

SPECIAL BULLETIN FROM THE PRESIDENT

UNIVERSITIES' PROBLEMS -- TWO VIEWS

PROFESSORS AND SENIOR ADMINISTRATORS UNDERPAID

by Don Westwood

In February 1988, Hay Management Consultants were commissioned by the Council of Ontario Universities to prepare a report based on:

"...a study to compare the compensation of faculty and senior administrative personnel in Ontario universities with that of professionals in the private and public sectors."

A precis of the major findings for faculty are set out in the Executive Summary of the report:

1. There is essentially one academic job: the tripartite task of scholarship/research, teaching and service.
2. There are no appropriate analogues for the academic position in either the public or private sectors. There are, however, positions of equivalent job size.
3. The role of the professor can only be defined within the context of the University. In this sense, it is an organizational position. Faculty compensation is compared, therefore, with that of professionals employed by private and public sector organizations but not with the compensation of self-employed professionals.
4. On the basis of measured job content, compensation for academics at the midpoint of their career falls below that of the selected comparator groups.
5. Starting salaries for academics are considerably lower than those paid for jobs of equivalent size in either the public or private sectors and are a function of the extended probation and maturation process governing movement through the various academic ranks.
6. The high age threshold, low starting salaries and extended probation and maturation period combine to impact negatively on the career earnings of faculty.
7. Faculty salary administration practice ("pay-for-maturity") results in a high correlation between age and compensation."

These unexpected conclusions are the result of a fundamental observation stated in the opening paragraph of the foreword to the report:

"When we compare how jobs are paid and we come to form some opinion about equity in compensation, we are really making judgements about the relative worth of jobs. And our opinions about relative worth are ultimately judgements based on perceptions of and beliefs about the relative contributions such jobs make. Therefore, disagreements among stakeholders about how certain jobs should be compensated are, in the final analysis, disagreements about the nature of the contribution these jobs are perceived to make."

During the course of this study, the investigators found that the prevalent perception amongst university-educated and non-university-educated persons alike was that:

"...academic activity was primarily about teaching."

This was very significant to several issues within the scope of the study, and to the interpretation of the report's findings. As the foreword goes on to observe:

"When the academic enterprise is seen to be primarily about teaching, then:

- * It is reasonable to conclude that the job can be performed in approximately 20 hours per week over an academic year of eight to nine months. Preparation time for teaching is considered to be negligible, as academics are perceived to deliver standardized lectures year in and year out.
- * Sabbaticals are perceived to be holidays, and for compensation purposes ought to be considered a perquisite.
- * Tenure looks like job security.

However, the moment one puts scholarship and research at the centre of the academic enterprise, then the issues of workload, sabbaticals and tenure become transformed and are seen in a very different way. We conclude that:

- * Academics devote at least as much, if not more, time to their jobs as anybody else in the workforce.
- * Sabbaticals are essential to the task of research and scholarship.
- * Tenure is an essential element of the safeguards needed to ensure the integrity of scholarship and teaching.

We draw attention to this problem of perception as we believe it has implications for the way in which the universities present the findings of this study to stakeholders outside the university community."

These revelations take on an added significance in light of Research Report #5, compiled in June 1991 by the Public Affairs Management Incorporated for the Commission of Inquiry on Canadian University Education (see the following article). Research Report #5 takes no cognisance of the Hay report whatsoever!

A DIM VIEW OF OUR PERFORMANCE

by Don Westwood and Georgina Hancock

This Fall, the Commission of Inquiry on Canadian University Education (Smith Commission) published, as Research Study #5, the opinions and attitudes towards universities of provincial government officials responsible for the funding of post-secondary education. The timing is remarkably co-incidental!

Interviews were apparently conducted on a confidential, not-for-attribution basis, but representatives of only 5 provinces are included in the sample (even though only Quebec officially declined to participate).

Taken together, the following quotations suggest the pretty poor regard in which we are held by provincial bureaucrats holding the purse strings. You may well wonder if our selection isn't just a little biased, to make a point. Could we not have quoted some of the more positive, appreciative comments included in the Research Report #5? We'd have liked to, but we could find NONE!! Drop by the CUASA office if you'd like to read the whole report: in the meantime, here are some direct quotations to provide the flavour of it.

FROM THE EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

"The consensus was that universities have not kept up with changing social demands, have not remained relevant and are either unwilling or unable to change. The words most frequently used to describe them were "remote", "isolated", "elitist", "arrogant", and "naive"."

ON WHETHER UNIVERSITIES ARE UNDERFUNDED:

"...one minister asserted that there is enough money in the system and that the issue is definitely one of allocation of resources: "Universities are not doing enough themselves; administrations are not controlling spending and are allowing a 'grande luxe' style to prevail." Another minister stated bluntly that university administrations were "simply appalling."

"...one finance official remarked that in his jurisdiction: "Universities have done pretty well relative to other sectors", including social services and health. An education official reiterated this view, saying: "Debt and health care costs have gone up, but universities have held their share while almost everybody else has been cut back."

ON WHETHER GOVERNMENTS ARE SUFFICIENTLY INFORMED ABOUT UNIVERSITY SPENDING:

"The reasons give for this deficiency in information were also uniformly negative: "Universities think they are quite sacred; they simply say how much they need and expect to be given it to spend autonomously."

"A number of university presidents ... ideas to resolve the financing issue... contained no analysis, no details or background and were clearly not well thought out... the presidents were both "unrealistic and useless."

"Finance officials and ministers felt no better informed. One said they only get "a moral, rhetorical pitch, devoid of facts."

"The strong consensus on this issue is that, while universities have been very vocal about maintaining their independence and have been very good at rallying students to their cause, "they can no longer have their cake

and eat it too." Governments believe that they must have more information about universities' spending habits and intentions and that universities must be more professional in providing it."

ON WHY UNIVERSITIES DON'T RECEIVE A GREATER SHARE OF PUBLIC FUNDING:

"...a few respondents believe that universities are "already getting the funding they need."

"...a number of ministers and officials referred to universities' predisposition for "whining and snivelling".

"One theme that recurred throughout the interviews was the feeling that additional funds would be "sucked up" by salary increases to tenured professors. One minister said that: "It's almost impossible to keep increases from falling into the hands of faculty." It is clear that these respondents believe this is an inappropriate allocation of new funds. Indeed, it was pointed out that professors "operate under the assumption that they are overworked and underpaid. But it's not true any longer, if ever it was. One official referred to faculty jobs as "too cushy".

"...the most often repeated indicator of quality is the ability of graduates to get good jobs - employability - and to contribute to economic competitiveness."

"Several officials felt that universities did not promote this aspect of their work sufficiently. They don't deliver a message about the importance of economic competitiveness and "don't use information about the degree to which they contribute to an industrially trained, literate population. They don't say how they contribute to a productive economy." One person noted that the quality of graduate students is an issue for the business community which has complained that "grad schools are turning out students who are not highly regarded by their peer group."

ON WHETHER UNIVERSITIES MEET COMMUNITY NEEDS:

"Several officials described universities' priorities, in order, as being: administration; graduate programs; and, undergraduate teaching, with teaching budgets getting what is left over. One deputy minister commented: "This ranking is wrong-headed because if undergraduates are not well taught the quality of graduate programs will ultimately be affected."

"Much of the criticism for this neglect of teaching is aimed at professors directly, who were variously described as "moonlighters who would rather be consulting than teaching", "technical experts who happen to teach, but don't see themselves fundamentally as educators", "having no sense that working with students is a priority", "relying on teaching assistants not only to save money, but by choice, so that they can spend more time on their real priority, research", "isolated from broader community". and "more interested in their own remuneration than in teaching."

"Many of those interviewed felt that universities were "isolated", "remote from their communities", "seen as elite institutions", and "operating like big private corporations that are closed to communities". One deputy minister said universities are "not seen as responsive either to local issues or to government economic initiatives"."

"There was a broad consensus that universities should develop "vibrant connections to their communities, particularly since they constitute huge infrastructures with large staffs "in certain communities. Not only should they do it, but "they have to be seen to be more responsive to the communities of which they are a part."

"...universities have not kept up with the world around them, a world in which "taxpayers are increasingly asking the question: 'What are we getting for our money'".

ON WHETHER UNIVERSITIES HAVE TRIMMED ALL THE FAT FROM THEIR BUDGETS:

"Universities are not wasting money or being profligate with their resources, but there is a definite dysfunction between revenues spent and the product (undergrads, research, graduates). This has to change."

"One minister, who felt that universities have cut their budgets to the bone, commented that: "Their priorities may not be appropriate; teaching and service to students always seems to be hardest hit, while administrative costs and the maintenance of capital infrastructure don't seem to be reduced at all. These priorities need to be rethought."

"The productivity of professors was raised as were the related issues of salaries, sabbaticals, and numbers of hours spent teaching. Given these perceived inefficiencies, several officials felt that there was, indeed, still some fat in the system."

ON WHAT PERFORMANCE INDICATORS GOVERNMENTS NEED:

"While there was a consensus that performance indicators are necessary, it was generally acknowledged that none exist and that little consideration has been given to what measures would be most appropriate. In broad terms, anything that would provide governments with increased university accountability and allow them to assess improvements in efficiency was considered desirable. The definition of efficiency was further acknowledged to be uncertain, or as one minister said: "Its like shovelling fog".

"As one minister noted: "We have to have benchmarks against which to judge the system; we need quality to be competitive in a global marketplace. I believe people might be willing to fund universities more if they felt that the quality of the system were better, if they were getting a better return on investment"."

ON WHETHER PUBLIC POLICY SHOULD ENCOURAGE DIVERSITY AND RATIONALIZATION:

"...as one finance deputy minister commented: "Universities do not operate in the real world. They do not understand that future funding is dependent on rationalization. I am not optimistic that they will do it on their own."

"Most also saw a clear role for governments in encouraging, if not forcing, the streamlining process through the power of the public purse. The lengths to which some officials seem prepared to go varied. Two senior officials in one province put the case most strongly. According to one: "Our approach is just starve the buggers to death and hope they'll react as we'd like. Of course, the patient might die before he gets the message." The other official said: "Our unstated strategy is to squeeze (university budgets) and to let them know that their destiny is in their own hands"."

ON WHETHER TUITION FEE LEVELS ARE APPROPRIATE:

"The view was virtually unanimous that tuition fees must go up."

"The consensus view was that tuition fees had been kept at an artificially low level - frozen in Québec and steadily declining as a proportion of revenues in other provinces - for political reasons. It was also acknowledged that governments are now prepared to accept the reality that "the burden of paying for university education has to be shared." As one official commented: "It is now assumed that any funding increases would be accompanied by tuition fee increases"."

"One reason for this change of heart is the recognition that, in the words of one finance minister: "We have come close to the ability of taxpayers to pay more. A fee increase will force universities to show students that it is not a free ride"."

"While there was little discussion about the appropriate tuition fee level, many thought that 25 % was about right."

FROM THE CONCLUSION:

"If there is an optimistic note to the findings of this report, it is that those interviewed expressed little real anger or hostility with universities and their administrations - although there was some antagonism directed toward tenured professors, the most visible representatives of the institutions. The sentiment most often expressed was one of resignation and regret that universities are not doing a better job."

"Expectations are not high. However, the clear message to universities is that they must take the initiative and get on with doing a better job. Their future prospects depend on it."

Please note that, as it is clearly stated in the Executive Summary of the report, the above quotations were "the attitudes and opinions of senior government ministers or officials who are responsible for universities and their funding in five provinces."

In the light of recent events, this makes interesting background reading, does it not?

CUASA has been asked by CUSA to provide you with the following information. The Canadian Federation of Students (CFS) and Ontario Federation of Students (OFS) have declared **Thursday, October 17, 1991** as **NATIONAL STUDENT DAY**. On this day, across the country, students, staff, and administrators will be fighting the Tory cutbacks to education.

RALLY * PARLIAMENT HILL
1:00 P.M. THURSDAY, OCTOBER 17, 1991
BUSSES LEAVE UNI-CENTRE
AT 12:30 P.M.

For more information, contact Marcella Munro (CUSA) at 788-6688.