



ONTARIO AGRICULTURAL COLLEGE

DEPARTMENT OF PLANT AGRICULTURE

May 6, 2024

To: Professors Herb Kunze and Lezlie Cunningham

Re: Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations (OCUFA) Chair Report for University of Guelph Faculty Association (UGFA) Annual General Meeting (AGM)

I attended the OCUFA Board of Directors (BOD) meetings that were held on October 27-28, 2023 and February 10-11, 2024. I also participated in Advocacy Day at Queen's Park on March 20, 2024. My report highlights some of the outcomes of these events.

The OCUFA BOD meeting and AGM held October 27-28, 2023 included an Open House (Friday evening) held at OCUFA's new offices and the Awards Celebration (Saturday evening), both of which were incredibly successful. The order of the day included an appeal for intervener status and judicial review (application by the University of Western Ontario Faculty Association (UWOFA) – Emma Phillip Lawyer retained by CAUT/OCUFA). A motion was passed regarding the Brescia Faculty Association (BFA) and UWOFA denouncing the unilateral decision to integrate Brescia University College with the University of Western Ontario. After the merger, Western University will apply for the bargaining units to intermingle.

OCUFA BOARD MOTION: That the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Association stands in solidarity with the Brescia Faculty Association and the University of Western Ontario Faculty Association to denounce the unilateral decision by both of their university administrations to "integrate" Brescia University College into the University of Western Ontario. The OCUFA Board opposes the process followed in reaching that decision, the steps that have been taken by both the Brescia and Western administrations since that decision, and the continued lack of transparency, commitment to collegial governance procedures and respect of the collective agreements in place. The Board also recognizes the unique and significant status of Brescia as Canada's only women's university college. At a time when the safety of women and trans people is increasingly threatened, it is especially concerning; student choices for equitable and safe spaces such as Brescia should be protected, not taken away. The Board calls on Brescia University College and the University of Western Ontario to work meaningfully with collegial governance procedures, and with faculty and staff associations at Brescia and Western to ensure that the path forward will respect and align with conditions of existing collective agreements.

The report by OCUFA President Nigmendra Narain addressed advancing equity, diversity, inclusion, and Indigenization (EDI) as core to OCUFA's Strategic Priority Plan and condemned the violent attack at the

University of Waterloo. As signatories of an open letter, Nigmendra spoke of the response by several universities to this attack.

Chris Donovan, Partner at Goldblatt Partners, attended the AGM on the afternoon of Saturday, October 28, 2023 to present about intellectual property (IP) rights and advocacy guidelines. He highlighted the need to include these rights in our collective agreements and that individual faculty own copyright. He also highlighted that faculty associations (FAs) need to get involved in licensing arrangements.

We also discussed freedom of speech and preparing a statement from OCUFA, especially in light of the current situation where some faculty members and students have been fired and/or publicly subjected to harsh criticism and/or actions over their comments around a ceasefire in the Middle East. Some examples shared were the Imam at Western University who was fired for his ceasefire position and our Minister of Colleges and Universities, Jill Dunlop, who made a statement in the legislature publicly naming faculty members and their academic institutions who have also spoken against the conflict in Israel and Gaza. OCUFA was looking into the Minister's statement and the intention was to work with elected officials to have this stricken from Queen's Park Hansard and to ask for a public apology from the Minister for "naming names" without consent or without context of comments. There was also discussion about whether faculty associations should put out statements about the conflict in the Middle East and how best to do this, and some FAs (Carleton University) shared their experience.

Ivana Saula, OCUFA's Director of Policy and Government Affairs, gave a presentation entitled Defending Public Universities on Bill 26 (sexual misconduct policies) and Overview of the International Students Act. Bill 44, a precursor to *The International Students Act* that was introduced by an NDP government with the goal of regulating recruiters of international students and establishing a code of conduct for schools, colleges, and universities. Mistreatment of international students was uncovered by an investigative report that examined the role of the International College Manitoba (ICM), a private business on the University of Manitoba (U of M) campus that prepares international students for university studies in Canada. It is worth noting that the owner of ICM is Navitas, which has a 10-year contract with the U of M expiring in 2028. The U of M receives funds from ICM, which by Navitas' accounts amounts to more than \$100 million in revenue for the U of M. The purpose of the legislation was to set parameters for the designation of learning institutions, establish regulations and codes of conduct for learning institutions to follow, and obligate designated learning institutions to enforce the regulations they themselves are bound by to recruitment agencies. The legislation applies to colleges, schools, universities, vocational schools, language schools, degree granting institutions, regional vocational schools, private schools, and private vocational schools. The presentation went on to identify the requirements, penalties, and loopholes of this legislation (such as the legislation does not prohibit use of recruitment companies, nor the establishment of organizations such as the ICM), and a number of discussion points were addressed, in particular regarding strengthening collective agreement language.

At the OCUFA BOD meeting held February 10-11, 2024, Jenny Ahn, Executive Director reported on the Blue Ribbon Panel Report.

The Blue Ribbon Panel Brief: the government-appointed panel made recommendations to the Minister of Colleges and Universities with the mandate to "advise the Minister with the focus on keeping the

postsecondary sector financially strong with a secondary focus on providing the best student experience possible.” Recommendations included a one-time 10% adjustment in per student funding to recognize high inflationary cost increases over the past several years with a commitment to annual adjustments over the next three to five years, with a minimum increase of 2% per annum. The panel also recommended an increase in student tuition fees similar to the adjustment in per student funding from the Provincial Government. They asked the institutions to find financial efficiencies and recommended 25% of funding received be based on performance. The Blue Ribbon Panel based its recommendation that universities pursue efficiencies on advice from Nous, an international management consultancy with Canadian universities. OCUFA’s response was that the panel recommendations fell short, leaving Ontario’s public universities with the lowest provincial funding and the near highest tuition fees for students in the country.

Intl Caps Briefing Note: the federal cap on international students has implications for Ontario’s universities. The problem is that the proposed cap on international student visas does not address the root causes of problems in Ontario’s postsecondary sector, namely chronic underfunding and growing privatization. “Many international students have become victims of exploitations, paying astronomical rates of tuition for inadequate privatized education and vague promises of immigration opportunities.” There was also mention of the lowest number of faculty per student ratio in Ontario, with 32.4 university students per faculty member in 2021 compared to the rest of Canada average of 22.4 per faculty member. Ontario universities have long been doing more with less and cannot afford any further revenue setbacks.

Ontario professors offered a blueprint for revitalizing public universities. OCUFA outlined problems created by provincial underfunding and offered four recommendations.

RECOMMENDATION ONE: OCUFA called for compounding annual total provincial university funding increases of 11.75% for a period of five years to reach the national average.

RECOMMENDATION TWO: Instead of increasing domestic tuition, OCUFA echoed the call of student groups for government to enhance the student assistance budget and convert loans into grants.

RECOMMENDATION THREE: OCUFA called for a review of Ontario’s provincial funding formula, including the corridor model, with an embedded goal of supporting domestic enrolment growth.

RECOMMENDATION FOUR: OCUFA called for reversing the planned implementation of the performance-based funding scheme.

The document goes on to state that “Ontario has the lowest per-domestic student funding level for universities in Canada. The province provided \$9,890 in total university funding per domestic full-time equivalent in 2021-22, the most recent year for which there is comprehensive data. This is a total far behind the national average of \$15,807. Ontario is also the only province that imposes funding caps on domestic students—a disincentive for universities to enroll more domestic students. The government of Ontario’s disinvestment has led universities to look elsewhere for revenue, including sky-high international student tuition fees. OCUFA noted the great benefits brought to our campuses by

international students and warned that such a heavy reliance on their high tuition fee dollars is very risky. This number is now capped by the federal government, which underscores the urgent need for more robust, sustainable provincial funding for Ontario's universities."

Earlier this year, as reported by CBC in an interview with Jill Dunlop (the Minister of Universities and Colleges), the Provincial Government earmarked \$1.3 billion for the sector, which is about half of what the government-appointed Blue Ribbon Panel recommended. The Premier did not support any increase in student tuition as recommended by the Blue Ribbon Panel. Part of these funds are to be used for institutions to hire "consultants" to increase efficiency.

OCUFA Advocacy Day: events were held on March 19 and 20, 2024 with a focus on the Pre-budget submission: "Empowering Tomorrow: OCUFA's Blueprint for Revitalizing Ontario's Public Universities". Training and orientation took place on the evening of March 19 with the faculty ambassadors (31) meeting with OCUFA staff and planning for Member of Provincial Parliament (MPP) meetings. We were broken up into teams of four FA representatives and paired with an OCUFA staff for the meetings with MPPs. The next day our group met with four MPPs including Bhutila Karpoche (NDP representative), Nolan Quinn (PC representative), Mike Schreiner (Green Party representative for Guelph), and Sandy Shaw (NDP representative). Group talking points included key messages centered on four issues: increase funding for Ontario universities; help Ontario universities meet and enhance their missions; develop a funding model that works for Ontario; and support good jobs on campus. Corresponding key messages were as follows: increase total provincial university funding by 11.75% compounded annually for five years to bring Ontario universities in line with the Canadian average per-student funding; invest in university as education, economic, and cultural hubs in Ontario communities through increased funding; that current models of funding were inappropriate for Ontario's current and future needs (i.e., performance-based funding model); and that faculty working conditions are student learning conditions and that improving faculty hiring and retention will enhance the student experience. The faculty representatives were invited to Question Period and recognized individually by Members of Parliament. At the close of the day, MPPs, faculty ambassadors, and OCUFA staff gathered at an evening reception. As a follow-up, I provided a letter requested by MPP Sandy Shaw with regards to the importance of faculty research and outreach activities at Ontario Agricultural College (OAC) to the Ag industry in Ontario.

As conveyed by Jenny Ahn, on March 26, 2024, the budget unfortunately contained no new funding for universities. However, the announcement of \$1.3 billion in additional funding spread over three years (for 40+ institutions) did indicate the government is aware of the crisis facing public universities and of the solution, i.e., more robust, sustainable funding to the sector.

Yours truly,

Helen Booker, Ph.D.