



Policy Paper

Student Success and the Future of Quality Education

March 2010

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Introduction

In the context of the post-secondary system, discussions of quality have traditionally been somewhat limited in scope. Somewhere between measuring student-to-faculty ratios and post-graduation employment rates, the question of what a successful post-secondary experience looks like has been drowned out. 'High quality' has become interchangeable with 'success', confusing the goal for students with the measurements of such. In recent years, however, a more comprehensive conversation of what quality means in the context of PSE has started to emerge amongst stakeholders and policy-makers. Since the creation of the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO) 'quality indicators' are being considered that span further across the continuum of the education experience.¹ As this much needed shift in examining this topic more thoroughly takes place, questions of what it takes to make students successful, and what exactly should be measured, have arisen. However, before this topic can be given the attention it deserves, it is time for the most substantial consumers of the post-secondary system – the students – to answer one overarching question: what does a successful education mean?

The value of this discussion is not limited to students in the system, though. In fact, pausing to consider the societal implications of successful students is necessary in order to appreciate the need to devote more attention to this subject. In the growing knowledge economy, more than 70 per cent of all new jobs require some form of post-secondary education.² While this alone may support a collective investment in successful students, studies additionally demonstrate significant social benefits of such. Education attainment has been inversely related to crime, creating a safer and more positive community for all citizens. Moreover, education attainment is related to better health, longer life, improved communication skills, and greater self-confidence.³ The reduced dependence on the system and the ability to contribute positively to the community is a benefit that all members of society can share in. Student success, then, provides value beyond the post-secondary community, and is deserving of a comprehensive analysis.

Thus, in a society requiring greater attention to the post-secondary system, and with benefits of a successful education reaching across all communities, it is time to confront what student success means more holistically. The purpose of this paper, then, is simple in intent and complex in result: to provide a vision for a successful post-secondary experience.

Principle One: Student Success is a continuum beginning well before students begin their post-secondary education, and continuing after they have graduated.

Student success has the potential to be viewed simply in as a matter of how many students persist to the end of their degree programs. However, it is OUSA's view that it is really a much more multi-faceted concept. The key to a true knowledge economy is not simply a degree holding population, but rather one leaving school with an appetite for growth, leadership and lifelong learning. These learning outcomes require all the inputs to education to be of high quality. This means that that education must not simply be engaging and of high quality, but accessible. It additionally requires an acknowledgement that barriers to education are often in place well before students start applying to college or university.

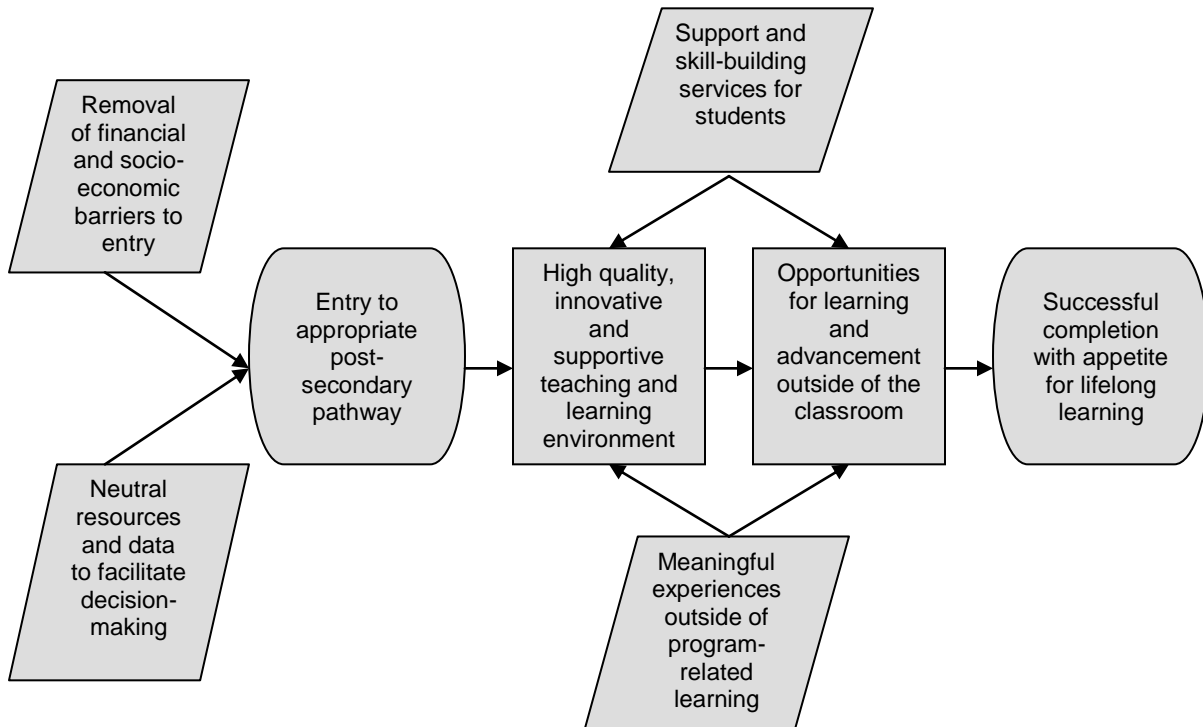
¹ Educational Policy Institute, "Producing Indicators of Institutional Quality in Ontario Universities and Colleges: Options for Producing, Managing and Displaying Comparative Data", Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, 2008.

² TD Economics, *Investing in Higher Education Delivers a Stellar Rate of Return*, 22 January 2004 (Toronto: TD Economics, 2004), 2.

³ Ibid.

For this reason, OUSA views student success as a continuum that begins as students enter school. One widely accepted interpretation on the continuum model holds that a pre-college/university phase, a college/university experience phase, and a post-college/university phase must be considered⁴.

figure one: continuum of student success



Student success starts with opportunity for all students, regardless of financial or socioeconomic standing, to attend the post-secondary institution most suited to their passions and skill-sets. They must have access to neutral and accurate data on their post-secondary options to facilitate proper decision-making. Upon entry to their chosen post-secondary pathway, the education they experience must be of the highest quality, and their needs must be supported. Teaching methods must be innovative, engaging and supportive to diverse learning styles. Students must also have opportunities to learn and advance their interests outside the traditional confines of the classroom. Opportunities for skill-building and support services for students with diverse needs must also be provided to ensure that students who encounter barriers during their post-secondary education.

All of these factors are inputs that, when combined, result in a successful student.

The student success continuum never truly ends, as successful students do not stop learning upon graduation. Students should graduate from post-secondary institutions with proper levels of satisfaction, engagement, as well as strong skill-sets to ensure success in the burgeoning knowledge economy. Additionally, they should be aware of the opportunities their education has provided them.

⁴ Kuh, George D., Jillian Kinzie, Jennifer A. Buckley, Brian K. Bridges, and John C. Hayek. "Piecing Together the Student Success Puzzle: Research, Propositions and Recommendations." ASHE Higher Education Report 32.5 (2007). 11.

Principle Two: All academically qualified students should have the opportunity to advance into and within all levels of higher education.

It is vital for individual and societal advancement that students have the ability to move freely into any level of higher education that they are academically qualified to attend. This is particularly true when looking specifically at higher education beyond the Bachelor's degree.⁵ Graduate and professional studies amplify the economic and social effects of higher education. Graduate students "conduct cutting-edge research, replenish faculty ranks, address the human resource needs of both the private and public sectors, and translate innovation into commercial activity. They are integral to the transfer of knowledge from universities to many other sectors of society."⁶

Advancement beyond the Bachelor's degree has become a more important issue as labour market demands have increased. Concurrently, costs have skyrocketed for graduate and professional degrees. According to the Council of Ontario Universities, Ontario and Canada "do not produce sufficient graduate students to compete with other global competitors" and, for the foreseeable future, demand for graduate students will continue to grow faster than our ability to supply them.⁷

Traditionally underrepresented groups, such as aboriginal students, first-generation students, rural and northern students, low-income students, students with a disability, and students with dependants, must all enjoy the opportunity for advancement past the undergraduate level.

Principle Three: Students in all levels of higher education should have access to meaningful opportunities to enrich their experience, develop new skills, and enhance their learning.

The philosopher of education, John Dewey, once said that for all forms of education, "Everything depends on the quality of the experience which is had."⁸ Furthermore, he believed that the quality of the experience was dependent on its influence upon future experiences.⁹ From this premise, Dewey was able to criticize the foundations of so-called 'traditional education,' in favour of a more progressive form that was dependent upon both experience and formative education as opposed to the mere mastery or acquisition of content. This theory underpins the importance of experiences in higher education that contain opportunities for discovery and development.

Experiences driven by discovery will benefit the student and their environment for years to come. Conceptually, this becomes more important in a world where information and environments change on a daily basis. Those individuals with transferable skills who are able to learn, discover and analyze will be the leaders and innovators of the twenty-first century.

Universities must also present opportunities for moral and civic development that encourage students to think critically about the world, especially in the context of a province and a nation where youth are becoming less engaged in public life.

We cannot continue to operate a system of higher education whose main purpose is the transmission of content and the acquisition of certificates. This does not diminish the need for the mastery of content, but the process of discovery must be further emphasized.

⁵Author's Note: The issue of transferability between colleges and universities is also an important issue for college students and directly relates to the concept of advancement within higher education. However, as noted in the introduction, this paper will focus on issues facing undergraduates. Therefore, transferability will not be discussed in this paper.

⁶ *Expanding Graduate Studies to Boost Our Human Capital Advantage*. Council of Ontario Universities, June 2008. Accessed online at <http://www.cou.on.ca/content/objects/BriefingNote-Grad%20Expansion-June2008.pdf>

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Dewey, John. *Experience and Education*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1938, 27.

⁹ Ibid.

Students must have the opportunity to journey beyond the lecture hall, beyond regurgitation and beyond the A, B, Cs of multiple-choice exams. They should have the freedom to explore their interests in new and engaging ways. Alfred North Whitehead wrote that, "...the purpose of a university is to join the old and the young in imaginative methods of learning." This concept of co-discovery and frontier exploration of ideas should drive the development of both students and institutions in Ontario. Institutions that pursue this principle will produce corollary benefits for society as a whole. Both the discoverers and discoveries are products of the system, and can be retained for the benefit of all.

In addition to discovery, there should be meaningful opportunities for students in all levels of higher education to develop skills and gain experiences to allow them to move on to higher levels of education or the workforce. One cannot ignore the practical function of higher education as a developer of skills and experiences for future jobs or further studies.

In 1998, The Boyer Commission on Educating Undergraduates in the Research University outlined the development of an Academic Bill of Rights for universities. The core principle behind this document is the belief that when a student is accepted into a college or university, an unwritten contract is established. Just as students are bound by a code of conduct, institutions are bound by a duty "to provide maximal opportunities for intellectual and creative development."¹⁰ The Academic Bill of Rights includes eight commitments of the institution, four of which include the word "opportunity." These commitments include:

- Opportunities to learn through inquiry rather than simple transmission of knowledge
- Appreciation of arts, humanities, sciences, and social sciences, and the opportunity to experience them at any intensity and depth the student can accommodate
- Careful and comprehensive preparation for whatever may lie beyond graduation, whether it be graduate school, professional school or first professional position
- Expectation of and opportunity for work with talented senior researchers to help and guide the student's efforts.
- Opportunities to interact with people of backgrounds, cultures, and experiences different from the student's own and with pursuers of knowledge at every level of accomplishment, from freshmen students to senior research faculty.

If Ontario students are to truly succeed, each of these commitments must be fulfilled at every Ontario university. OUSA stands firmly behind the Boyer Commission's Academic Bill of Rights and its vision of producing the type of graduate who is "equipped with a spirit of inquiry and a zest for problem solving; one possessed of the skill in communication that is the hallmark of clear thinking as well as mastery of language; one informed by a rich and diverse experience. It is that kind of individual that will provide the scientific, technological, academic, political, and creative leadership for the next century."¹¹

It should be noted that the concept of opportunity is not driven by the need for skills related to employment. It is merely one among a host of outcomes that is sought in higher education. It should be further noted that these principles do not remove the need for faculty. In institutions where the opportunity to discover and develop are seen as paramount, faculty must play an even more important and engaged role. They must act to impart the needed foundation of knowledge, and also become co-discoverers and developers of skills for their students.

Principle Four: Student support services are a fundamental part of fostering student success.

Universities across Ontario are inherently different, in terms of structure, organization, and focus. Though universities operate in different ways, and while their over-arching autonomy must be respected, there remain core areas of

¹⁰ Boyer Commission on Educating Undergraduates, *Reinventing Undergraduate Education: A Blueprint for America's Universities* (New York: Boyer Commission, 1998); accessed online at <http://naples.cc.sunysb.edu/Pres/boyer.nsf/webform/rights>

¹¹ ibid

support that should be present on each university campus. In order for students to be successful in their educational endeavors universities must be equipped with support centers that will foster a community which encourages diversity and makes students feel welcome and included in the fabric of the institution, regardless of their situation.¹² By creating and supporting partnerships between students, faculty and student affairs personnel, universities across the province can foster a culture of student success.¹³

Student supports exist on campuses across the country because they provide essential resources for success. Universities that do provide “effective advising” have students who are more likely to persist and graduate.¹⁴ After collecting information on OUSA member schools regarding what student services currently exist at Ontario universities, it was revealed that support centres are most commonly attached to, or are affiliated with, student affairs departments.¹⁵ Health, counseling and disabilities services are universal, while other essential supports such as aboriginal and equity services exist but vary in scope and reach. The fundamental belief of OUSA is that certain key support services must be in-place and of high-quality at all institutions in Ontario.

To underscore the importance of student supports to success, Queen’s university may be used as an example, considering that it has the highest retention rate in the province at 97% between first and second year and 92% for overall degree completion.¹⁶ Given these impressive numbers, it is important to note that almost 40% students make use of the writing centre and learning common services alone.¹⁷ This percentage would only grow if the plethora of other support centres’ available and widely utilized by students were included.

Principle Five: High quality and timely health services must be available to all students.

While academic challenge is an expected part of a university education, some students find that their success is challenged not by institutional expectations, but factors completely outside their ability to control. Fifteen percent of university students will be diagnosed with a mental health condition, which is particularly harrowing when one considers that this statistic only counts those students who seek help¹⁸. Even more disturbingly, suicide is the second-leading cause of death among university students.

A student cannot begin to chart a course to student success if they are facing these kinds of issues. One of the single most important areas requiring dedicated provincial support is mental health and disability resources.

Principle Six: The delivery of varied, innovative and engaging teaching methods is fundamental to creating a successful student.

The classroom is the one space in a university campus where students are guaranteed to congregate. As such, the classroom experience deserves to be subject to a significant amount of attention. Without an engaging, innovative and high-quality classroom experience, the university experience will never be conducive to student success.

When taking a student-success based approach, literature emphasizes faculty-student contact (as a holistic concept rather than a ratio), opportunities for active and collaborative learning, high expectations, and respect for diverse

¹² Kuh, et al., 2007,43-53.

¹³ Ibid, 99.

¹⁴ Tinto, Vincent. "Taking Student Retention Seriously." American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers. Syracuse University, Syracuse, NY. 15 Apr. 2002. Lecture. 2.

¹⁵ Wood, Phil. "Interview with Dr. Phil Wood, Dean of Students at McMaster University." Personal interview. Summer. 2009.

¹⁶ Deane, Patrick. "Interview with Dr. Patrick Deane, Vice-Principal (Academic) at Queen’s University." Personal interview. Summer 2009.

¹⁷ Babington, Doug et al. "The Writing Centre at Queen’s University Annual Report". Queen's University. 5 Mar. 2008

¹⁸ Anderssen, Erin. "Mental Health Worries." Globe and Mail [Toronto] 20 Sept. 2009, Globe Campus sec. Web. Summer 2009. <http://www.globecampus.ca/in-the-news/article/mental-health-worries-grow-among-university-students/>.

ways of learning as principally important¹⁹. What is crucial to note about all of these teaching areas is that they do not only require a mass hiring of new teachers, but rather providing the teachers currently in the system with the resources they need to facilitate student engagement. In this context, resources can mean learning technologies, greater support for centres for teaching and learning, professional development opportunities for professors, improved classroom infrastructure, or support for new styles of pedagogy.

Support for centres on teaching and learning, professional development opportunities for professors, improved classroom infrastructure, and support for new styles of pedagogy are all important avenues to explore because they all help facilitate a move towards more engaging and educationally effective learning styles. One common theme that has arisen throughout much of the literature on teaching and learning is that passive lecture is contrary to almost every principle of an ideal learning environment²⁰. Traditional styles of pedagogy should be moved past in favour of more progressive and innovative styles. For students to be given the greatest chance at success, they require pedagogies that engage students with peers, involve them actively with their education, and apply subject matter in a variety of different settings.

Learning technologies are a particularly interesting avenue for discussion, as incoming generations of students will be more technologically literate than ever before. Some evidence has suggested that courses designed to infuse instructional technology and web-based learning have positively affected completion rates, and lowered drop/failure/withdrawal rates²¹. Even more interesting is that it has been shown to have particular impact on low-income, first generation and adult learners²².

The federal government has made academic research and innovation a major priority by establishing organizations such as the Canadian Foundation of Innovation, founded to fund research initiatives at colleges and universities across Canada.²³ In addition, the provincial government has partnered with the federal government to provide funding dedicated to Canada Research Chair positions, further demonstrating their commitment to high quality academic research.

It is important for the Ontario government to realize the potential that exists by providing similar funding opportunities for the development and implementation of innovative teaching and learning experiences at universities. As Jane Harrison argues, “the new economy places new expectations on its workers and requires of them new skills and abilities. To ensure that students are better prepared for this environment, universities must change how they teach students and assess what they have learned.”²⁴ New innovations in teaching are more commonly accepted than ever before. In fact, the processes of learning and discovery are being more widely researched and experimented with. It is imperative that the Ontario government support this research and encourage the use of innovative teaching methods at all Ontario universities.

Principle Seven: All University instructors should receive in-depth, formal training to develop their teaching skills.

Ontario public school teachers must acquire a degree in education before being allowed to teach. OUSA believes that any individual who will be teaching undergraduate students for any length of time should also be required to participate in some sort of formal training in teaching. It is unreasonable that an education degree is required when

¹⁹ Kuh, et al., 2007, 43; Promoting Persistence, 23.

²⁰ Kuh, et al., 2007, 94.

²¹ Ibid, 96.

²² Ibid, 97.

²³ Canadian Foundation for Innovation, “Home Page” (2007); accessed online at <http://www.innovation.ca/index.cfm>.

²⁴ Jane E. Harrison, “The Quality of University Teaching: Faculty Performance and Accountability. A Literature Review”, *Canadian Society for the Study of Higher Education Professional File*, 21 (2002): 5; accessed online at <http://robertwright.ca/Harrison.pdf>.

teaching a senior high school student, yet teaching a first-year university student does not require training of any kind. The Boyer Commission recognizes the lack of training that instructors receive and complains that “they are too often expected to know how to teach with little more than a few days or weeks of casual training and with little or no supervision throughout the year.”²⁵ With the establishment of instructional support programs at universities across Ontario, the infrastructure to handle such a process is now in place and it is time for the provincial government to give serious thought to this matter.

Principle Eight: The broader learning experience a student receives outside the classroom is important to Student Success in Ontario.

The standard university experience is not defined primarily by time spent in class. While the classroom is the one learning space where students are guaranteed to congregate, outside-the-classroom institutional conditions are also important to a student’s university experience. Factors such as size, organizational structure and the student focus of the institutional mission are related to student success²⁶. Additionally, opportunities for extra-curricular growth, such as clubs, athletic programs, as well as residences, have been positively correlated with persistence and engagement²⁷.

An education is not simply defined by what a student learns in a classroom, but by the diverse avenues a student will inevitably take to grow during their time in school.

Principle Nine: Student success is enhanced on campuses that encourage and foster a positive experience with diversity.

University campuses are often living microcosms of the larger global village. Experiences with diversity have been shown to be positively correlated with desirable educational outcomes²⁸. Students exposed to a wider variety of groups and cultures inevitably come into contact with more perspectives on the world, expanding the scope of their knowledge. Ontario is in a fortunate position in this capacity, as it is home to a rich and diverse tapestry of cultures. This is often reflected in the student populations of our institutions.

It is important that our institutions are encouraging contact among students of different backgrounds, as well as actively seeking to incorporate diverse perspectives into class discussions. With a diversity of perspectives and experiences, which is necessarily brought to the table when underrepresented groups are present on campus, more opportunities are available for students to interact and share their unique experiences.

With more and more students who identify as members of underrepresented groups entering post-secondary education, it is for the benefit of the institution to update their teaching strategies and practices. Underrepresented groups must feel welcome on their campus. Reports on persistence and student success agree that institutions where students are accepted and supported for their social and academic needs, house students who persist. Therefore, when campuses create an environment where underrepresented groups feel comfortable, not only will they become more engaged and more likely to succeed, but so to will all students, because all students benefit from a diverse campus, both inside and outside the classroom.

²⁵ Boyer Commission on Educating Undergraduates, *Reinventing Undergraduate Education: A Blueprint for America’s Universities* (New York: Boyer Commission, 1998); accessed online at <http://naples.cc.sunysb.edu/Pres/boyer.nsf/webform/VIII>

²⁶ Kuh, et al., 2007, 73.

²⁷ Ibid, 59-66.

²⁸ Ibid, 59.

Principle Ten: International students make an enormous contribution to the higher education experience and bring crucial global perspectives to Ontario campuses. They also provide significant benefits to Ontario universities and local communities across the province.

Over the last several decades, universities across Ontario have become increasingly international. They have accepted that the global arena can provide new ideas and new perspectives to enrich the quality of scholarship in Ontario.

Engaging the World, Queen's University's strategic plan, aims to ensure "that every student attending Queen's University will develop an enhanced appreciation of the international facets of their studies and the necessity to be mindful of international contexts whatever their field of study. Throughout their educational program, students will be exposed to a rich variety of perspectives and opinion, through their interactions with students from a wide range of international backgrounds, both on campus and abroad."²⁹

Engaging the Future, the strategic plan of the University of Western Ontario, states that the university is "enriched by the cultural and personal diversity provided by an international faculty, student, and staff community. Members from abroad bring to the University a rich variety of heritage, tradition, culture, knowledge and perspective. They also bring a commitment to scholarship, academic expertise, and an ability to extend Western's influence and prestige into other areas of the world."³⁰

Universities across the province agree that the presence of international students creates an enriched learning experience for all. Moreover, international students add to the local economy, especially if they remain in Canada after completing their studies. Some argue that a majority of international students simply return home and do not contribute as much to Canada as Canadian students. However, a study by Statistics Canada indicates that "over 72% of graduates born outside Canada or the United States intended to remain in Canada upon completion of their doctoral studies."³¹

Principle Eleven: Student success is enhanced by the inclusion of research methods in the classroom.

A great deal of research has concluded that teaching and research are stronger when integrated. The most constructive environment for both students and teachers seems to be a forum that allows both groups to learn from each other through a constructive dialogue and sharing of research results. Education policy researcher Jane Harrison sums up this process of mutual discovery saying, "the student learns within and is inspired by an environment of enquiry and creativity; while faculty are re-energized and revitalized by the act of teaching through which they gain new perspectives on old ideas."³² The Boyer Commission briefly explores the potential opportunities at universities if research and discovery are integrated for the benefit of all parties, "scholar-teachers would treat the sites of their research as seminar rooms in which not only graduates but undergraduates observe and participate in the process of both discovery and communication of knowledge."³³ If Ontario is to offer a high quality educational experience, the prevailing university pedagogy must incorporate these new ideas.

²⁹ *Engaging the World: A Strategic Plan for Queen's University*. Dec. 1, 2006. p.26 Accessed online at <http://www.queensu.ca/engaging/>

³⁰ *Engaging the Future: Final Report of the Taskforce on Strategic Planning*. Section 5: Internationalization. June 22, 2006. Accessed online at http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/strategic_plan/report/05.htm

³¹ *Doctoral graduates in Canada 2004/2005*. Statistics Canada. Accessed online at <http://www.statcan.ca/english/freepub/81-004-XIE/2008002/article/10645-en.htm>

³² Jane E. Harrison, "The Quality of University Teaching: Faculty Performance and Accountability. A Literature Review", *Canadian Society for the Study of Higher Education Professional File 21* (2002): 4; accessed online at <http://robertwright.ca/Harrison.pdf>.

³³ Boyer Commission on Educating Undergraduate in the Research University, "Reinventing Undergraduate Education" (New York: Boyer Commission, 1998): 18; accessed online at <http://naples.cc.sunysb.edu/Pres/boyer.nsf/>.

Principle Twelve: The progress of each student through all levels of education must be tracked and this information must be collected and analyzed with the goal of improving the system.

If we truly wish to ensure all students have the opportunity to reach their full potential, the Ontario government will need to track the progress of its students from primary through post-secondary education. This data can then be used to identify barriers to education and to make improvements in the system. A comprehensive, transparent tracking system would provide additional data on topics such as the impact of tuition fee increases and would inform the public, stakeholders and government as to the best future policy direction to pursue.

Concerns

Concern One: Passive lecture-style pedagogy, still pervasive across Ontario, is not as conducive to student success as other methods of learning.

The method of instruction students across Ontario are most familiar with is the lecture. It is a common expectation of a university education that students will be taught primarily by a professor standing at the front of a classroom discussing course material, while students take notes. Ironically, this passive style of learning is counter-productive to creating educationally engaging classrooms³⁴.

Opportunities such as learning communities, service-learning, active/collaborative learning are all recognized as being educationally effective, however over half of graduating seniors never participate in any community-based work as part of their regular coursework³⁵. Often, opportunities to participate in non-traditional style classrooms are limited to a few sparse opportunities in first year, or in small exclusive programs. Even more troubling, first-generation and transfer students have been identified as significantly less likely to participate in educationally effective methods of learning³⁶.

If maximizing student engagement is to be a priority in Ontario, innovation in pedagogy must be fostered.

Concern Two: Students are falling through the cracks in the education system, particularly students with lower historic student engagement rates.

University is not only an adjustment in learning style; it is a fundamental lifestyle shift for entering students. Some students are prepared to handle this change effectively, and others face more difficulty. It is of vital importance that our classrooms are equipped with the resources to detect and deal with students who face difficulties in their first year of studies. Research has identified several key groups of students with low student engagement rates (which have been correlated with persistence and student success), as well as several risk factors that show up early in a student's academic career.

Three Examples of Student Groups with Lower Student Engagement

- *First Generation Students:* First Generation students, being those students whose parents did not attend post-secondary education, tend to be less engaged, according to studies due to a variety of direct and

³⁴ Kuh, et al., 2007, 94

³⁵ NSSE 2007, 13

³⁶ NSSE 2007, 13

indirect factors³⁷. Predominant culture on the campus may not mesh with the student's background or upbringing, leading to difficulty adapting to the new community.

- *Off-Campus Students*: NSSE data has shown that students who live on-campus tend to be more engaged than students who live off-campus³⁸. This finding is unsurprising as on-campus students have easier access to support resources, are more likely to be full-time students, and have more time for academic preparation between classes. Additionally, access to faculty is easier for on-campus students. Living on-campus is important in first year, when students are least aware of the support services offered by the university.
- *Part-Time Students*: Part-time students tend to have greater obligations to family responsibilities, as well as off-campus work, inhibiting their ability to take part in certain educationally enriching opportunities³⁹. These opportunities include study abroad programs, extracurricular events, as well as workshops run by academic support services.

Additionally, factors such as attendance habits, drop and add patterns, early semester and midterm grades, as well as high school performance can all indicate a student who is at risk of dropping out⁴⁰. Universities must be ensured not only the resources to track this data, but for student affairs professionals and advisors to be able to reach out to students who are in danger of falling through the cracks.

Concern Three: There is currently insufficient information on post-secondary participation and attainment rates due to the lack of a transparent program to track the advancement of a student throughout their post-secondary career.

Unfortunately, there are no comprehensive and easily accessible sources of data on participation rates and educational attainment for higher education in Ontario. Students who transfer from one institution to another cannot be tracked. Instead this is counted as a drop-out at one institution and a new enrollment at another. This presents a problem for a jurisdiction interested in ensuring access for all individuals regardless of socio-economic status.

Concern Four: Many under-represented groups face significant barriers to advancement past the undergraduate level.

High quality graduate and professional programs do not assist those who, for many reasons outside their control, do not continue their education past the undergraduate level. It is important to remember that the concept of accessibility applies to more than just an undergraduate degree.

Students from underrepresented groups often feel greater pressure to fit in and can have a difficult time adjusting to university life. For this reason, many institutions have programs set up to provide these students with additional support. In 2006, the Ontario government announced funding to "help postsecondary institutions deliver programs that improve access to postsecondary opportunity for francophones, Aboriginal peoples, persons with disabilities and those who would be the first in their families to attend college or university."⁴¹ This funding is extremely important if we are to continue to retain under-represented groups and tear down barriers to a graduate education.

³⁷ Kuh, et al., 2007, 51

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 116.

⁴¹ "Increased Support for Aboriginal Postsecondary Students." MTCU Press Release. July 13, 2006. Accessed online at http://ogov.newswire.ca/ontario/GPOE/2006/07/13/c9608.html?lmatch=&lang=_e.html

In 1998, the Ontario government deregulated fees in professional programs resulting in dramatic increases for medicine (286%), dentistry (370%), and law (173%) over the next four years.⁴² Since then, a number of studies have examined the impact of these increases on accessibility. A 2002 study by Kwong et al found that, between 1997 and 2000, the number of first year medical students with a family income of under \$40,000 declined in Ontario but not in other provinces.⁴³ A 2004 study by King et al. shows that five out of six Ontario law schools experienced a decrease in the proportion of students from middle-income families and a concurrent increase in the proportion from high-income families between 2000 and 2003⁴⁴ These results confirm that deregulation of professional programs has had a negative impact on accessibility for low and middle income students.

Concern Five: Students on the margin of success lack programs that sufficiently support them academically.

At some point in every student's academic career they will undoubtedly face difficulty in successfully completing an assignment, exam or course. It is during these crucial moments that he or she may teeter on the brink of non-completion. Often, students will turn to specific academic support programs in order to find the assistance they need. Unfortunately, these support programs are the first to be cut in times of financial challenge and so often lack the adequate and reliable funding needed to be sustainable year after year.⁴⁵

As the demographics of the average undergraduate student continue to change, the chronic underfunding of academic supports has even graver consequences. With increased focus on accessibility for post-secondary education, new types of students fill seats in classes. These new students bring new gifts as well as new challenges to their learning environment. Often, students from diverse backgrounds are misunderstood or their challenges ignored "...these differences in learning style are sometimes viewed as academic deficiencies requiring remediation."⁴⁶ Elsewhere, this paper explores the importance of varied pedagogy; however, without concurrent academic support students will continue to miss their opportunities for success.

Concern Six: Ontario lags behind peer jurisdictions in attracting international students to our campuses. In addition, Ontario universities are not meeting their unique needs.

Statistics Canada has found that foreign students prefer studying in the United States over Canada, especially students from emerging economies. "Approximately 35% of all doctoral graduates in the United States (compared to 23% in Canada) in 2004/2005 were foreign or visa students."⁴⁷ If we are to compete with US institutions and train the brightest minds of the future, Ontario must work to attract the best international talent. It will not be easy.

The Council of Ontario Universities reports that we will see strong growth in the number of international students for at least the next 20 years. "Competition for these students, particularly the brightest ones, will intensify. Moreover, the costs of competing for these students will rise as other countries are launching more aggressive measures to attract and retain foreign students."⁴⁸ Given the importance of attracting the world's best students to Ontario, the provincial government must be proactive in assisting with recruitment.

⁴² Frenette, Marc. *Summary of: The Impact of Tuition Fees on University Access: Evidence from a Large-scale Price Deregulation in Professional Programs*. Statistics Canada. September 2005. Accessed online at <http://www.statcan.ca/english/research/11F0019MIE/11F0019MIE2005264.pdf>

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Wood, Phil. "Interview with Dr. Phil Wood, Dean of Students at McMaster University." Personal interview. Summer. 2009.

⁴⁶ Kuh, et al., 2007, 91

⁴⁷ *Doctoral graduates in Canada 2004/2005*. Statistics Canada. Accessed online at <http://www.statcan.ca/english/freepub/81-004-XIE/2008002/article/10645-en.htm>

⁴⁸ *Managing Growth in University Enrolment and Enhancing the Quality of the Student Learning Experience*. Council of Ontario Universities. July 2008. Accessed online at <http://www.cou.on.ca/content/objects/BriefingNote-Growth&Quality-June20081.pdf>

In 2007/2008, the average tuition fees for full-time undergraduate international students were raised to \$13,985, over three times the fees that Canadian students pay.⁴⁹ Despite paying so much, international students receive inadequate student services that fail to recognize their unique needs. Services like Academic Writing Centers, English as a Second Language programs, adequate international student centers, and housing and residence services are vital to providing an exceptional international experience.

Hastily assembled sub-committees and ad hoc working groups have done little to improve the services and support mechanisms needed to help international students with the pressures associated with living and learning in a new culture. Institutions across Ontario have not adequately invested in programs that help combat the genuine 'culture shock' many international students experience. They have paid substantial amounts of travel, housing and tuition fees, and made the commitment to a university education in Ontario, only to find that the support mechanisms at their institution are lacking in resources and poorly organized.

In 2001, the University of Windsor allocated \$100,000 to run the Windsor International Student Employment (WISE) program. This was the first work fund for international student, but was cancelled after only one year of operation, due to lack of resources.

Moreover, the pressure from families in their home countries to succeed is immense; it is only logical to expect universities to create a welcoming atmosphere with support services and facilities that will ensure an easy transition and encourage academic success. Universities are accepting international students without implementing the support mechanisms and programs needed to facilitate the quality learning environment they were promised.

International Student Advisor at the University of Windsor, Dr. Jianqiang Wu, articulated the root of the problem: "The most challenging task is to meet the emerging needs of international students with limited resources."⁵⁰

Concern Seven: Quality assurance at campus health centres across Ontario is not guaranteed.

One troubling aspect of the way we fund student affairs, which run crucial student support services across campuses, is that it is not consistent across campuses. Difficulties can arise when attempting to guarantee a certain level of quality in mental health or disability services when institutions run such vastly different programs with such vastly different student fees.

Additionally, university contributions to student affairs budgets at some institutions have been frozen, and departments have been asked to absorb inflationary increases.⁵¹ This has meant, according to some student affairs professionals, that departments are being forced to make difficult choices with regards to what programs to keep and which to lose. At a time when student success and post-secondary education is important to Ontario's future in a knowledge economy, student support services should not be reducing in size and quality.

Concern Eight: Opportunities for students to further their educational experience through meaningful work-study programs can be threatened by budgetary constraints, especially in difficult financial times. Further, decreases in student employment rates can negatively impact a student's chance of successfully completing their degree.

⁴⁹ "University Tuition Fees 2007/2008." Statistics Canada Press Release. October 18, 2007. Accessed online at <http://www.statcan.ca/Daily/English/071018/d071018b.htm>

⁵⁰ Habib, Sausan. "Mediocre support for international students." The Lance. October 8, 2003.

⁵¹ Wood, Phil. "Interview with Dr. Phil Wood, Dean of Students at McMaster University." Personal interview. Summer. 2009.

In the 2009 provincial budget, the government invested 90 million dollars into summer employment opportunities for youth, which was predicted to cause a growth of over 100,000 jobs⁵². Unfortunately, this was coupled with a summer that featured the highest student unemployment rates since 1977⁵³. Students who needed work were left out of the system, and now must make up the lost income. Demand for work-study jobs is very likely to be higher than it normally would be as a result of this.

Additionally, the Ontario Work-Study program requires that students have completed an OSAP application, meaning that students unable or unwilling to take on more debt have been left out of the opportunity for work-study this academic year.

One of the unfortunate negative effects of this is that fewer students are able to benefit from the learning experiences that can come with work-study opportunities and meaningful summer employment. Work-study has been positively correlated with higher retention and graduation rates⁵⁴. Additionally, a moderate amount of on-campus work has been positively correlated with student success, since it can enhance student understanding of how institutions function⁵⁵.

Concern Nine: Teaching has become less of a priority than research as teaching ability is regarded as less important than research performance when awarding tenure and hiring instructors.

It is not only student groups who are concerned with the inequity of teaching and research. Professors, especially those that often focus much of their efforts on teaching have publicly shared that they feel that an imbalance exists. Dr. Geri Van Gyn, a professor at the University of Victoria states that “the research record of the individual mitigates the impact of the teaching record on the final result. The stronger the research record, the less impact a weak teaching record will have on the outcome. In the case of a weak research record, it is unlikely that strong teaching will tip the balance toward a positive decision.”⁵⁶

In the graduate studies curriculum of most Ontario universities, priority is given to high-quality academic research over teaching. “Preparations for teaching in higher education pales in comparison to the preparation graduate students receive to do research. Generally, graduates students are expected to learn teaching tools and pedagogy by trial and error, and also gain advice from colleagues who learned about teaching in the same way.”⁵⁷ This is an important concern because these are the students who will someday make up a large portion of Ontario’s university faculty. According to the National Research Council’s 1995 Survey of Earned Doctorates, 54 per cent of all doctoral students will seek employment in colleges and universities.⁵⁸ Of this high percentage of students, few will have received the training they need to excel.

This favoritism toward research is constantly affecting the outcome of hiring and tenure decisions at Ontario’s universities. Not only have professors and administrators noted this inconsistency, but direct evidence is displayed daily in the way our universities scramble to be considered “research intensive”. In general, stories of success inside the classroom are seldom given the same credit awarded for advancements in research.

Concern Ten: Teaching evaluations are often not made available to students.

⁵² http://www.fin.gov.on.ca/english/budget/ontariobudgets/2009/bk_jobstoday.html

⁵³ <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/subjects-sujets/labour-travail/lfs-epa/lfs-epa-eng.htm>

⁵⁴ Kuh, et al., 2007, 28.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Dr. Geri Van Gyn, “Why teaching should really count,” (BC: The University of Victoria, 2003).

⁵⁸ Boyer Commission on Educating Undergraduates, *Reinventing Undergraduate Education: A Blueprint for America’s Universities* (New York: Boyer Commission, 1998); accessed online at <http://naples.cc.sunysb.edu/Pres/boyer.nsf/webform/VIII>

Another concern about teaching evaluations is their level of availability to students. In order to hold their professors and institutions accountable for a high-quality education, students must have the ability to view the data collected from the evaluations they fill out. At present, the availability of faculty evaluations is poor or non-existent at many institutions and is inconsistent across the province.

The popularity of websites such as RateMyProfessor.ca, that allow students to post and read reviews of instructors at their universities, demonstrates the demand for information about a professor's teaching abilities. In its ten-year existence, the website has received over 8 million ratings of over one million professors.⁵⁹ However, there are numerous concerns about these websites, as there is no guarantee the contributors are students that have taken the class, and the comments often have little to do with teaching effectiveness. The sample sizes are also flawed so that students could be making course choices based on one or two students' reviews.

The main impediment to the public availability of teaching evaluations is that they are often treated as the private property of the professor under faculty collective agreements, and so the professor's permission is required in order to make the information public.⁶⁰ Rather than automatically making them public, many universities require professors to opt-in to a program that publishes the results of student evaluations. These types of contracts and agreements demonstrate the resistance at many institutions to open and public teaching evaluations.

Concern Eleven: University instructors do not receive regular formal training in teaching.

University professors are expected to conduct research and to publish their findings. To accomplish this they use their research skills, gleaned while completing many years of graduate work. Along the way they are faced with many tests, to ensure that their research is of the highest caliber. Yet these same professors are asked to devote an equal amount of time to teaching as they do to research, after receiving absolutely no formal training in education. They are told that teaching and research must be balanced equally, yet are often given no formal instruction on how to teach. They may receive teaching tips from their peers, or they may attempt to emulate a worthy professor from their past, but the majority do not have the basic instruction in teaching that will allow them to excel.

Professors and teaching assistants are given the tremendous responsibility of encouraging the development of knowledge in others, without any training on how this should be done. We cannot expect quality teaching from these individuals without first teaching them how to instruct others. While some instructors do improve quickly, gaining confidence and experience as they go, others are soured by initial failure and never push themselves to improve.

Ontario universities claim to value teaching and research equally, but do not push new instructors to meet criteria concerning teaching ability. While instructional development programs are available at many institutions, they are optional and many instructors choose not to partake. It is up to the provincial government to insist that instructors at our public institutions are capable of quality teaching, before they are thrust in front of a class. The quality of undergraduate teaching cannot truly advance until formal training in teaching is implemented.

Recommendations

Recommendation One: The provincial government must designate targeted funding to support the development of collaborative learning opportunities at all institutions across disciplines.

One unfortunate reality of traditional teaching models is that student learning is very much an independent, isolated experience. With traditional lecture-style classes, there are few formal opportunities for consistent student participation. Students are expected to learn the material presented by the faculty, and demonstrate that they have

⁵⁹ As of March 2006; from RateMyProfessors website, accessed online at <http://ratemyprofessors.ca/index.jsp>.

⁶⁰ Ann Dowsett Johnston, "Grading the Graders", *Maclean's*, 14 November 2005, 26.

learned the material through essays, exams and labs. Nowhere in this process are students required or encouraged to interact with their peers, meaning that the traditional lecture-style classes miss a valuable opportunity to enhance student success.

Student interaction with peers has been shown to positively influence overall academic development, knowledge acquisition, analytical and problems solving skills, as well as overall student self esteem⁶¹. Additionally, increased opportunities for peer interaction within the classroom bring students into contact with students from diverse backgrounds, which have also been positively correlated with desirable post-secondary outcomes⁶².

More importantly, the classroom is the only venue in a post-secondary institution where all types of students undoubtedly interact. For this reason, it is vitally important that teaching be done in a way that facilitates interaction between students, as well as between students and faculty.

Community and Peer Based Learning

Community-based learning is an idea that has been proposed as an effective way to facilitate collaborative learning at the first-year level⁶³. One example of a learning community starts with co-registering (or being co-registered) in classes and tutorials so that they discuss topics and attend lectures with a consistent group of peers⁶⁴. Some large universities in the United States have already adopted models where students co-register in blocks of 25 to 30⁶⁵. They attend larger sized lectures, but stay together for discussion in smaller group. This is similar in principle to tutorials, but the difference is that this discussion group stays consistent between classes.

Tinto proposes that organizing classes in this manner will require students to work together across classrooms, encouraging them to become more active and involved in each-other's learning⁶⁶. This is supported by evidence that has been available for quite some time. A 1976 study on peer learning found that seventy-percent of students felt more involved with a collaborative teaching model⁶⁷.

The Problem-Based Learning (PBL) teaching model employed by the faculty of Health Sciences at McMaster University is a more recent, Canadian example of the benefits of collaborative learning. In 2005, the PBL program won the Alan Blizzard award for innovation in teaching and learning, partly due to its success in helping students collaborate and communicate with one-another. In fact, one of the goals of the program was to foster community based learning⁶⁸. In an open letter, one student recalled the impact PBL had on his learning experience. As he describes, "I can see now that I am a much more mature learner than many students I know from other faculties."

With provincial support for similar collaborative learning opportunities, prospects for collaborative learning could be extended to students from all faculties and programs.

Recommendation Two: The provincial government must support infrastructural projects specifically designed to promote collaborative learning.

⁶¹ Kuh, et al., 2007, 58

⁶² Kuh, et al., 2007, 59

⁶³ Tinto, Vincent, Taking Student Retention Seriously, (Syracuse University: April 15, 2002), 4

⁶⁴ Ibid

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 5

⁶⁷ Falchikov, Nancy. Learning Together: Peer Tutoring in Higher Education, (London: RoutledgeFalmer, 2001), 35

⁶⁸ McKinnell, Jennifer, et al., Skill Development with Students and Explicit Integration Across Four Years of the Curriculum, (McMaster University: 2005), 8.

Some institutions have shown incredible leadership through the provision of learning space tailored to support collaborative learning. For example, learning commons space has been established in a number of university libraries across Ontario. Some of these spaces have been constructed with funds provided by the recent federal and provincial infrastructure programs⁶⁹.

Should collaborative and community-based learning become more prevalent however, it is vitally important that Universities are able to provide adequate meeting space to all students who need access to it. This space should be extended beyond the traditional sphere of the library. Numerous scholars have recommended that classrooms be re-thought in order to facilitate student success. Since the classroom is the one place where students are certain to meet, it has been proposed that making classrooms the locus of campus community is a sure way to facilitate engaging classroom environments⁷⁰.

For schools seeking to show leadership through the promotion of collaborative and community based learning, efforts to provide the necessary infrastructure should be supported provincially. This will not only provide institutions another incentive to move to a collaborative teaching model, but would give them the resources to do it effectively.

Recommendation Three: The provincial government must support early warning systems to ensure the protection of its investment in students across the continuum of their education is protected.

Student Affairs departments are vital to student success, and it must be ensured that they have the resources to be proactive about retention. Some of the most important work identified for them in literature regarding student success lies in keeping track of student behavioural patterns⁷¹. Student profiles should be kept track of, with information regarding attendance patterns, drop and add information, early semester grades as well as preregistration information. This would allow student professionals to have a better overall picture of a student's ability to succeed, as well as make them more aware of a student's particular learning needs.

At some institutions in the US, innovative early warning systems have already been developed. Fayetteville State University, for example, employs an early alert system where faculty members contact student affairs professionals if a student is experiencing challenges during the first two weeks of the semester⁷². Mentors are able to then contact students and refer them to the appropriate resources. The benefit of having this kind of intervention happen early is that it happens before students develop biases or prejudices towards a particular class.

Should a system-wide implementation of early warning systems across Ontario universities be infeasible, it is vitally important that the systems be put in place to support those students with historically low levels of student engagement. This would represent a smaller investment, but would have an enormous impact on those students who face barriers and challenges to student success.

Recommendation Four: The provincial government must support the enhancement of the first year experience at the institutional level.

Student engagement at the first year level has an enormous impact on student success. Programs focusing on the first year experience have been positively correlated with a variety of positive outcomes, such as higher persistence and graduation rates⁷³. Several initiatives have been proven to have a particular impact on student success, and it is of vital importance that when schools deal with financial strain these programs are not the ones that suffer.

⁶⁹ Lakehead Learning Commons.

⁷⁰ Kuh, et al., 2007, 117.

⁷¹ Kuh, et al., 2007, 116.

⁷² Kuh, et al., 2007, 116.

⁷³ Kuh, et al., 2007, 79.

Orientation: Studies conducted in the mid-eighties found that institutions providing the most extensive orientation programs had higher graduation rates than institutions that placed less of a priority on orientation. The 2005 NSSE reported that students who attended orientation participated in more educationally enriching activities, reported higher satisfaction rates, had improved perceptions of campus, and reported greater developmental gains during their first year.

First Year Seminars: First year seminars have taken a wide variety of forms across the institutions that have utilized them. Some are an orientation to university style learning, while others are subject-based and presided over by faculty members. The common thread throughout these programs is that they teach not only course content, but facilitate closer interaction between students without university experience, and faculty or staff who are familiar with success strategies. Through this interaction, students learn not only what is taught, but how to learn it.

The advantage of utilizing first year seminar-style programs is the positive impact they have on students with diverse study skills. First year seminars have the greatest impact on the least academically prepared students. Students who have taken first year seminars have shown higher grades and reenrollment rates. Since success in first year has been linked with persistence and success in upper years, the opportunity to increase success in first year is an opportunity that must not be missed.

Recommendation Five: The provincial government must encourage institutions to consider all students eligible to apply for government and institutionally subsidized work-study opportunities.

To get through the difficult period ahead, where students will have immediate costs but be faced with a poor job market, it is absolutely essential that support for work-study programs be increased, and that eligibility for these programs be opened up to all students. Currently, jobs available through the Ontario Work-Study program are only available to students who have a processed OSAP application for the corresponding academic year⁷⁴. To ensure that students facing difficult financial circumstances have access to employment, it is imperative that these opportunities be open to all students attending post-secondary institutions and not simply students in the OSAP system.

Programs such as McWork at McMaster University offer students meaningful employment opportunities through the University⁷⁵. Jointly funded by the institution and the provincial government, McWork offers employment that is knowledgeable about students' educational needs during their term of employment. It is an excellent example of an already existing institutional-provincial partnership that provides students the kind of employment conducive to student success. These opportunities must be available to all students in need, not simply those in the OSAP system.

Recommendation Six: The provincial government must show leadership through the support of Service Learning departments at institutions.

Service learning is an approach to education that integrates volunteerism and community service into post-secondary education. This is a model that has gained popularity at a number of Ontario institutions and has learning benefits to students, and economic benefits to the community. It is widely considered to be an educationally purposeful activity⁷⁶. 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 persistence⁷⁷.

⁷⁴ McMaster University, Website, (October 2009); accessed online at http://sfas.mcmaster.ca/work_study/jobs.html#owsp

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Kuh, et al., 2007, 103.

⁷⁷ Kuh, et al., 2007, 59.

In 2005, the J.W McConnell family foundation distributed a series of grants which allowed for the creation of community service learning departments at recipient universities across Canada⁷⁸. Unfortunately, there are no guarantees that these departments will be continued when the grants stop. Concern has been expressed by the Service Learning workers across Canada that funding will not be sustained⁷⁹. 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 centres⁸⁰.

As an educationally effective practice conducive to student success, supporting community service learning should be a provincial priority, by not only ensuring the longevity of these departments, but also that they have the desired impact on student learning.

Recommendation Seven: Funding must be designated by the provincial government to found and maintain instructional support programs to encourage innovation in teaching and provide ongoing professional development for Ontario's post-secondary educators.

Neither teaching nor learning are static processes and should not be treated as such. At present, "most campuses have centres to encourage better teaching practices but they are not mandatory and often it is the teachers who are most in need assistance that are least likely to receive it⁸¹." Individual institutions have made commendable efforts to improve the support offered to instructors; however, the province must make a significant investment in the improvement of teaching quality to all institutions in Ontario. The first step is to provide targeted funding to instructional support programs.

Instructional support and professional development programmes in Ontario must encompass a number of important areas such as: training in language, sensitivity, diversity, as well as recommendations on effective pedagogical practices.

Recommendation Eight: Quality teaching must have equal consideration with research performance for all decisions relating to hiring, promotion and tenure.

Teaching and research are often said to be of equal value, but in reality most institutions heavily favour research in decisions related to hiring, promotion and tenure. One study shows that faculty estimate "evaluation of teaching is rated around 20-30% in salary, promotion and tenure decisions, compared to 60% or more for research." This is particularly troubling given that both student satisfaction and engagement are so strongly linked with student success⁸².

Since the passage of the 2007 paper on teaching quality, OUSA has been calling for greater equality between the importance of teaching and research in the tenure process. However, with reason, institutions tend to be protective of their own autonomy, which makes broad government mandates regarding hiring processes a potentially challenging topic.

To ensure that teaching quality is weighted equally with research in relation to hiring decisions, it is essential that the sector come together to arrive upon a mutually beneficial solution to the issue. If government action is required it is preferable that it stem from a broad consensus across the PSE sector. For this reason, OUSA proposes that

⁷⁸ Canadian Alliance for Community Service Learning, Website, (October 2009); accessed online at http://www.communityservicelearning.ca/en/welcome_history_canada.htm

⁷⁹ Canadian Alliance for Community Service Learning, Website, (October 2009); accessed online at http://www.communityservicelearning.ca/en/documents/ScanofCSLinCanada_000.pdf, 13.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Rae, Bob, Ontario: A Leader in Learning, (Toronto: Queen's Printer, 2005)

⁸² Kuh, et al., 2007, 10.

students, the government, institutions and faculties come together to discuss why and how our institutions should hire the faculty who wind up teaching undergraduate students.

Recommendation Nine: The provincial government must insist that teaching quality remain a fundamental part of all future multi-year accountability agreements.

OUSA is pleased to see the emphasis on quality that has resulted from the recent implementation of multi-year accountability agreements. Little information is available however, on how the government plans to hold Ontario universities accountable to these agreements and OUSA urges the government to clarify the process.

One of the objectives of the MYAAs is to ensure each institution receives a predictable amount of funding over a period of several years. Our universities must be confident of receiving their designated funding with sufficient time to implement improvements to teaching quality. Unfortunately, this has not always been the case. OUSA recommends that in the future, the government supply the funding in a more timely fashion.

Recommendation Ten: The provincial government must develop incentives for all new PhD students to be given formal instruction in teaching methods and practices.

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

For this reason, OUSA believes that the best way to ensure that instructors at Ontario universities receive adequate training in teaching is for the training to be incorporated into PhD programmes. A pocket of funding should be made available to universities if they are able to develop teaching training programmes for PhD students. Since many Ontario universities already have centres for teaching and learning, these efforts could be utilized to coordinate the development of these programmes.

The benefits of providing these incentives are clear. Teachers aware of educationally effective pedagogies in the United States have had positive results engaging students from diverse backgrounds with differing learning styles⁸³. Even for those PhD students not seeking teaching positions, the ability to communicate information effectively is still useful.

Recommendation Eleven: The provincial government must mandate all Ontario Universities to perform teaching evaluations, which must be made public and easily accessible to all stakeholders, including students.

Students and taxpayers contribute a great deal to Ontario universities, in exchange for quality education. As a student, one contributes to the university through tuition payment. Thus, the accessibility of information on quality is of the greatest concern to Ontario students. In addition to knowing how their tuition is benefiting them, students must be able to make informed decisions about course selection and the faculty they develop working relationships with.

The vast majority of teaching evaluation survey results must be made public in order to provide instructor and institutional accountability. Because some collective agreements between universities and faculty associations prevent open access to professor evaluations, this may require that future collective agreements include this requirement.

⁸³ Kuh, et al., 2007, 91.

Recommendation Twelve: The provincial government should provide financial incentives for universities to develop comprehensive Undergraduate Research Opportunities Programs.

There are few opportunities that can facilitate discovery and skills development as effectively as undergraduate research opportunities programs (UROPs). UROPs are an integral part of university life in many American universities, but these opportunities have never been fully explored in Ontario, or even Canada. Recently, McMaster University started a pilot project for undergraduate research that is believed to be the nation's first university-wide UROP.

UROPs 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 work full-time for summer terms or part-time during the year within an academic department at the university; and
- The research results are presented to the public or can appear in academic journals.

Undergraduate research contributes to the academic culture of an undergraduate education. Involved students feel a part of scholarly history, their work having been recorded and presented to current and future students. Groups of students work together, further defining new areas of study. This is the type of environment within which excellence flourishes, an environment of free, critical thinking, combined with independent research.

The student or students are given control of the direction of their research, with faculty providing assistance in the learning process. 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.

This type of program is linked with objectives at various levels of government. The federal Conservative government, in its 2006 election platform, emphasized that "increased promotion of basic and applied research, especially in science and technology, is an essential component of Canada's future economic well-being."⁸⁴ In 2005, Premier McGuinty created the Ministry of Research and Innovation and chose to lead it himself, thus demonstrating his desire to focus on this portfolio. On its website, the Ministry calls innovation "the driver of growth across all sectors of the economy"⁸⁵ and its strategic plan says we must "rebalance the learning environment by providing more exposure to experiential-based learning...with a focus on people at the post-secondary education level and those involved in early-stage research and development enterprises."⁸⁶

Undergraduate research opportunities programs have other benefits for institutions and the province as a whole. UROPs can increase research capacity while maintaining quality. Many universities brand themselves "research intensive" while also claiming to be focused on the individual student. Research and undergraduate learning are seen to be separate enterprises, each distinct from the other. Institutions therefore feel they must decide between supporting their undergraduate teaching mission and supporting their research capacity. Undergraduate research aims to bridge this divide. Funding this type of initiative allows institutions to increase their research capacity without compromising their commitment to undergraduate education.

⁸⁴ *Stand Up For Canada: Conservative Party of Canada Federal Election Platform 2006*. Page 18. Accessed online at <http://www.scribd.com/doc/334166/Conservative-Party-of-Canada-Federal-Election-Platform-2006>

⁸⁵ "Why MRI Was created." Ontario Ministry of Research and Innovation. <http://www.mri.gov.on.ca/english/about/MRISStory.asp>

⁸⁶ *Ministry of Research and Innovation Strategic Plan*. November 2006. Page 18. Accessed online at <http://www.mri.gov.on.ca/english/about/documents/strategyPlan.pdf>

Students who engage in undergraduate research consistently pursue graduate education, often leading to a PhD. Funding undergraduate research increases the pool of potential graduate students, and initiates student research enterprises at a younger age, allowing students to better define their research pursuits. Given the provincial government's recent emphasis on graduate education, and the looming faculty shortage due to retirement, UROPs would go a long way to increasing the graduate applicant pool.

UROPs can also provide meaningful employment opportunities for students. Resources allocated towards undergraduate research offer much needed summer employment for students already struggling to earn enough to cover the ever rising costs of post-secondary education. Financial compensation for undergraduate students conducting research is lower than industry standards, allowing funds to be spent on employing greater numbers of students, while also funding high quality research environments.

While not all undergraduate students will participate in these initiatives, undergraduate research will undoubtedly enhance the university experience for all students by raising the level of intellectual activity, and therefore providing additional opportunities for personal growth. Studies have shown that participation in undergraduate research, "...made it more likely that students mastered complex scientific concepts and developed critical and independent thinking skills."⁸⁷

Recommendation Thirteen: The provincial government should provide financial incentives for universities to develop campus business incubators, entrepreneurial challenges and broad-based idea accelerators.

Campus business incubators, entrepreneurial challenges and broad-based idea accelerators provide students with an opportunity to explore and develop a new idea or business concept with the help of faculty and local advisors. They provide meaningful opportunities for university students to develop skills, enhance learning and gain experience, all of which allow them to move on to higher levels of education or the workforce.

A campus business incubator provides operational expertise, including the ability to facilitate the establishment and growth of new business. The concept of an incubator draws on the U.S. experience, where ideas generated by student entrepreneurs have led to successful multi-billion dollar businesses such as Yahoo! The trend has reached the UK, where a number of firms have supported students setting up start-up businesses. The development of campus incubators in Canada and Ontario has been quite limited, with a few notable exceptions.⁸⁸

This concept that is in line with the provincial government's election platform, which lists "strong support for innovation" as one of the cornerstones of a stronger Ontario.⁸⁹ In fact the 2008 Ontario Budget lists "strengthening the environment for innovation" as part of the government's five point plan for the economy.⁹⁰

By participating in a business incubator, students gain knowledge and experience in the process of drafting business plans and raising capital, as well as access to a network of professional advisors. Most incubators offer working space to the start-up companies in a campus-style environment, which allows the occupants to network with each other and use their collective expertise. These collections of 'micro-businesses' form what is known in Japanese as keiretsu – a group whose members rely on each other for synergy. The financial sponsors of an incubator invest in the future worth of resident members of the network through investment in-kind and recoup their investment in the

⁸⁷Nnadozie, Emmanuel, John Ishiyama and Jane Chon. Undergraduate Research Internships and Graduate School Success. Kirksville, MO: Truman State University, 2001.

⁸⁸ Examples in Ontario include the University of Toronto's Excele@tor and McMaster University's Campus Incubator. These projects can be found at www.excelerator.ca and www.campusincubator.com respectively.

⁸⁹ *Moving Forward Together: The Ontario Liberal Plan 2007*. Page 12. Accessed online at <http://www.ontarioliberal.ca/pdf/platform/MovingForwardTogether.pdf>

⁹⁰ *2008 Ontario Budget: Growing a Stronger Ontario*. Accessed online at <http://www.fin.gov.on.ca/english/budget/ontariobudgets/2008/>

long term from the increase in equity value of successful businesses. The sponsors also accept a proportion might fail. These start-up entrepreneurs in turn will in due course decide if they wish to remain within the supportive environment of the incubator or move out and live on their own, giving up the synergies of the group in return for corporate freedom.

It should be noted that campus incubators focusing on the development of students' ideas are quite different from incubators focusing on the commercialization of research. These incubators have become quite popular recently, particularly in the biotech sector. At McMaster, the new Centre for Learning and Discovery will have lab space for a Biotech Incubator.⁹¹ In London, the University of Western Ontario and the City's Economic Development Department have partnered on the London Biotechnology Incubation Centre.⁹² These models do not share the same goals and outcomes as student-focused campus incubators or entrepreneurial challenges.

Broad-based idea accelerators are quite similar to campus incubators; however, the objective is not entrepreneurial success. These kinds of programs or facilities allow students to develop a concept that may have a positive social impact on a particular group or region. This may involve the development of community art, sustainable engineering projects or the establishment of a framework for human rights advocacy organization in developing countries. An example of an idea accelerator is the Artisan House Incubator in Bristol.

Recommendation Fourteen: The provincial government should create a grant program for university students to engage in international exchange and should work to increase the diversity of international opportunities available.

International exchange opportunities are incredibly beneficial to student success. Students are given a chance to experience different teaching styles and unique research, but more than that, personal development is stimulated. This results in increased creativity and freedom of thought, as well as an understanding and appreciation for other cultures and ways of life. In addition to the personal growth achieved through international programs, these experiences are also beneficial to Ontario's economy. In 2003 it was estimated that U.S. companies lose \$2 billion a year due to inadequate cross-cultural knowledge among employees.⁹³ The benefits of international experience cannot be over-emphasized.

There are currently a number of programs that are offered at Ontario institutions that provide international exchange opportunities, however, the number of students involved in these initiatives is relatively small. The number of international opportunities must be increased and financial support must be made available to encourage students to take advantage of these opportunities.

There are clear benefits to a system-wide program of financial assistance for international exchange. Such a program would enhance the educational experience of numerous students by giving the opportunity to study abroad when financial barriers would normally hold them back. Moreover, if existing international exchange programs were coordinated through an international exchange co-operative, or universities engaged in more collaborative efforts around international exchange, this might increase the diversity of international opportunities available.

⁹¹ Easton, Shelly. "Ontario's newest funding investment benefits students, McMaster president says." McMaster Daily News. April 14, 2003.

⁹² Van Raay, Chantall. "Biotech incubator proposed for Research Park." Western News. October 14, 1999.

⁹³ Ben L. Kedia and Shirley Daniel, "U.S. Business Needs for Employees with International Expertise" (paper prepared for the Conference on Global Challenges and U.S. Higher Education at Duke University, Durham, NC, January 2003), pp. 5, 12-14, 17. Accessed online at www.jhfc.duke.edu/ducis/globalchallenges/pdf/kania_daniel.pdf

The United States Senate declared 2006 as the “Year of Study Abroad.”⁹⁴ Ontario universities are working hard to provide new opportunities for their students but they do not have the same level of support that the U.S. Senate has shown. It’s time for the government to lead the way.

Recommendation Fifteen: The provincial government must create a separate envelope within the funding formula that designate specific amounts per FTE for student support services.

As has been explored throughout this paper, the goal of Ontario’s post-secondary education system cannot simply be to fill first year seats; it must be about keeping seats full until students complete their studies. There are many ideas on how best to help student persist, but beyond debate is the concept of student support. Academic life is meant to challenge and push individuals beyond their capacity, and periodically, this will create serious difficulty. It is important that during these periods, when students are most at risk of not completing their studies, that they are able to quickly find and utilize services meant for their help.⁹⁵

The Ontario government has a variety of tools at its disposal to encourage institutions to fully and reliably fund student support centers. While one option might be rolling punitive measures into the Multi-Year Accountability Agreements, OUSA believes that a more successful option will be creating incentives. Within the Operating Funds Distribution Manual a number of special envelopes and grants are explained. The Quality Assurance Fund, for example, had a specific amount of money set aside for the funding of, amongst other priorities, student support centres. Each special grouping of funds is intended to target specific aspects of the post-secondary educational system for improvement.

Tying monies to student supports that do not already exist on every campus will encourage universities to take advantage of funding. Similarly, in places where one form of the services already exists, a specific envelope of funding will free up important operating funds for other uses and provide an element of reliability of funding to student services that it is currently missing. Incentives will ensure student success. Centres that are accessible and well funded will provide the necessary support students need to persist and complete their studies.

Recommendation Sixteen: In addition to services for all students, the Ontario Government must provide adequate supports that focus on underrepresented groups.

The increased attention paid to accessibility in the Reaching Higher plan was an important first step in ensuring that Ontario’s future workforce is made up of well-educated individuals. But accessibility alone is not enough. If students fall behind and lack the support to persist through post-secondary education to successful completion then the system is not fulfilling its intended purpose. The Government is in the best position to support student services, as well as regulate their quality. Through the use of targeted funding, institutions can be encouraged to invest in student services and supports for traditionally underrepresented groups.

Support for underrepresented groups on campus is essential for the success of the students and the university. If students do not have to burden their time and energy with exterior stresses, feeling marginalized, living with dependants, they will be more engaged and, consequently, more likely to succeed.⁹⁶ For example, universities that have child care available and at a reasonable rate have students who are more likely to remain in school, complete their degrees and earn higher grades.⁹⁷ As well, providing extended hours to part-time students, mature students and students with dependents are important services that will directly impact their chances of degree completion.⁹⁸

⁹⁴ “Why Study Abroad? The Benefits of International Education.” Georgia Perimeter College.

<http://www.gpc.edu/~gpcglobe/Students/benefits.htm>

⁹⁵ Tinto, 2002, 2.

⁹⁶ Tinto, 2002, 3.

⁹⁷ Kuh, et al., 2007, pg 90.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

By providing academic support and advising services that are properly funded the University can create measures that address student needs. Moreover, by focusing on the creation of supports for students from all backgrounds, including underrepresented groups, more students will persist all the way to graduation. “Advising is thought to be most effective in terms of promoting student success when integrated into academic support services and when sensitive to developmental needs of diverse students.”⁹⁹ If the government is serious about increasing persistence and graduation rates, then academic supports sit at the foundation of that goal.

Recommendation Seventeen: Post-secondary institutions must recognize the importance of the broader-learning environment.

While traditional higher learning takes place inside the classroom, many post-secondary students learn just as much from participating in extra-curricular activities. Through athletics, arts, charity work, student governance and other endeavors, students develop leadership skills, see the benefit of contributing to their community and experience immense personal development. If Ontario students are to gain the most from their education, it must include these extra-curricular opportunities and our universities must commit to supporting a broader-learning environment on and around campus.

This institutional commitment is especially important when it comes to student services. Athletic facilities and programs must be adequately funded to ensure students remain healthy and have the opportunity to participate and compete as part of team. Residences must be in reasonable condition and resources must be available to assist students with all aspects of their lives, not to fill the role of the parent but to assist in the personal development of the student. Adequate campus space must be set-aside for study and meeting space where students can work and socialize with their peers.

Recommendation Eighteen: The provincial government must support remedial and transition programs designed for students who have experienced academic challenges.

Not all students are immediately successful in their university experience. For a wide variety of reasons, thousands of students each year find themselves on academic probation or academic suspension. The path back to regular academic standing can be a daunting one, filled with fear of failure as a cloud of disbarment looms over every academic decision that is made.

Many universities have strategies in place to transition and support these students, and it makes perfect sense. Fewer students dropping out means greater retention rates and enhanced statistics for the institution, and also costs significantly less to retain existing students than it does to recruit new ones. But not all programs are designed in a student-centric model, with the individual needs and concerns of the at-risk student placed at the forefront. Many will not address the underlying causes of the academic difficulties; instead offering reduced course loads, or suggesting programs which are perceived to be easier. These programs keep students long enough to get them out the front door with a degree, but often not in a desired length or discipline.

More universities are now adopting a structured transition approach, often involving a combination of techniques. A new program at Brock University, launched in the 2009-10 year offers an alternative to academic suspension. Called ‘BOOST’, this program has created a course focused on skill development, workshops, and other university services, which can be taken concurrently with academic courses instead of having the student spend time away from school during their suspension year. While this is a fantastic “made-at-Brock” solution in response to an identified need, it comes with an additional tuition charge of \$750 for a non-credit course on a cost-recovery basis. Struggling students

⁹⁹ Kuh, et al., 2007, 82.

are now forced to weigh the pro-con of additional tuition into their decision whether to remain in school, or leave entirely.

Remedial programs, short-cuts and transition steps should be as student-focused as possible, while removing as many burdens as possible. As student retention remains a desired outcome for the provincial government, increased support should be made available for programs assisting students in academic jeopardy.

Recommendation Eight: Students from primary through post-secondary education must be assigned an Ontario Education Number (OEN) to increase our understanding of the barriers to advancement through post-secondary education.

The Ontario government has announced plans to use the existing Ontario Education Number to track a student's progress through post-secondary education. OUSA supports this move and looks forward to its implementation. This data will be invaluable in tracking improvements to the system, identifying areas that require improvement, and analyzing trends to identify future needs.

Conclusion

The debate over quality includes a broad range of issues, but in the end, the goal is always the same: to ensure that every student has the opportunity to succeed.

The conversation must begin with access and advancement. All academically qualified students deserve the opportunity to attend all levels of post-secondary education, and support services must be in place to ensure they are supported throughout. If we are to see true equality in access, it will require changes to tuition fee policies, investments in financial assistance, early intervention and awareness programs, and system-wide targets for access. A student tracking system, such as the Ontario Education Number, must be implemented for post-secondary students to provide the data we need to improve higher education in Ontario.

In an increasingly global world, higher education must provide a wide variety of perspectives and the opportunity to learn about other cultures and ways of life. International students contribute these new perspectives and thereby add tremendously to the learning environment. With competition increasing for the world's best and brightest minds, Ontario must be proactive in attracting and supporting international students from around the world.

One of the most important and under-emphasized aspects of quality is availability of enrichment opportunities outside the classroom. A high quality education must include a fertile learning environment where one may develop new skills, enhance one's learning and simply enrich one's experience. We have offered a number of initiatives which would enhance the learning environment at Ontario's post-secondary institutions, including business incubators and idea accelerators, greater opportunities for international exchange, and undergraduate research opportunity programs. More generally, OUSA is calling on the province to embrace innovative teaching methods and to champion new programs based on inquiry learning, community service learning, and problem-based learning.

But before these opportunities can be realized, Ontario's post-secondary institutions require an increase in base funding to at least the national average. Without it, they cannot hire the additional faculty members that are so necessary to a high quality education.

If we do not take these issues seriously, we are risking the ability of our graduates to be highly skilled and innovative participants in the democratic, social and economic fabric of Ontario and the nation. If we do not act, we are risking the very socio-economic viability and future of our province.

Student Success Policy Statement

WHEREAS student success is a continuum beginning well before students begin their post-secondary education, and continues after they have graduated.

WHEREAS all academically qualified students should have the opportunity to advance into and within all levels of higher education.

WHEREAS students in all levels of higher education should have access to meaningful opportunities to enrich their experience, develop new skills, and enhance their learning.

WHEREAS student support services are a fundamental part of fostering student success.

WHEREAS high quality and timely health services must be available to all students.

WHEREAS the delivery of varied, innovative and engaging teaching methods is fundamental to creating a successful student.

WHEREAS all University instructors should receive in-depth, formal training to develop their teaching skills.

WHEREAS the broader learning experience a student receives outside the classroom is important to Student Success in Ontario.

WHEREAS student success is enhanced on campuses that encourage and foster a positive experience with diversity.

WHEREAS international students make an enormous contribution to the higher education experience and bring crucial global perspectives to Ontario campuses. They also provide significant economic benefits to Ontario universities and local communities across the province.

WHEREAS student success is enhanced by the inclusion of research methods in the classroom.

WHEREAS the progress of each student through all levels of education must be tracked and this information must be collected and analyzed with the goal of improving the system.

WHEREAS passive lecture-style pedagogy, still pervasive across Ontario, is not as conducive to student success as other methods of learning.

WHEREAS students are falling through the cracks in the education system, particularly students with lower historic student engagement rates.

WHEREAS there is currently insufficient information on post-secondary participation and attainment rates due to the lack of a transparent program to track the advancement of a student throughout their post-secondary career.

WHEREAS many under-represented groups face significant barriers to advancement past the undergraduate level.

WHEREAS students facing difficulty who are on the margin of success lack programs that sufficiently support them academically.

WHEREAS Ontario is not attracting enough international students and Ontario campuses are not meeting their unique needs.

WHEREAS quality assurance at disability health centres across Ontario is not guaranteed.

WHEREAS opportunities for students to further their educational experience through meaningful work-study programs can be threatened by budgetary constraints, especially in difficult financial times. Further, decreases in student employment rates can negatively impact a student's chance of successfully completing their degree.

WHEREAS teaching has become less of a priority than research as teaching ability is regarded as less important than research performance when awarding tenure and hiring instructors.

WHEREAS teaching evaluations are often not made available to students.

WHEREAS university instructors do not receive regular formal training in teaching.

BIRT the provincial government must designate targeted funding to support the development of collaborative learning opportunities at all institutions across disciplines.

BIFRT the provincial government must support infrastructural projects specifically designed to promote collaborative learning.

BIFRT the provincial government must support early warning systems to ensure the protection of its investment in students across the continuum of their education.

BIFRT the provincial government must support the enhancement of the first year experience at the institutional level.

BIFRT The provincial government must encourage institutions to consider all students eligible to apply for government and institutionally subsidized work-study opportunities.

BIFRT the provincial government must show leadership through the support of Service Learning departments at institutions.

BIFRT funding must be designated by the provincial government to found and maintain instructional support programs to encourage innovation in teaching and provide ongoing professional development for Ontario's post-secondary educators.

BIFRT quality teaching must have equal consideration with research performance for all decisions relating to hiring, promotion and tenure.

BIFRT the provincial government must insist that teaching quality remain a fundamental part of all future multi-year accountability agreements.

BIFRT the provincial government must develop incentives for all new PhD students to be given formal instruction in teaching methods and practices.

BIFRT the provincial government must mandate all Ontario Universities to perform teaching evaluations, which must be made public and easily accessible to all stakeholders, including students.

BIFRT the provincial government should provide financial incentives for universities to develop comprehensive Undergraduate Research Opportunities Programs.

BIFRT the provincial government should provide financial incentives for universities to develop campus business incubators, entrepreneurial challenges and broad-based idea accelerators.

BIFRT the provincial government should create a grant program for university students to engage in international exchange and should work to increase the diversity of international opportunities available.

BIFRT the provincial government must create a separate envelope within the funding formula that designate specific amounts per FTE for student support services.

BIFRT in addition to services for all students, the Ontario Government must provide adequate supports that focus on underrepresented groups.

BIFRT post-secondary institutions must recognize the importance of the broader-learning environment.

BIFRT the provincial government must support remedial and transition programs designed for students who have experienced academic challenges.

BIFRT students from primary through post-secondary education must be assigned an Ontario Education Number (OEN) to increase our understanding of the barriers to advancement through post-secondary education.