

OCUFA Report
NUFA AGM May 2017
Todd Horton and Amanda Burk

Todd Horton and Susan Srigley attended the 150th OCUFA Board of Directors Meeting October 29-30, 2016 in Toronto. Amanda Burk will be attending the OCUFA Policy Exchange Conference: Developing a compelling policy vision for higher education in Ontario May 11 – 12, 2017, as well as the upcoming OCUFA Board Meeting May 13, 2017. Additionally, we have participated in OCUFA conference calls about University Governance and the Strategic Mandate Agreement. NUFA has also completed an OCUFA survey reviewing Student Questionnaires on Courses and Teaching and their use at Ontario institutions.

We would like to extend our thanks to Dr. April James who attended the OCUFA sponsored Advocacy Day at the Ontario Legislature as our faculty ambassador. She presented a poster on her research and attended meetings where she advocated on our behalf to our Members of Provincial Parliament for increased university funding.

OCUFA Board Meetings continue to be an important forum for discussion and exchange about the challenges being faced by faculty and faculty associations across Ontario. OCUFA is also a solid, proactive resource that assists faculty associations in remaining informed and prepared for changes occurring to the post-secondary sector. Each year, OCUFA chooses its priorities and directions for advocacy in response to changes to government policy, planning and regulations, and based on the concerns raised through the OCUFA Board and Committee meetings. As such, OCUFA's priority areas for 2016-2017 are as follows:

Pensions: As a key stakeholder in the **University Pensions Project (UPP)**, they have continued to be an advocate for a well-grounded **Jointly Sponsored Pension Plan (JSPP)**. Together with university faculty associations, union coalition and the Council of Ontario Universities (COU), progress has been made towards completing the design phase of the project. The completion of the design phase is anticipated to occur in 2017. The final phase or “consent to move” phase will follow whereby each association will authorize and make the transition into the plan. It is important to note that other pension efforts are underway at various institutions (e.g., Nipissing's own consideration of the **CAAT Plan**) but the JSPP continues as a possible province-wide option. Its import is increasing as some university plans are facing solvency issues and the provincial government is “incentivizing” concrete movements toward completion of the JSPP by cutting back on solvency relief funding thus “pressuring” universities experiencing shortfalls to move in this direction.

Fairness for Contract Faculty: OCUFA continues to be focused on the issue of increasing use of precarious labour in the university sector. With initiatives like **Fair Employment Week (FEW)** and the **We Teach Ontario** campaigns, OCUFA is well-situated to continue its advocacy work at both the provincial and federal levels for increased university funding to ensure good academic jobs.

The timelines for the **Changing Workplaces Review** – a comprehensive review of employment and labour law in Ontario – continue to be stretched out. OCUFA is joining with our partners in the **Fight for \$15 & Fairness** campaign to call on the Minister of Labour and MPPs to keep the process moving, so that

the government can implement positive changes before the end of the of the spring legislative session at Queen's Park.

University Funding: The Ministry of Training Colleges, and Universities (MTCU) has changed its name to the **Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development (MAESD)** but the review of the current funding model continues. OCUFA participated in the consultations and to date, MAESD has indicated that the new funding model will include three key components: an enrolment based funding envelope, a special purpose grants envelope, and a differentiation/student success envelope.

The enrolment envelope will include funding based on an enrolment corridor designed to insulate institutions against potentially harmful financial impacts of enrolment decline. The special purpose grants envelope will consolidate and streamline all existing special purpose grants currently allocated to institutions, and the funding institutions receive through the student success/differentiation envelope may be at risk, but has not yet clarified what is meant by "risk" or what the associated accountabilities will be. OCUFA is advocating against "at-risk" university operating funding allocated based on performance against specific metrics.

OCUFA also highlighted that the province is in various ways increasingly willing to insert itself into the post-secondary education sector (e.g., mandating experiential learning components as part of undergraduate degrees). This more directive approach has serious implications for academic governance as well as academic freedom.

University Governance: Faculty associations throughout the province share NUFA's concerns about the state of university governance. There is recognition that erosion of faculty participation is occurring as processes are ignored, undermined, eroded, or eliminated. Compositions of Boards of Governors are increasingly narrowed and participation on key committees is being reduced or abolished. The OCUFA Board was particularly interested to hear about Nipissing University's Special Joint Governance Commission. The **OCUFA Policy Exchange Conference: Developing a compelling policy vision for higher education in Ontario** coming up in May is intended for participants to enter into discussion about governance and assist OCUFA in developing a resource document for faculty associations who are trying to revive collegial governance. Discussions at the conference will be focused in the following key areas: the future of provincial funding for universities, precarious academic employment and the evolving role of contract faculty, reshaping university governance and accountability

Executive Compensation Framework: This new framework came into effect in September 2016, lifting the 2012 freeze on executive compensation at broader public sector institutions. The Framework allows broader public sector institutions to increase compensation for executives. The details of how executive compensation will be set at each institution have to be posted on the university's website for 30 days to allow for members of the university community and general public to be informed about the proposed changes and to provide feedback. It will be important for faculty and faculty associations to pay close attention to the executive compensation proposals brought forward by their university and actively engage in the consultations. This deadline for the posted framework is early September 2017. More details on the compensation framework are available on the OCUFA website here: <https://ocufa.on.ca/blog-posts/executive-compensation-framework-means-universities/>

Other Initiatives:

Student Questionnaires on Courses and Teaching (SQCT): OCUFA established a working group to review **Student Questionnaires on Courses and Teaching and their use at Ontario institutions**. The group was tasked with developing a deeper understanding of how student questionnaires are currently being used at Ontario's universities, defining the limitations of these questionnaires, and developing proposals for ensuring that these questionnaires are used appropriately. The working group is expected to release its report and recommendations later this year. What follows is a summary of the group's findings so far.

1. Student questionnaire results are skewed by factors outside of faculty control
2. Student questionnaire results are skewed by systemic discrimination and bias
3. Student questionnaires facilitate anonymous harassment
4. Student questionnaire results can compromise educational quality
5. Student questionnaire results should not be used to determine university funding levels

All of these findings are described in more detail here: <https://ocufa.on.ca/blog-posts/briefing-note-student-questionnaires-courses-teaching/>

Strategic Mandate Agreement (SMA): In December, the Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development released an update on the next round of **Strategic Mandate Agreements (SMAs)** to be negotiated in 2017. The Ministry also announced a two-year extension to the existing cap on tuition fees while it consults with postsecondary institutions and students. Discussions happening among faculty and faculty associations reveal concerns about institutional metrics, particularly research metrics in relation to the process of the SMAs.