

news from CUASA

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RESPONSE TO THE PRELIMINARY REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON THE FUTURE ROLE OF UNIVERSITIES IN ONTARIO

Editorial Note: On May 6, 1981, CUASA submitted a formal response to "The Challenge of The '80s". In order that the membership will be as fully informed as possible of the activities of the Association, that response is reprinted below. Copies of the responses of other academic staff associations and of various university administrations can be consulted, upon request, in the CUASA office.

Les Copley, President.

In the "Challenge of the '80s", the Committee on the Future Role of Universities in Ontario has identified problems, but not their solutions, found social inequity, but not the policies to correct it, and implied contradictions in current government policy, but avoided a direct confrontation with them. In short, the Preliminary Report is critical of the past development and current state of the university system in Ontario in a way that avoids direct criticism of the government that brought the system to its present pass. We have no intention of imitating this lesson in circumspection.

UNDERFUNDING

The principal problem facing the universities of Ontario is easily stated: a decade of government neglect which, if continued for a second decade, will result in a cumulative disintegration of the system. The Committee has been good enough to detail in their models 2 and 3 the degree, if not the cost, of this disintegration. The pernicious effects of prolonged underfunding cannot be overstated. It poses an insuperable impediment to meeting public expectations of the university system, even when the latter are stated in the most utilitarian terms. It results in a degradation of the quality of the educational experience provided by the universities through:

- an enforced reliance on out-dated and sometimes defective equipment in instructional laboratories;
- severely restricted library acquisitions resulting in actual reductions in serial and periodical subscriptions as well as increasingly inadequate holdings generally;
- increased instructional workloads for faculty resulting, not from an increased student/staff ratio, but from cut-backs in support staff and teaching assistant numbers;
- a decreased number of course offerings;
- a decreased ability to launch new and innovative programs in response to changing social needs;
- faculty salaries that have been persistently eroded by inflation⁽¹⁾ and which compare unfavourably with those of any other comparable group;
- poor faculty morale which, especially when combined with the erosion of faculty salaries, is bound to drive more and more faculty to seek employment elsewhere.

Similarly, research, scholarship and service to the community, have also been adversely affected in these or analogous ways.

Further symptoms of underfunding are implicit in the Committee's report. For example, an inadequate recognition of the importance of traditional arts and science disciplines, the relegation of teaching to a level of secondary importance, and the assumption that it should be possible to increase significantly teaching "productivity" without debasing the "product".

None of the funding models discussed by the Committee is designed to reverse the government's current policy of beggaring the universities. Perhaps it is unrealistic even to consider such reversal as being possible, no matter how desirable it may be. Therefore, we shall confine ourselves to insisting that an end be put to this policy, and hence, to the processes it has set in motion. In operational terms, this can be easily and rationally effected by equating increases in operating funds to the corresponding increases in the gross provincial product (GPP) over the preceding twelve-month periods. This has the obvious merit of preventing a further decrease in the fraction of the GPP that is invested in universities and hence, of course, in scholarship, research and development. Surely, if the people of Ontario must live by their wits, then the return from their enterprise should be reinvested in their most critical of natural resources.

The intent of the \$25 million annually for equipment and furniture replacement in the Committee's Model 1A is laudable. Unfortunately, equipment and furniture are not the only university resources in need of periodic renewal or renovation. University library holdings not only require repair and replacement, they must be constantly added to. Again, it is perhaps unrealistic to hope that the effect of both inflation and a devalued currency can be made up for. However, there is a clear need for supplementary library acquisition grants, tied either to enrolment or to current holdings.

The aging state and deterioration of the capital assets of the system, as well as their very considerable value to the Province, provides as persuasive an argument for capital funding as should be necessary. We endorse the suggestion made by the administration of Carleton University that this funding should be set at an annual rate for each university of 1% of the value of the university's space inventory.

Surely, the Committee must urge the government to adopt a policy of making the supplementary and capital grants indicated above quite independent of global operating funds whose rate of growth, as we have suggested, should be that of the GPP. This leaves open how the global funds should be distributed. It is our view that the current enrolment-based formula should be modified to take account of the indirect costs of research (which currently account for 35% of university resources), and to encourage individual universities to make more efficient use of their resources. The latter could be accomplished by means of special grants taken from the global operating funds allocation. These could be awarded to fund approved projects in such diverse areas as university energy consumption, waste recycling, cooperative use of university resources and facilities by local industry or government agencies, and personnel policies designed to modify the age profiles of university employees (see below).

ACCESSIBILITY

We were disappointed at the lack of importance that the Committee apparently attaches to the issue of accessibility. It is becoming increasingly clear that this government, like many others in North America, is succumbing to the temptation posed by the "user-pay" system of funding universities. Well before this process is complete there should be a full study of all the factors that affect accessibility, with particular emphasis on tuition fees. Current evidence ⁽²⁾ indicates that we already teach a socio-economic elite. It is not in the interest of our society to perpetuate this situation; it is even less so to worsen it. In this regard, we endorse the position of H. Ian Macdonald, President of York University, who recently stated: ⁽³⁾

"In my opinion, we should be having more, not fewer, students in universities, and we should be enlarging opportunities in every possible way. This is not only important for the universities, but indeed it is a prerequisite for the future of the Ontario economy and society which will depend so much more on human resources and technological improvement than on material resources. My objectives would be to see some agreement on:

- (a) the widest degree of accessibility with such student financial assistance as is necessary to make that objective a reality;*
- (b) an increasing proportion of the population attending university."*

THE FACULTY AGE-PROFILE

If accessibility is increased, then so will student enrolment. Indeed, the most recent, (4) and most sophisticated, demographic projection of student enrolment indicates that, barring a significant decrease in accessibility, university students will be as numerous in the 1990's as they are today. It appears, therefore, that we need no longer be obsessed with the spectre of decreasing student demand. What should preoccupy us instead is the age profile of Ontario's professoriate.

We are aging almost as rapidly as a group as we are individually. This has serious implications for the intellectual vitality and balance of the university system during the remainder of the century. It also means that the system will face a staffing crisis (5) (a shortage of qualified academics) that will coincide with a rapid increase in student demand at the turn of the century. Maintaining even current levels of activity in research and graduate studies will become increasingly difficult. The capacity to respond to new needs in research or new needs for specialists and researchers will become increasingly restricted.

This problem requires the implementation, and funding, of innovative personnel policies of the type that have been recently introduced (6) at Carleton. (For example, retraining to facilitate the internal transfer of faculty, and schemes providing for early retirement, involve significant front-end costs.) It also entails very considerable, provincially funded, improvements to existing pension plans. Over the short term, this represents an expensive solution. However, over the long term, it will render a return which should attract even the most conservative of investors.

SUPPORT FOR RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

This discussion of the age-profile problem leads rather naturally to the problem of unravelling the contradictory aspirations of both levels of government with respect to research and development. The federal government recently reiterated its intention of increasing expenditure on research and development from 0.9% to 1.5% of GNP by the early 1980's. This has a two-fold implication for universities, since they are charged with the responsibility of supplying the highly qualified manpower that will be required, as well as of carrying out most of the fundamental research conducted in Canada.

This, in turn, translates into a two-fold obligation being placed on the provinces, since they alone have the privilege of funding universities. First, the provincial government must ensure that the universities can meet the indirect costs of this research and that they can offer salary levels sufficient to attract and retain academics of the highest research calibre. Secondly, the provincial government must recognize that there is a need for much more rapid growth of graduate schools, particularly in science and engineering, than has recently been the case. The demographic potential for such growth already exists. (7) A detailed analysis (8) carried out by NSERC showed that, if the target of 1.5% of GNP were realized over the five years from 1978 to 1983, the supply of Ph.D.'s in the physical and applied sciences and engineering would fall short of demand by 500 per year or 2500 over the whole five-year period. This prediction was made in 1979 and over the intervening period doctoral enrolment has, if anything, decreased. (9) A further growth of university graduate schools to meet the manpower demands of the universities themselves in the mid-1990's and beyond will need to be initiated in the mid-1980's. Significant growth implies increased expenditures for equipment, supplies, and adding to existing faculty complements. The Committee, in its preliminary report, seems to be largely unaware of these matters.

All this logically implies the assumption of a financial burden by the government of Ontario that even exceeds what would be required to keep pace with increases in the gross provincial product, as called for above. The government should be alerted to this in the strongest possible terms and asked to consider carefully the relative roles and responsibilities of the two levels of government in university policy and funding. This seems a particularly appropriate exercise at a time when the Established Programmes Financing legislation is under review.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE SYSTEM

As the Committee suggests, if the current level of underfunding (Model 3b) is maintained, the question of "structures" - of advisory and executive powers - will not matter. The university system of Ontario will simply stagnate and deteriorate to the point of no return. However, at levels rather more favourable than at present, a forceful, yet responsive and responsible body, broadly similar to the reorganized OCUA discussed by the Committee, will undoubtedly be required.

We endorse the Committee's assertion that the revamped OCUA should continue to have "... a strong minority of academic members". We request, however, that the selection process for the academic membership involve much fuller and more frequent consultation with the academic community than has occurred in the past. Moreover, the consultation should not be restricted to COU, which is by no means the sole representative of the university community and, in particular, does not represent the professoriate. Only OCUFA, or the individual faculty associations across the province, can speak for the system's academic staff.

We strongly endorse the Committee's suggestion of creating "strong academic committees" to provide OCUA with additional academic resources. Indeed, we consider the committees to be an indispensable adjunct to a strengthened OCUA. Once again, however, we insist that the membership of these committees should be determined only after the fullest consultation with OCUFA, as well as with COU.

Such support as we have provided here for a strengthened OCUA is due to our identification of the idea as being less unattractive than the status quo, and than any other proposals for structural change that have been put forward recently. The Committee has not been graphic in its identification of the powers, either specific or diffuse, that it would assign to OCUA. We shall require a detailed definition of the range of these powers, determined through consultation with the academic community, before we consider whether to add some enthusiasm to our support.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The most immediate challenge of the 1980's consists of convincing the government of Ontario that it cannot expect increased social and economic contributions from the university system if it persists in funding the system at levels that will inevitably result in a reduction of the services it provides to the people of Ontario. We have already discussed the unrealistic expectations implied by the federal government's plan to increase significantly research and development in Canada. Analogous expectations are also implicit in the plan to bring about a "massive economic expansion"⁽¹⁰⁾ in Ontario under the direction of the Board of Industrial Leadership and Development. There is no question of achieving the economic goals of either level of government unless the government of Ontario decides to expand rather than contract its university system. It seems likely as well that expansion rather than contraction will be a necessary precondition for preserving federal support for post-secondary education under the EPF legislation.

Finally, it has been frequently argued by the government that it is unable to provide the universities with increased resources. This "inability to pay" argument has been convincingly laid to rest recently by the COU Committee on Operating Grants.⁽¹¹⁾ By comparing Ontario's total fiscal capacity and current tax effort, this committee showed that the Province's tax revenue can be increased by about 15% without exceeding the average level of taxation in the rest of Canada. They further point out that this would generate an additional increase in 1980-81 operating grants of \$130 million. The government's current policy of revenue restraint must not be continued if it necessitates an inadequate level of funding for Ontario's universities.

In short, the real challenge of the 1980's is to transform a myopic government into one of vision.

FOOTNOTES

- (1) See for example, the evidence provided in the OCUFA response to the Preliminary Report.
- (2) Laura Selleck, "Equality of Access to Ontario Universities", COU Report, 1980 - and references contained therein.
- (3) Excerpted from a statement by H. Ian Macdonald to the York University Community, York Gazette, January 8, 1981.
- (4) David K. Foot, "A Troubled Future? University Enrolments in Canada and the Provinces", presented at the Conference on Financing Canadian Universities, Toronto, March 3, 1981.
- (5) See Peter Leslie, "Canadian Universities: 1980 and Beyond", AUCC (1980), for a quantitative assessment.
- (6) L. Copley, "Mid-Career Options at Carleton University", CAUT Bulletin, October, 1980.
- (7) David K. Foot, *ibid.*
- (8) Quoted in Lynn A.K. Watt, "Canadian Universities - Their Role in Research in Science and Engineering", Conference on University Financing, Toronto, March 3, 1981.
- (9) Background Data, Preliminary Report of the Committee on the Future Role of Universities in Ontario.
- (10) The Honourable William G. Davis, "Building Ontario in the 1980's", Toronto, 1981.
- (11) COU Committee on Operating Grants, "A Future of Lost Opportunities?", Brief to the Ontario Council on University Affairs, Toronto, 1981.

AMENDMENT FORMULA PASSES

J. George Neuspiel, the Electoral Officer, wishes to announce the results of the vote on the proposed amendment formula of the CUASA Constitution. There was a total of 218 votes cast as follows: 186 in favour, 23 against, and 9 spoiled ballots.

Thus, the proposed amendment was carried, but once again the large number of apathetic members who failed to exercise their democratic right came within a hair's breadth of vetoing the will of an overwhelming majority. As a result of the amendment which was adopted, it will now be possible to update the CUASA Constitution in a more democratic fashion.

TEACHING EVALUATIONS AND CAREER DECISIONS: A PROGRESS REPORT

David Bennett, President-Elect

One of the tasks of the Academic Career Planning Committee in the past eight months has been to review the whole issue of teaching evaluation and the role it plays in academic career decisions. We have examined expert opinion on the rationale for teaching evaluation, on the administration of the process, and on the design and limitations of the specific instrument used. These are general issues, not unique to Carleton; but we have gone beyond these global considerations to look at the way in which teaching evaluations fit within the specific environment created by the Collective Agreement at Carleton.

The topic is, of course, sprawling, complex, and untidy. Teaching evaluations are pervasively influential; indeed, they constitute one of the handful of topics guaranteed to stir many of our members out of their torpidity towards their Association.

The stage we have reached is that Management's and the Association's representatives agree on the following broad policies or principles.

First, if teaching evaluation is to play a useful, meaningful part in the rational taking of career decisions, then the process must produce a consistent, ubiquitous, and disinterestedly defined data base, permitting both time-series and cross-sectional comparisons.

Second, there must be a procedure which uses the data responsibly. By this we mean that the summaries and analyses based on the data must do no great violence to the limitations and assumptions on which the data stand.

Somehow, teaching evaluations must be processed in such a way that they guide but do not determine career decisions. Spurious precision and certainty should be guarded against; that means that the data must steer a middle course between hard and soft indicators, between anecdotal anarchy and positivist rigidity.

Third, the data must be generated by a carefully designed instrument which enjoys the broad confidence of all parties to the evaluation process. The instrument should evaluate the effectiveness of the instruction, eliminating all other concerns such as behavioural traits, or the popularity of the instructor. It must also distinguish quite clearly between the nature of what is taught - course content - and the effectiveness with which it is taught.

That is all very easy to think through, and easier still to write; but to turn these informal accords into a usable and useful process is a lot harder. The committee will be reporting to the principals with suggestions on where to go from here. In the meantime, any comments - pro or con - which you think we need to consider before we write our report should be directed to me, c/o the CUASA office.

* * * * *

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