One of the key elements of Tennessee's success in performance funding has been its non-punitive nature. Under the original 1979 system, which went largely unaltered in basic structure until 2010, institutions could earn between a 2 to 5.45 per cent increase in annual state appropriations based on performance on series of key performance indicators.<sup>85</sup> The funding plan's supporters in the higher education community recognized that by making progress on goals important to the public, increases in funding for higher education could be better justified.<sup>86</sup> Furthermore, funding on a performance basis was not subject to the same limitations as enrolment-based funding; namely, if enrolment were to flat-line, so would overall funding while institutional costs rise. The Tennessee system also incorporates a cyclical review process, where policymakers and higher education institutions make changes to indicators and the structure of the system to make it more responsive to institutional needs. This review process has transformed the system to one with differentiated indicators for each institution, expanded the range of system-wide*

*indicators from five to ten and more closely aligned the performance assessment process with institutional strategic plans.<sup>87</sup>*

*It is worth noting that Tennessee's historic success in performance funding has largely been the stability of its system. Very little evidence suggests that tying funding to employment and retention rates in Tennessee improved these rates measurably over the last two decades. As such, Tennessee altered its funding formula to make close to eighty per cent of public funding to post-secondary institutions outcomes-based in 2010.<sup>88</sup> The system has completely replaced the state's enrolment-base funding model. Some early indications from this shift from a performance funding top-up to a performance funding formula are that it has had some impact on university behaviour, leading campuses to bring in extra student advisors, increase tutoring and remedial classes, fast-track major courses and develop bridging courses between semesters.<sup>89</sup> However, meaningful data on whether key performance indicators experience considerable improvement over time will not become available until the system has been in place for longer.*

## CASE STUDY: OHIO

*Ohio's system of performance funding was implemented in 1998 with the creation of six "challenge funds" relating to tuition levels, timely graduation, industry training partnerships, third-party sponsored research and IT investment. These initial investments totalled approximately \$27 million in 1998 and grew to over \$146 million by 2009.<sup>90</sup> Four-year universities participated in three of the funding challenges: research, timely graduation, and technological investment.*

Similar to Tennessee's system, the funding was not punitive in nature; performance funding came in addition to existing enrolment-based funding. As four-year universities invested in infrastructure and student success, the performance funding grew considerably. Similar to Ontario, Ohio's performance funding envelope started close to a single percentage point of total higher education funding, but grew to approximately 9 per cent, a very large proportion for systems where performance funding comes in addition to enrolment funding.<sup>91</sup> Like Ontario, Ohio's performance indicators are system-wide, and not differentiated between institutions.

The Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) credits Ohio's performance funding system with cutting the median time to degree completion from 4.7 to 4.3 years between 1999 and 2007.<sup>92</sup> In this instance, performance funding would appear to have achieved some degree of measurable success, which was not the case in Tennessee. However, it must also be noted that Ohio's investment in performance funding, particularly the student success envelope dedicated to degree completion, experienced considerable growth over this time period, ballooning from \$4 million in 1999 to \$53 million in 2007.<sup>93</sup> This indicates that institutions received considerable direct investment in degree-completion initiatives.

In 2009, Ohio moved from a performance funding system that came in addition to enrolment funding to a performance budgeting system where enrolment-based funding was replaced entirely by funding allocated on a performance basis.

#### CASE STUDY COMPARISONS TO ONTARIO

Ohio and Tennessee were chosen as case studies due to the fact that, like Ontario, performance funding has been a stable component of university finance

since its inception. Further, they were chosen because one system has achieved measurable success on a given indicator, while the other has not. The three systems are entirely different, yet Ontario and Tennessee have been criticized for not meaningfully improving performance, while Ohio has achieved some measure of success on one indicator tracked.

#### **Lesson for Ontario: Performance funding has to fund progress on key indicators through additional investment.**

Both Tennessee and Ohio provide performance funding as a top-up to regular enrolment funding that increases each year as targets are met. This differs substantially from Ontario, where performance funding is a static envelope year-to-year. Both Tennessee and Ohio have, as a result, achieved some objectives they have conditioned performance funding around. Tennessee has used performance funding to fund a culture of assessment, and have used increasing performance funding to finance institutional participation in instructional, quality, student satisfaction assessments, as well as full participation in the accreditation process. However, the performance funding has not meaningfully effected change in other measures such as transfer rates, graduation and retention rates. Higher education officials in Tennessee report that the cost of assessment is onerous on universities, even with the extra performance funding. With the performance funds being utilized primarily to fund assessment, little is left to allow institutions to devote resources to the other performance indicators.

Ohio, on the other hand, has provided institutions with performance top-ups that have grown exponentially, but set very defined targets. Ohio's progress in reducing the mean degree completion time for undergraduates has been largely due

to the fact that the program provided enough financial incentive to devote a portion of their resources to improving degree completion time.

Ontario's performance funding system provides no incentive for institutions to change behaviour, since the possibility of additional funding is absent. Evidence from Ohio and Tennessee point to the fact that performance indicators must be matched with additional public funding, which must be sufficient to fund to the achievement of the targets. In this way, performance funding can be seen simply as a targeted investment.

**Lesson for Ontario: Performance funding is more effective as a larger share of post-secondary finance.**

Ohio's success in utilizing performance funding to drive improvement in key performance indicators stems partly from its proportionally large share of university budgets. Through sagging growth in enrolment-based funding and rapid growth in performance funding, higher education institutions in Ohio had to participate in the performance goal to adequately compete for incremental public funding. This condition is not possible if funding growth in an enrolment-driven formula outpaces growth in performance funding, as it has in Ontario.

The fact that both Ohio and Tennessee have recently moved from performance funding models to performance-driven funding formulae is telling. Though some progress has been made in each state towards the achievements of the goals of performance funding, the move towards performance budgeting in each state was driven by political sentiments from policymakers that higher education was not achieving its full potential.<sup>94</sup> In other words, incremental, top-up based performance funding did not produce results that governments were satisfied with.



# SLOW GROWTH IN MERIT-BASED AWARDS

*savings: variable*

In 2009-10, 59 per cent of Ontario students received an entrance scholarship worth a median of \$2,000, 85 per cent of which were automatic awards.<sup>96</sup> In contrast, only 15 per cent of Ontario's first year students received need-based aid from their institution, worth a median of \$1,250. In Ontario, both the magnitude of entrance awards, as well as the percentage of students that receive them was higher than the national average. While it is often assumed that many of these scholarships are paid for through donations, in reality 73 per cent of funding for merit-based scholarships come out of university operating budgets.

Universal merit-based scholarships are the largest and fastest growing expenditure for institutional financial assistance in Ontario, yet they are one of the least effective at helping promote accessibility or quality. Between 2004-05 and 2009-10, universities increased spending on scholarships and bursaries outside of the required tuition set-aside by nearly \$132 million dollars, mostly driven by demand for merit-based entrance awards.<sup>97</sup>

Institutions primarily invest in entrance scholarships as a means to compete for the best and brightest incoming students. The nature of this system is akin to a market place: competitive advantage is not gained unless one's awards are comparable or greater than the competition's. As a result, a study in 2008 found that most institutional entrance scholarships were clustered between \$1,000 and \$2,500.<sup>98</sup> With few outliers, it stands to reason that institutions within this range are likely not influencing students' enrolment decisions, since a student who receives an entrance scholarship at one institution likely receives similar offers from other institutions they are considering attending. Moreover, given how widespread entrance scholarships are, it is unlikely that they truly reward the best and brightest students, and rather serve as general recruitment tools for institutions looking to attract more, though perhaps not better, students. However, it also stands to reason

that if a single institution were to scale back or repeal their merit-based entrance scholarship program, it would leave them at a competitive disadvantage, making student recruitment more difficult.

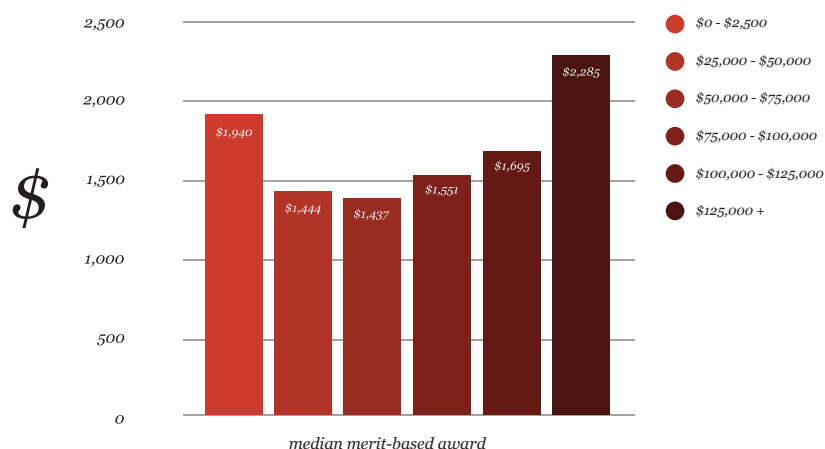
Merit-based scholarships seldom must help underrepresented groups access a university education. A 2011 survey of Ontario students revealed that merit-based entrance scholarships most often benefit students from the highest income quintile (see Figure 14, opposite). While students whose parents made between \$25,000 and \$50,000 received an average of \$1,500 in merit-based academic awards, students from families whose parental income was in excess of \$125,000 annually received an average award of \$2,300.<sup>99</sup> A similar gap exists for students in middle-income groups, a significant fact considering that the majority of students are clustered in this group.

Even if there is a tendency of merit-based entrance awards to benefit students from more privileged economic backgrounds was inconsequential, it is hard to ignore the fact that they do little to assist students in upper years pay for post-secondary education. As the 2011 survey revealed, while two-thirds of first-year students achieved an entrance scholarship, the proportion dropped to approximately 20 per cent in all other years of study (see Figure 15, opposite). This is largely due to the fact that the vast majority of entrance scholarship awards are non-renewable, aimed at recruitment rather than retention.<sup>100</sup>

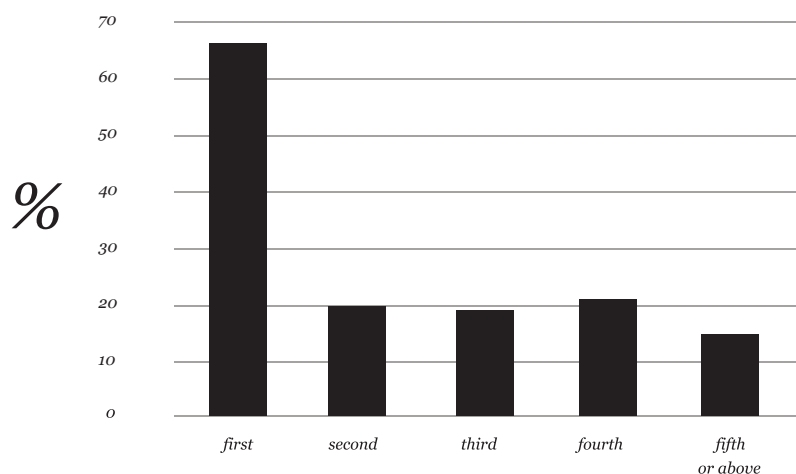
Though merit-based entrance scholarships help first-year students meet some of their costs, there are far better mechanisms through which to deliver financial assistance. The Drummond Commission in Ontario recently recommended maintaining the Student Access Guarantee, which mandates that institutions deliver 10 per cent of new tuition revenue to supporting need-based student

*“A study in 2008 found that most institutional entrance scholarships were clustered between \$1,000 and \$2,500.”*

**FIGURE 14: AVERAGE MERIT-BASED AWARD BY FAMILY INCOME**



**FIGURE 15: PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS RECEIVING A MERIT-BASED AWARD BY YEAR OF STUDY**



assistance programs.<sup>101</sup> The approximately \$150 million allocated to institutions to meet set-aside requirements pales in comparison to the growing amount of money spent by institutions on merit-based awards. If the \$300+ million currently spent each year on entrance awards were to in part be re-focused on need-based programs, it would represent a significant investment in the overall accessibility of Ontario's university system.

If universities increase spending on merit-based scholarship at the average rate that they have been increasing over the last half-decade, while enrolment continues to rise by projected amounts, a considerable amount of new money will be required to be spent. OUSA estimates that over \$115 million dollars in

new institutional student financial assistance will be needed to fund merit-based entrance scholarships for incoming university students by 2021. If growth in spending on merit-based scholarships were to not increase, this amount could be nearly halved.

..... **Why Ontario is ready for this:** Merit-based scholarship growth is something like an arms race. As universities compete for students, no institution wants to be caught with a substantially smaller entrance scholarship. If enrolment growth slows, competition for students will only increase. Without control the growth of scholarship costs, Ontario universities could face a substantial bill in future years, that could have been spent on more pressing issues.



# STUDENT MOBILITY

*Removing barriers in the  
Ontario system*

# ACCEPT ALL FIRST- AND SECOND-YEAR CREDITS

*savings: variable*

In the 1995 Pan-Canadian Protocol on the Transferability of University Credits, the Premiers of Canada's provinces endorsed the following recommendation: that "all course work completed by transfer students during the first two years of university study in Canada will be recognized and fully credited for the purposes of granting a degree, provided that:

*The transfer student is deemed admissible and has been presented with an offer of admission;*

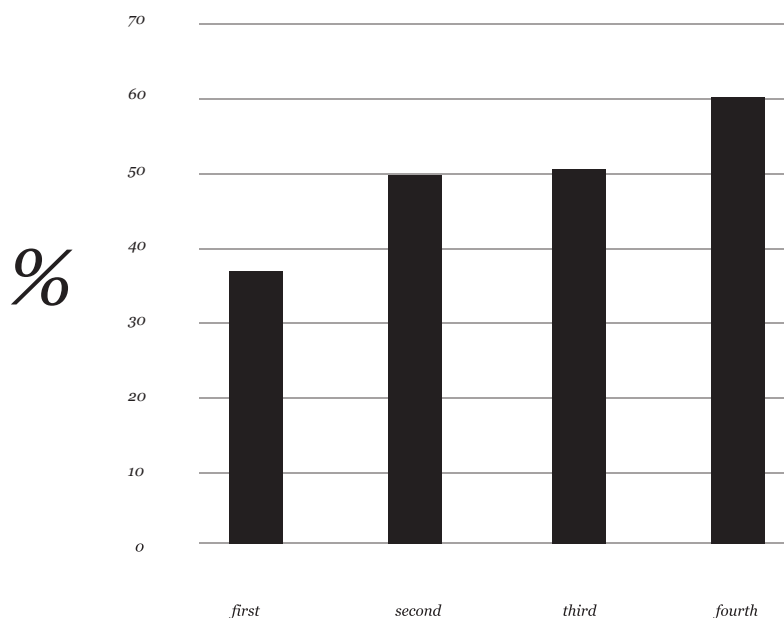
*The transfer student has achieved a passing grade in his/her course(s) and has obtained grade levels that would normally be required of continuing students; and*

*The credits earned are related to the program of study in which the transfer student will register, or the credits can be counted as electives for the program of study.*"<sup>102</sup>

Students fully endorse the recommendation from this protocol for a number of reasons. First, it will be a change affecting those students who need it most. Data gathered from OUSA's recent post-secondary student survey indicate that students in their upper years of university study had received greater percentages of their credits recognized when transferring to their current institution (see Figure 16). There are a number of factors that make interpreting this data more complex, but the relationship between year of study and credit recognition is visibly linear. Interestingly, first year students appeared to have the lowest levels of credit recognition, despite the fact courses at the first year level tend to cover introductory material that should be considered foundational in any program of study.

The idea that the first two years of university should be fully transferrable between credit transfer pathways represents an effective compromise between the

**FIGURE 16: PERCENTAGE OF TRANSFER CREDITS RECOGNIZED ACROSS YEARS OF STUDY**



responsibility of the public post-secondary system to offer a certain degree of student mobility, with its allowance that universities have the freedom to differentiate in courses of study. Particularly in the early years of a degree, knowledge should be foundational, with common concepts taught in similar courses of study across from each institution or across institutions. However, as students specialize in upper years, it is understandable that transfer credit may be harder to grant. Early credit recognition between similar programs of study will also be useful to students due to the fact that has been found that more transfer takes place between similar programs than different ones.<sup>103</sup>

Second, the creation of a broad credit transfer standard in the university sector will create a degree of certainty amongst university-to-university transfer students where none exists currently, despite the fact that university-to-university is the most common type of transfer. While many universities already grant these types of transfer requests, the process currently is such that no transfer student knows exactly how many of their credits will transfer, nor can they estimate in any meaningful way. A standardized system would allow students a broad understanding of how the credit transfer system works, allowing a degree of consistency and predictability currently lacking. In addition, as online learning becomes more common, a robust credit transfer system can increase student choice, and facilitate the collaborative development of online degree programs, a critical step in the Ontario government's plans to develop the Ontario Online Institute.

Finally, it is important to recognize that every credit a student is forced to re-take due to poor credit transfer arrangements represents an additional investment from both the student and the government. The

government pays universities on a per-credit basis, meaning that enhancing credit transfer arrangements could save the government substantially in basic operating funding.

....✧ **Why Ontario is ready for this:** Students currently are forced to navigate an incredibly complex system of transfer, where course repetition is commonplace. This repetition is expensive for both students and Ontario. Provided that credits are only transferred between appropriate programs, a provincial standard for transfer would provide maximum clarity and save students and the province a great deal of money.

*“Every credit a student is forced to re-take due to poor credit transfer arrangements represents an additional investment from both the student and the government.”*

# ADJUST MINIMUM GRADE REQUIREMENTS

*savings: variable*

Minimum grade requirements are in place to ensure that credits transferred are reflective of student learning equal to the standards of the receiving program. Two types of minimum grade requirements exist: minimum entering averages and per-course minimum grade requirements. Minimum entering averages refer to the minimum cumulative average a student must have to transfer to a new institution, while per-course minimum grade requirements are the academic standard a student must have achieved in a particular course for that credit to transfer.

Most post-secondary transfer programs between colleges and universities require the college class mark to be between a 70% and 75% in order to be approved for transfer to the university; however, the passing mark for most university transfer is 60% or 65%. See Figure X for an overview of the minimum grade requirements across the province (see Figure 17).

In particular, given that Ontario's universities all operate within the same quality assurance framework, university-to-university course credit transfer should not be based on an arbitrary grade threshold, but rather on the actual passing grade. The denial of credit transfer applications for students who have succeeded in completing a course based on an arbitrary grade level requirement is unfair. While there may be a rationale for differentiating the grade threshold for college-to-university transfer, when a university-to-university transfer student has already met or exceeded the university admission requirements, there should not be refused the transfer of some of their course credits. The pass threshold should not be higher for transfer student than it is for non-transfer students at a given institution.

**FIGURE 17: PER-COURSE MINIMUM GRADE REQUIREMENTS AT ONTARIO UNIVERSITIES IN 2011-2012, PERCENTAGES**

Institution	College	University
Algoma	60	60
Brock	70	60
Carleton	73	60
Guelph	70	60
Lakehead	75	65
Laurentian	65	60
Laurier	70	70
McMaster	73	65
Nipissing	75	65
OCAD	65	65
Ottawa	73	n/a*
Queen's	60	60
Ryerson	70	65
Toronto	n/a*	60
Trent	70	60
UOIT	75	65
Waterloo	70	65
Western	73	60
Windsor	60	60
York	70	60
* information not readily available		







# EXPANDING ONLINE LEARNING

*How to shift towards more  
online initiatives*

# MOVING FORWARD WITH THE ONLINE INSTITUTE

The Premier of Ontario announced in the 2010 Speech from the Throne that the Province was going to launch the Ontario Online Institute and “bring the best professors in the top programs at Ontario universities to the homes of those who want to pursue this option for higher learning.”<sup>104</sup> Since the initial announcement, students have been urging the government to launch the Institute, which will provide post-secondary students with more online learning options. Online learning is critical to the future of the province for many reasons, but two in particular stand out to students. First, online learning will help meet the needs of lifelong learners and non-traditional students, who are entering our post-secondary system at an ever-quickenning pace. Oftentimes, these students are mature, have jobs and families, or live in communities without a university nearby. In a shifting economy, it is of the utmost importance for the post-secondary sector to be accommodating for students who return to university or college for retraining after suffering a job loss or displacement.

Second, online learning is a critical building block of a truly mobile post-secondary education system. Offering online versions of current university courses would allow students studying at a particular campus, or not studying on a campus at all, to choose courses from across the Province. An oft-forgotten fact is that online learners are most often students studying on-campus. For example, at the University of Waterloo’s Centre for Extended Learning, 71 per cent of students taking online courses study on-campus as well.<sup>105</sup> Online courses offer very distinct benefits to on-campus learners. For instance, if a course cannot be offered due to a professor taking a sabbatical, or a course cannot fit within a student’s timetable, online learning offers that student a way to fulfill their degree requirements in a timely fashion. Perhaps for this reason the top reason for choosing

online learning at the University of Waterloo was convenient course scheduling.<sup>106</sup> Given that Ontario already offers over thousands of online courses, the only thing stopping these courses from being mobile between post-secondary institutions is poor credit transfer arrangements.

Students put forward a vision for the Ontario Online Institute in 2010, which recommended that the institute be designed as a consortium of universities and colleges that would share online courses, resources and infrastructure. In this model, the institution that granted the majority of the credits would confer the degree, similar to the way the Open Universities Australia operates. The Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities shared this vision in 2011, where the government supported the development of a portal through which all online courses could be shared.<sup>107</sup> Additionally, the government indicated that funding would become available for the development of new online courses and professional development of faculty for online teaching. Where possible, new online courses would be developed collaboratively between post-secondary institutions and investments would be focused on strategic priorities for learning.

Students believe that a holistic approach to online learning that includes robust student support services, course and infrastructure development, and collaboration between institutions is the most effective strategy to build on Ontario’s current capacity and take online learning to the next level.

*“At the University of Waterloo’s Centre for Extended Learning, 71 per cent of students taking online courses study on campus as well.”*

## HELPFUL TANGENT

### *Should the Ontario Online Institute strive to emulate the success of Western Governors University?*

One proposal for the Ontario Online Institute has been that it could be modeled on the Western Governors University. A design completely based upon Western Governors would signal a significant shift away from the direction previously articulated, but adopting certain aspects of Western Governors could contribute to the excellence of the future Ontario Online Institute. Western Governors University (WGU) is a private, not-for-profit, online American university with an enrollment of approximately 25,000 students, both at the undergraduate and graduate levels. Focusing primarily on professional education, WGU offers programs in business, health, teaching and information technology. The institution is intended for students with some previous post-secondary experience, as transfer credits are required for admission. The average age of a student at WGU is 36, while 64 per cent of students work full-time while studying. Additionally, a majority of WGU students are from traditionally under-served populations, including low-income, rural and first-generation backgrounds.

There are two facets that greatly differentiate WGU from a traditional university: admissions process and instruction-style. Western Governors University is not strictly open admission, since it requires that students have some previous post-secondary and work experience, depending on program. However, once a student has met these criteria, the admissions process largely ignores prior marks and academic achievement, focusing instead on a readiness assessment measuring reading, writing, math and personal learning

style. The institution assesses these performance tasks and measures students' academic competencies. Following this assessment a student will either be admitted or denied admission. Admitted students work with enrolment counsellors to draft a personalized degree plan for that student, including timelines, benchmarks and learning opportunities.<sup>108</sup>

Instruction at WGU does not follow the traditional instructor-student pedagogical style. No "classes" at assigned times take place. Rather, a student completes a self-directed curriculum with the aid of a personal mentor for support. WGU also utilizes discussion and chat threads to facilitate communication between students. This method has meant that WGU has hired no faculty to conduct teaching or research. Rather, ready-made courses are purchased from publishing companies and completed by students.

As can be plainly seen, WGU is quite different than the vision initially proposed. While the initial vision called for the online institute to bring together courses developed by faculty at currently existing Ontario institutions, the Western Governors model goes completely outside the existing university system, opting instead to act as a broker to students for privately-developed course modules. Students have significant reservations about this model, as a university operating without faculty is far removed from current practice in Ontario. Concerns exist regarding how such a degree would be perceived, both in the academic world and across the Province, and how such a model would be financed without exploiting students.

However, there are several aspects of the Western Governors University model that the Ontario Online Institute could strive to emulate. Firstly, the student support services offered by WGU are quite robust. In addition to the individual academic mentoring that follows a student throughout their degree, the university offers a virtual student success office, central IT help support available during non-business hours, and 24/7 personal counselling for students.<sup>109</sup> As a result, WGU scored significantly higher than traditional universities on the National Survey of Student Engagement with regards to the supportiveness of the campus environment, despite not having a physical campus. Additionally, the competency-based approach utilized by WGU is currently unavailable at Ontario universities, and could offer a unique learning style for non-traditional students who have had difficulty with Ontario's post-secondary education system.

Given the fact that the Western Governors University appears to offer a unique and valuable model of online education to students in the United States, as well as its radical departure from the vision of the Ontario Online Institute, students believe the government should strive to include successful aspects of the WGU approach while maintaining the original vision for the Online Institute to be a consortium of current university and college courses. Students have long advocated that the Online Institute must offer support services centrally, with WGU's high student scores serving as an indicator of the value of this approach. By adopting this best practice of Western Governors, as well as other successful online institutes in the UK and Australia, the Ontario government would achieve the intent of allowing Online Institute to resemble a physical campus.

Additionally, the competency-based approach at Western Governors has achieved a great deal of success in serving the needs of students from under-served backgrounds. With 74 per cent of the student body coming from a low-income, first generation, rural or minority background, the institution can tailor the learning experience of a student to that student's individual needs, allowing them to learn at their own pace. WGU requires every student to take an initial course that teaches the skills necessary to succeed in their degree program, in addition to supporting the student actively through personal mentoring. Such an individualized experience is not possible in the current Ontario system. To add this capability to our post-secondary system, the program development fund planned for the Ontario Online Institute could be utilized to support the development of such programs where gaps currently exist.

However, it makes little sense that the university should be developed as a stand-alone institution offering courses supplied by publishers when Ontario is home to an abundance of online courses. As of 2008-09, there were over 20,000 courses and 800 online programs offered online by Ontario universities, accounting for over 11 per cent of all post-secondary course registrations across the sector.<sup>110</sup> Institutions have already utilized government and students resources to develop these courses naturally over time in order to compete in a higher education marketplace where online learning is sure to take an increasingly important role. It would be, at best, an inefficient use of these resources for government to invest in an infrastructure that would not leverage the value of the online courses that already exist at Ontario's universities and colleges.

Any consortium model system where universities would populate a central portal with existing courses would require a flexible and open credit transfer framework to be useful to students. Students taking online courses through such a model would be inclined to take courses from multiple institutions to maximize choice, meaning that any credits taken at the institution not granting the final degree would need to be transferred. Without guaranteed transfer networks, institutions would not be required to recognize courses offered by other institutions. This is currently the reality of Ontario's credit transfer system. Universities handle credit transfer students on a case-by-case, credit-by-credit basis, with the responsibility largely on the student to negotiate their transfers. A recent survey found that the university-to-university credit recognition rate at eight Ontario universities averaged to approximately 52 per cent. In such an environment, a truly mobile online education would be nearly impossible, since students would have to negotiate each course not taken at a degree granting institution.

For this reason, OUSA is supportive of the proposal that the Ontario Online Institute have authority to confer degrees. If implemented properly, degree-granting authority could act as a catalyst for current institutions to pursue more robust credit transfer arrangements. Proper implementation must take into account the following principles:

*The Ontario Online Institute should only grant degrees where arrangements cannot be made with participating institutions.*

The Canadian job market is familiar with all twenty of Ontario's universities, the qualifications they grant and the type of students they turn out. Graduates would prefer to attain a degree from an institution that employers and other post-secondary institutions recognize. Additionally, a model where established institutions are the primary degree granting authority

would create an incentive for institutions to expand online offerings and improve quality that would not exist otherwise, as online degrees would have to live up to existing standards of quality.

The terms of reference provided for the design of the Ontario Online Institute in 2011 specified that the government would create a course development fund, incentivizing institutions to develop further online courses, train faculty in online pedagogy and facilitate multi-lateral credit transfer arrangements. Students believed that this strategy was particularly well suited to the goal of an Ontario Online Institute driven by institutional excellence, and we continue to believe

so. The course development fund should continue to be offered even if the online institute gains a certain amount of degree granting authority.

Students' preferred approach is that the Institute not admit students nor itself deliver any courses or programs; however, the Institute should be granted the authority to establish an academic body that would grant diplomas and degrees. Students who have taken a sufficient number of courses from Canadian post-secondary institutions could apply for a credential through the Ontario Online Institute, and be granted a diploma or degree if the student's prior learning met the provincial standard for the appropriate credential.

*The Government should continue to pursue a robust credit transfer strategy for online learners, even if the Online Institute becomes degree-granting.*

In 2010, the government announced a credit transfer strategy that would be transparent, consistent and improve student mobility and success. While much progress has yet to be made, the Credit Transfer Innovation Fund, Institutional Grants, the Ontario Council on Articulation and Transfer, as well as new accountability measures will undoubtedly create incentives for institutions to improve student mobility.

*“OUSA is  
supportive of  
the proposal  
that the  
Ontario Online  
Institute have  
authority to  
confer degrees”*

One risk that is incurred by allowing the Online Institute to admit its own students and grant its own degrees is that it will remove pressure on universities to put in the effort to develop transfer pathways to facilitate effective online learning. It is important to ensure that universities do not use the authority of the Online Institute to confer degrees as an excuse to disengage from the credit transfer discussion.

*The Ontario Online Institute should offer support services centrally, with a portion of all online tuition dedicated to paying for these services.*

Students using online learning methods often have personal and professional commitments, including employment, children, and other responsibilities, that preclude them from studying at a traditional institution and can have a significant impact on their ability to compete in a post-secondary program. As a result, the dropout rates for distance education courses are usually higher than those for comparable, on-campus courses. For example, dropout rates in Europe are between 20 and 30 per cent, and in Asia they have reached approximately 50 per cent. Social and environmental factors, such as creating time and space to study, patterns of work, the inability to take part in tutorials and the inaccessibility of institutional supports were cited as the main reasons why students discontinued their online education.

Students wholeheartedly agree with the notion that the Ontario Online Institute should offer all the amenities of a regular post-secondary campus and would propose that support services be considered a key component of the institute. The Ontario Online Institute would be best positioned to deliver these non-academic support services centrally, as this would provide for efficiencies of scale and easy access to services for students taking a variety of courses offered in partnership with different universities through the Ontario Online Institute. Services requiring the sharing of confidential records and academic information could be accomplished through integration of academic records and IT systems between institutions, or it could continue to

be delivered by each institution individually.

In addition, technology-enabled learning can also refer to a wide variety of hybrid models of education wherein the primary vehicle for content delivery is not a traditional lecture hall. OUSA's support for expansion of these technology-enabled classes depends largely on the particular pedagogical model. Courses such as first-year psychology at McMaster, where content is delivered primarily online but classes are used for discussion can greatly enhance the student experience if executed properly.<sup>111</sup> However, to ignore the active learning component of this model, simply delivering content online through video lectures, would likely result in quality concerns from students.

**RECOMMENDATION TEN:** Launch the Ontario Online Institute as a consortium of colleges and universities delivering online courses and programs through a central portal.

**RECOMMENDATION ELEVEN:** The Ontario Online Institute should centrally offer a robust suite of non-academic student support services geared to online learners, including support for students with disabilities, personal counselling, and information technology support.

**RECOMMENDATION TWELVE:** The Government should utilize a course development fund to fill gaps in available online programming and develop some open admissions and competency-based online programming.

**RECOMMENDATION THIRTEEN:** Prioritize the development of course-to-course equivalencies for online credits to allow students to graduate, where possible, with a degree from a currently existing Ontario university.

**RECOMMENDATION FOURTEEN:** Grant the Ontario Online Institute limited degree-granting authority to ensure that students are not held back from graduation by denied transfer credits.







## OTHER REFORM IDEAS

*Discussion & data on  
proposals to reform  
post-secondary education*

# INITIAL THOUGHTS ON REFORM PROPOSALS

As Ontario positions itself to address a budget deficit while striving to improve or maintain quality of education in its universities, several significant reform proposals have come forward from both the Ontario government and the Commission on the Reform of Ontario's Public Services, as well as independent organizations and the higher education sector itself. Many of the suggestions would represent significant changes in the delivery of higher education, affecting students and institutions alike. Additionally, the majority of these suggestions have implications for quality and the cost of education, both of which are key considerations in the current economic climate. The final section of this report explores a number of recent reform proposals raised by a number of stakeholders, and aims to critically examine their potential utility from both a quality enhancement and a cost-savings perspective.

## DIFFERENTIATION

In late 2010, the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario released a report supporting this notion, claiming that

"...increasing the differentiation of the postsecondary system brings the following benefits: higher quality teaching and research programs, more student choice with easier inter-institution transfer and mobility, greater institutional accountability, a more globally competitive system, [and] a more financially sustainable system."<sup>112</sup>

For a number of years prior to and since this statement was made, differentiation has been posited as a means to promote both excellence and quality at Ontario universities. *Academic Transformation* by Clark et al, outlined the concept of "academic drift" which they defined as a tendency in universities to pursue similar academic missions, primarily focused on research.<sup>113</sup> The authors later proposed differentiation as a means to control costs, let institutions specialize in their strengths and refocus scarce resources on the undergraduate experience.

In 2011, the government unveiled the beginnings of a differentiation strategy through the *Putting Students First* plan, which proposed negotiating "mandate agreements with institutions to align both provincial priorities and institutional aspirations."<sup>114</sup> This seemed to indicate that, at least as far as future program funding was concerned, government would no longer be funding all types of growth at every institution.

Students are generally supportive of the government's plan to develop a strategic mandate for each Ontario university. The post-secondary system in Ontario has reached a level of financial unsustainability where it must improve the ways in which resources are allocated in order to better serve government mandates, institutional priorities, and students in the system. Students recognize that greater institutional differentiation has the potential to provide an environment in which the university system could more effectively expand capacity for undergraduate teaching and research activity.

While students generally support moderate differentiation, we believe that any differentiation of institutional missions must be pursued in a non-coercive manner, in which differentiation does not create hierarchical divisions between Ontario universities. For example, students do not support differentiation that would allow some universities to specialize exclusively in research, while others focus on solely on teaching. Such a system has been referred to as "vertical differentiation."<sup>115</sup> In addition, given Ontario's geographic diversity, to maintain an accessible system for students from rural and remote areas Ontario must endeavour to keep healthy mix of programs in different areas of the province. For instance, it would not make sense for Lakehead, Laurentian or Nipissing to collectively stop offering business programs because universities in southern Ontario already offered a comprehensive number of similar programs, since it is well known that students are more likely to attend university close to home. This is particularly true for students that may not

have the resources to attend a distant university. In fact students living more than 80 kilometres from a university are only 58 per cent as likely to attend university as those who live within 40 kilometres.<sup>116</sup>

It should also be noted that there are already substantial differences amongst Ontario universities, in terms of location, size, strengths, focus, and campus culture. This is a strength of the sector that allows students to choose the university that fits their needs best. A conversation on increased differentiation should begin with the recognition that most of our institutions are already very different. OUSA believes that the government should work with institutions to plan for future enrolment growth and initiate dialogue on what each institution believes its plans and priorities should be. From these discussions, teaching or research strengths should be incentivized where those strengths exist, and performance indicators and benchmarks should reflect the unique conditions of each institution. For instance, an institution that excels and plans to focus on undergraduate education should be able to do so without being financially penalized due to a lack of research funding. Funding from the Province for teaching-focused faculty, mandatory teaching training, or capital for undergraduate teaching and resource space would be good examples of how to contribute to institutions with this mission. Conversely, institutions with proven research strengths should be encouraged to focus on those strengths. These institutions should be given funding to develop and expand their graduate and research capacity through sufficient operating and capital funding, such that the base undergraduate funding provided is not used to subsidize the research capacity of the university, as is currently the case at many research-intensive universities.

This would allow institutions to differentiate themselves naturally, rather than following system-

*“Since the negotiation of strategic mandates will have drastic implications for the future of universities, it is of utmost importance students are involved.”*

wide incentives from both the provincial and federal government. An appropriate avenue to begin this process would be through a re-negotiation of the Multi-Year Accountability Agreements, which would act as strategic plans to achieve differentiated objectives. Finally, since the negotiation of strategic mandates will have drastic implications for the future of universities, it is of utmost importance that students are involved. Particularly given that tuition and ancillary fee revenue now matches government funding, it is not enough to suggest to institutions that they voluntarily consult students. Rather, students must be guaranteed a voice in the process of negotiating a strategic mandate. At the very least, students believe that their organizations must be required to indicate that they have been adequately consulted for an institution’s strategic mandate to be adopted.

#### SATELLITE CAMPUSES

As part of its 2011 *Putting Students First* plan, the provincial government indicated that it would be creating a new policy governing the creation of satellite campuses in Ontario. Prior to this announcement, the creation of publically supported satellite campuses was largely at the discretion of universities themselves. Due to the high start-up costs associated with satellite campuses, the province’s new policy is intended to allow the current system to grow, but in a more controlled and predictable fashion.

While students do not oppose the expansion of satellite campuses, recognizing the tremendous benefits to accessibility they can provide, the recent proliferation of satellite campuses has also generated a number of concerns. There is evidence to suggest that the standard of student support services (like counselling, health services, library resources, and academic tutoring) at satellite campuses often lags behind that offered by more established

parent campuses. For example, according to a report by the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations, students at Wilfrid Laurier's Brantford campus were not provided with student support services at a "level normally associated with university student services" until six years after the campus' creation.<sup>117</sup> Similar stories have been replicated across the Province.

Indeed, universities in the process of expansion may find themselves with a relatively small student population but one that has a full slate of support needs. Given the important role student support services have in promoting student persistence, this is a worrisome trend. To prevent support service gaps from occurring at recently established satellite campuses, every student should be assured that a minimum standard of service is available to provide personal, academic, and financial support as necessary. For every year a student attends university, the provincial government invests nearly \$10,000 in their education. Consequently, investing in student persistence, by ensuring adequate resources are available at satellite institutions should be a key priority not just for students, but for the government and administrators as well.

Course selection and teaching capacity have also traditionally been issues associated with satellite campuses. For instance, universities may choose to focus a satellite campus on a distinct or select portion of academic programming. While this is an advantage for some students, there are potential problems that may arise from limited course availability on satellite campuses. Ultimately, reduced course choice at satellite campuses leads to limitations on the elective or supporting courses that a student might have available to them, compromising the ability of the student to access a holistic academic experience through the exploration of complementing minors or electives. There have been concerning examples

in the past of higher than average student-to-faculty ratios, limited access to library materials and limited programming at new and developing satellite campuses.<sup>118</sup> For example, Wilfrid Laurier University's satellite campus in Brantford has a much higher student to faculty ratio at 39:1 than the 23:1 that is experienced at WLU's Waterloo campus.<sup>119</sup> While there are different student needs and resource usage patterns at satellite campuses, it is irresponsible to commence educating at a satellite campus without teachers, courses and material supports of a similar caliber to those available at a parent campus.

*"Universities in the process of expansion may find themselves with a relatively small student population but one that has a full slate of support needs."*

Students believe that in its forthcoming policy on satellite campus expansion, the government should ensure that satellite campuses offer minimum standards for:

- Student support services;
- Course selection;
- Teaching loads;
- Student-to-faculty ratios;
- Access to library resources.

Furthermore, institutions should only be permitted to create satellite campuses where there is appropriate demand. The Ontario government has set an important policy direction with its recent memorandum mandating that university expansion through satellite campuses will be subject to government approval and will happen only at approved sites or risk not qualifying for funding. This regulatory stance should ensure that future expansion is always in line with intelligent and healthy system growth.

Though students agree that changes must be made in the system to shift the focus back to teaching, the creation of new satellite campuses is not necessarily the best or most cost-effective means to achieve this objective. Building satellite campuses is costly and would prove more expensive in the long run. While there are several areas in Ontario that could benefit

from closer access to post-secondary education, the government should exercise caution in this pursuit, and ensure that the resources that will be required to open high-quality campuses not come at the expense of the ongoing needs of existing campuses.

## TEACHING-ONLY UNIVERSITIES

In light of the state of teaching at current institutions, and the increased demand for undergraduate degrees that is expected in the next decade, the authors of *Academic Reform* have proposed the creation of a new teaching-focused undergraduate university sector. Pointing to the fact that most current institutions in Ontario are pursuing research missions, the authors make the case that the creation of a new sector would mean that teaching universities could focus on the needs of undergraduate students, without having to invest in research infrastructure. The Ontario Liberal Party in the 2011 election made a similar commitment to build “three new, leading-edge undergraduate campuses.”

The authors of *Academic Reform* suggest that faculty at these institutions would teach six to eight courses per year, and spend 80 to 85 percent of their time in the classroom (with the remaining time being spent on curriculum development and scholarly pursuits related to their field of instruction). The authors emphasize the importance of creating several entirely new institutions to mitigate anticipated enrolment pressure on current institutions in the Greater Toronto Area. They also argue that the creation of multiple teaching-focused institutions is more likely to enable these institutions to avoid the “mission creep” associated with creating only one teaching-focused institution that would have to compete with the other research universities.

OUSA has traditionally been critical of the proposal to create teaching-only institutions. While OUSA strongly appreciates the need for a greater teaching focus at Ontario’s universities, we believe that to be effective, this shift in priorities must take place on a

system-wide scale. All students in Ontario deserve to receive the benefit of increased teaching focus, even the students at universities that are generally considered research-intensive. Increasing teaching focus at all Ontario universities also makes good economic sense for Ontario in terms of creating a system where university instruction is delivered in a cost-effective manner. As mentioned earlier in this report, if a teaching-stream of faculty was created as a viable career option for professors who are excellent teachers and would like to teach more, the Ontario system could realize significant savings in the per-credit cost of delivering university education.

Furthermore, while *Academic Reform* rightly points out that there is little intrinsic correlation between excellence in teaching and research, there is ample evidence of positive outcomes associated with intentionally integrating research into the classroom and the broader learning environment.<sup>120</sup> In fact, the culture in which students participate in the process of discovery and communication of knowledge with scholar-teachers is largely what defines the university.<sup>121</sup> Removing researchers from the university deprives students of the opportunity to engage undergraduate research opportunities, thesis projects, and other research-based applications. It is possible that this new university sector could become antiquated, with an emerging disconnect between curriculum and the latest research.

## THREE-YEAR DEGREES

The suggestion that three-year degree options be expanded has been proposed by a number of Ontario higher education stakeholders recently. One such suggestion was a call for an increased number of three-year degree programs, largely for the purposes of integrating Ontario with the global Bologna process, which allows for transferability of post-secondary credentials between programs, institutions and even countries. The Drummond Commission’s recommendation is slightly different: it suggests that “post-secondary institutions be

compelled to compress some four-year degrees into three years by continuing throughout the summer,” a move that could theoretically allow for greater efficiency in resource utilization on campuses.

The expansion of three-year degrees could be accomplished and incentivized by altering the university funding formula, which currently applies a 1.5 BIU weight to first-year students enrolled in four-year honours programs. This funding incentive has directly contributed to trend towards phasing out comprehensive three-year degree programs. The most extreme example of this is currently the University of Toronto, which has phased out all three-year degree programs of any kind. Most other universities still offer three-year degree programs, though many offer them only as general courses of study. In most existing three-year programs, students are not permitted to major in a specific field, though they may accumulate minor concentrations. These degrees are not compatible with most graduate and professional programs, creating an incentive for students to enroll in four-year honours programs.

Students urge the government consider the full impacts of a proposal to convert four-year options to three-year options before pursuing it in earnest. Students generally support the notion of an expansion of three-year degree options, but such a strategy could be pursued in ways that would result in negative consequences for higher education in Ontario, including significant hidden costs and uncertain impacts on quality and student mobility.

**Benefits:** First, removing the funding formula incentive on three-year programs would be prudent. As has been demonstrated above, the weight has

certainly contributed to the trend away from three-year degree programs. This trend has greatly limited student choice, as only seven universities in Ontario now offer a full-suite of comprehensive, three-year degree options for students who may want to concentrate in a particular discipline (see more details outlined in Figure 18). Ontario’s funding formula for operating grants to universities was developed in 1967. With a few amendments, the same system has remained in place to this day. The system is based upon university enrolments: universities submit the number of credits students enroll in, which are converted into Fiscal Full-Time Equivalents (FFTEs), which are subsequently converted into Basic Income Units (BIUs), based primarily upon a given student’s program of study. For example, a student enrolled in a full course load in a first-year arts program would be considered one arts and science FFTE, which would correspond to a single BIU of funding, since first-year arts and science carries a funding weight of one. In contrast, an upper-year honours science student enrolled in a full course load would generate two Basic Income Unit’s worth of funding.

The BIU weights were originally implemented in order to account for the different costs associated with different academic disciplines, though the funding formula is explicit in stating that it does not precisely reflect relative costs or importance of each program at each university.<sup>123</sup> Over time the nature of the BIU weights has created an incentive for institutions to enroll students in four-year honours

programs. The fact that upper-year honours arts and science students receive 1.5 to two times the amount of annual funding as a three-year general degree program has been widely speculated to have driven

**FIGURE 18: DIFFERENCES IN BIU FUNDING BETWEEN PROGRAMS AND YEAR OF STUDY<sup>122</sup>**

Funding Weight	Programs (Examples)	Grant Per FTE Student (2007/08)
1	1st Year Arts & Science General Arts & Science	\$3,100
1.5	Upper-year Honours Arts, Commerce, Law	\$5,800
2	Upper-Year Honours Science, Applied Science and Engineering	\$8,500



universities to discourage students from enrolling in three-year general arts programs.<sup>124</sup> The funding disparity occurs despite that general and honours students take largely the same courses in their first three years.

Given that universities receive more funding for honours degrees, many institutions have reduced or eliminated their three-year general degree offerings. Currently, three universities do not offer three-year general programs.<sup>125</sup> Furthermore, only seven of Ontario’s universities offer three-year programs that allow students to specialize in a particular discipline and receive recognition for it in their qualification (i.e., a bachelor of arts in English, as opposed to a general bachelor of arts). The absence of recognition of academic specialization critically diminishes the value of general degrees, making honours degrees far more appealing to prospective students. By removing the funding

*“Ball State University in Indiana had a one per cent take-up rate to their three-year option ”*

incentives associated with honours programs, an environment may be created where more options exist for students interested in pursuing three-year degrees. For students, the decision to pursue a general or honours program is one that should be based upon personal motivation and goals. Honours degrees

should not be made the default or standard path for students, and institutions should not create environments where student choice is supplanted by inappropriate financial incentives.

**Drawbacks:** There is little evidence of a latent demand for more three-year options in Canada. Sixty-four per cent of students responding to the 2009 Canada University Survey Consortium viewed four-year degrees as being inherently more valuable than other options, while 94 per cent of students graduated with a four-year degree.<sup>126</sup> Only 5 per cent of survey respondents thought that three-year degrees would be more valuable to them. When asked about the possibility of compressing a four-year degree into three years, nearly 60 per cent of students indicated that they would not be interested in this option.

**FIGURE 19: CURRENT THREE-YEAR DEGREE OPTIONS IN ONTARIO**

Institution	3-year General BA Option	3-year Options with Specialization
Algoma		
Brock	✓	-
Carleton	✓	-
Guelph	✓	-
Lakehead	✓	✓
Laurentian	✓	-
Laurier	✓	-
McMaster	✓	✓
Nipissing	✓	✓
OCAD	-	-
Ottawa	✓	-
Queen's	✓	-
Ryerson	✓	-
Toronto	-	-
Trent	✓	✓
UOIT	-	-
Waterloo	✓	-
Western	✓	✓
Windsor	✓	-
York	✓	✓
✓ = offered - = not offered		

In some peer jurisdictions, demand has been similarly low. Ball State University in Indiana has had a one per cent take-up rate to their three-year option.<sup>127</sup> It is also worth noting that in Bologna-compatible countries that offer three-year degrees as a norm, the vast majority of students go on to pursue further education. In Germany and the Netherlands, for instance, close to 80 per cent of graduates from bachelor’s degree programs go on to pursue further education.<sup>128</sup> Given the fact that Ontario’s funding formula awards universities twice the amount of per-student funding for a master’s student as an upper-year bachelor’s student, care should be taken to ensure that a move to three-year degrees does not balloon costs through an expansion in demand for graduate programs.<sup>129</sup>

With Ontario entering into a period of fiscal restraint,

the proposal to expand three-year degree offerings is supported by students insofar as it could be cost-effective. Eliminating the funding formula incentive to push students into four-year degrees and reinvesting these savings elsewhere would be prudent. However, to model Ontario degree programs off of the Bologna process would likely be controversial and cost- & time-intensive. As such, students have concerns about the implementation of the Bologna process in Ontario.

### THREE FULL SEMESTERS

Typically, universities offer full course offerings during the fall and winter term, with a reduced offering of courses available during the summer term. Often summer course offerings are delivered in a modified timetable, where students are limited to fewer classes than they would be in the fall and winter terms. This is currently the practice at seventeen of Ontario's twenty universities. However, the University of Guelph, University of Waterloo and York University have all adopted full-time semesters throughout the year, allowing students to potentially compress a four year-degree program into three years.

Both the Drummond Commission and the Ontario government have suggested that universities should adopt the trimester-based model used by Guelph, Waterloo and York universities, citing potential benefits to cost and quality. These benefits are articulated as follows:

- *Allowing students to complete degree programs faster thus accelerating entry into the labour market;*
- *Make better use of currently university facilities, many of which are not used throughout the summer, despite the fact that the operating costs of running them are still incurred;*

*“Many students seek employment during the summer, the time of year when the student job market is most active.”*

- *Smoothing the spikes in the supply of skilled labour entering the workforce in May.*<sup>130</sup>

While supportive of the increased flexibility that incentivizing trimester term structures for universities provides, students urge the government to carefully consider the costs of implementing this proposal as well as the potential demand for summer course offerings. An ample amount of evidence suggests low demand for summer courses because many students use this time to work and earn money toward necessary educational costs, meaning that considerable investments in student financial assistance would be needed to create the summer course demand necessary to justify the investments in capacity needed to implement three full semesters.

**Benefits:** As some have rightly pointed out, one benefit is that greater summer course offerings would increase flexibility for students considerably. A student that wanted to fast track would be able to; a student who encountered difficulty in a few classes would be able to redo these courses in a timelier fashion; a student might be able to accept a job in the fall or winter that would have otherwise not been an option for them. These are not inconsiderable individual benefits.

**Drawbacks:** The drawbacks to implementing a system-wide move towards trimester-based course schedules can be found when one examines the cost of implementing another academic term versus the demand for such an initiative. Though some efficiency gains may be found through the use of campus facilities year-round, these costs could very well pale in comparison to the administrative and structural costs associated with expanding the amount of instruction the system must undertake annually; costs which would likely be exacerbated by low student demand for summer instruction. Currently, instructional costs account for over half of total Ontario university expenditures, while physical

operating costs account for only ten per cent.<sup>131</sup> In addition, without significant investment in financial assistance, investment in full-time three year degrees would likely only benefit the wealthiest of students: those who can afford to not work full-time during the summer.

Proponents of year-round study often argue that if one-third of all instructional activity (including student enrolment) was moved to another semester, that decreased costs in the fall and winter terms would pay for the increased cost in the summer term. However, the reality of instructional costs is far more complicated. Any expansion of course options into the summer would likely result in course duplication, as it is highly unlikely that a large number of courses would be able to be truly “moved” to the summer. This is largely due to the fact many students seek employment during the summer, the time of year when the student job market is most active. While it might be possible to truly move some sections of extremely large classes, these large classes do not comprise the majority of university course offerings. A large number of classes would almost inevitably need to be offered in the summer in addition to the academic year, in order to accommodate students who may not have the finances to undertake summer learning, or who want to gain summer job experience. Any duplication of course offerings would certainly inflate instructional costs (instructors, teaching and research assistants, learning materials), which are a far more significant component of the university budget than physical facilities. Administrators at Waterloo and York University, also point to the increased behind-the-scenes costs associated with summer registration, maintenance and support staff.<sup>132</sup>

This would seem a curious use of money in a time when Ontario is looking to trim a deficit, particularly when student demand for full summer terms is quite low. At the two universities that currently offer students the option to take a term in the summer, demand has not been high. At Waterloo, only 20 per cent of non

co-op students utilize the summer term, while only 0.1 per cent of students utilized summer courses to complete four-year degrees in less than three years. In fact, universities that have attempted moving towards three-year degrees in other jurisdictions have been required to make considerable investments to drive demand towards summer terms. For instance, though Perdue University in Indiana has set a goal of enrolling 20,000 students in the summer term, they have incentivized this enrolment through tuition subsidies of up to 50 per cent of fall/winter tuition costs.<sup>133</sup>

The upfront costs associated with implementing full trimesters, the low evidence of demand and the further costs associated with creating demand, make full-year education a proposal which almost certainly warrants cautious investigation before proceeding to full implementation. At a time where resources are scarce, students prefer that any free resources be devoted to more immediate priorities.



# CONCLUSION

*Moving ahead with  
educated reform*

80/

# CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

While few would characterize Ontario's economic situation as ideal to facilitate quality improvement at universities, students believe that this time should be conceived of as an opportunity to innovate, not stagnate. "Quality" means many things to many different stakeholders, but broadly it can be agreed that successful students should graduate as informed, engaged citizens with the ability to approach problems critically. Many students attend school in the hope that they will be able to apply their skills to the labour market. In both cases, our university system could be doing better than it is now. While Ontario is quite competitive on the world-stage with regards to higher education, the maintenance of our leadership will depend not only on how well we finance the sector, but also how efficient it is. An oft forgotten fact is that both public and private spending on higher education in Canada, including Ontario, leads the world.<sup>134</sup> With such a significant investment, it only makes sense that we should seek to maximize our returns from it.

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The recommendations contained herein demonstrate a way to maximize the value of our investment in post-secondary education, while remaining sensitive to Ontario's fiscal situation. More investment will undoubtedly be required to ensure that the system's quality is maintained in the long run, but even with more funding, students would recommend that these reforms be enacted.

OUSA has a long history of attempting to foster partnership, dialogue and compromise in Ontario's post-secondary education sector. None of these recommendations are intended to create winners or losers, and none of them are intended to ask any sector stakeholder to shoulder the entire burden of improving efficiency in the system. Rather, students are asking everyone working in higher education to come together around the common responsibility for ensuring that Ontario remains one of the best places in the world to be educated.

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