



Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations  
Union des Associations des Professeurs des Universités de l'Ontario

**Opportunity for Ontario  
Through Quality Post-Secondary Education**

**Brief to the Standing Committee  
on Finance and Economic Affairs**

Pre-Budget Consultations

Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations (OCUFA)

January 28, 2008

## **Introduction**

The Ontario Confederation of University Faculty [OCUFA] commends the government's investment in post-secondary education contained in its 2005 Budget. Reaching Higher was a robust first step to improving the declining quality in Ontario's post-secondary education system. However, the government's initiative in realizing its own vision of Ontario being a leader in the quality of its higher education seems, regrettably, to have stalled. Threats to the quality of higher education in Ontario continue. Therefore, OCUFA is calling on the government to make the necessary investments that will see its vision for post-secondary education become reality.

OCUFA supports the government's most recent initiatives as stated in the Throne Speech of building a strong economy, eliminating poverty, protecting the environment and improving our health care system. OCUFA believes an effective way the government can realize these goals is by investing in higher education. The 2008 budget provides the government with an opportunity to achieve real results and long term solutions by improving the quality of higher education.

This opportunity is more possible today because of the federal government's commitment to provide additional funding for post-secondary education. The Ontario government must direct the more than \$400 million in federal transfer payments that are a part of the new Canadian Social Transfer arrangement towards augmenting its support for higher education, instead of simply using this increase to replace previously-committed provincial funding for post-secondary education.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The government must act now and make the necessary investments in higher education.

<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Cost</b>
• Ontario must hire 5,500 new faculty to bring class sizes and student faculty ratios to at least the national average.	• \$440 million <sup>1</sup>
• Ontario universities need to be able to fix decaying infrastructure.	• \$260 million per year (minimum) <sup>2</sup>
• Support all research equally.	• Simply take a more balanced approach to research funding

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<sup>1</sup> This figure represents salaries, but not benefits or support staff.

<sup>2</sup> This number is also supported by both the Council of Ontario Universities and the Auditor General of Ontario.

## **Threats to Ontario universities**

The Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations represents more than 15,000 professors and academic librarians in Ontario universities. We have advocated since our inception for a post-secondary education system in Ontario that will advance not just the life prospects of individual Ontario students, but also the social health and economic prosperity of the province as a whole.

Ontario's academic community has applauded and supported this government's commitment to higher learning. We recognize that the current government values higher education and has accordingly increased funding to post-secondary education substantially. The government's \$6.2-billion investment in 2005 was the largest made to the post-secondary sector since the system's expansion in the 1960s, and we congratulate the government for its vision.

To a large extent, the government and the universities are victims of the success of these initiatives. More students are seeking access to university education. This growth has only increased the need for more full time faculty and space to ensure that these students obtain a quality education.

Ontario continues to hover near the bottom in many core comparisons with other Canadian and American peer jurisdictions. Increasing enrolments currently exceed the capacity of Ontario's university facilities, equipment and faculty. Class sizes continue to grow. The most current statistics available show that students have twenty five percent less classroom and lab space than they need. The number of hours a graduate student has the undivided attention of a faculty member is 20% less than ten years ago.

Students in Ontario must compete much harder than students in the rest of Canada and in the United States just for time with their professors. Faculty in Ontario teach four more students on average than faculty in the rest of Canada. Ontario faculty members each have ten more students to teach than professors in American peer institutions.

Ontario still scores tenth and dead last in the country in terms of per capita funding to its universities; it is ninth in terms of per student funding.<sup>3</sup>

Much needed maintenance has been deferred for so long that real problems are occurring with university infrastructure. Simply to maintain buildings in their current state requires \$260 million per year. To upgrade them to a standard of excellence comparable to the goals of Reaching Higher would be more than \$450 million per year. Most university buildings require significant upgrades.

Research and development is critical to the economy, but Ontario's R&D is not competitive globally. Our investment in research and development, as a proportion of GDP, is 14 per cent below the G7 average. The problem is that business is chronically underfunding R&D while the universities are investing much more than their fair share. The government is trying to solve this problem with funding and research policies that emphasize the commercialization of university research and applied university research tied to private sector participation. This approach distorts university research and ignores that investments in basic research have economic benefits. It also has limited utility in leveraging greater business investment in R&D. Government priorities have to move away from an emphasis on the commercialization of applied research to a balanced approach toward research.

### **The opportunities of enhanced investment**

Ontario's growing class sizes, poor student faculty ratios, inadequate per student funding, crumbling infrastructure and inequitable research funding show that Ontario has reason for concern. However, it is a mistake to assume these problems are irreversible. Greater investment in post-secondary education will give students the quality education they deserve.

The government has a long, honourable and intelligent history of investing in public education. To realize the current government's vision of higher education as a system equal to any in the

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<sup>3</sup> (COU, *Resource Document*, 2007).

world, as well as to promote a strong economy, a better protected environment, a decreased poverty rate and a better health care system, the government will have to enhance its investment in post secondary education substantially.

The recent federal funding makes “reaching higher” in post-secondary education even more attainable and lessens the need for the province to shoulder the burden alone. The increase in the Canada Social Transfer to Ontario for post secondary education will be over \$400 million this budget year. OCUFA is concerned that the funds promised for post-secondary education under the Canada-Ontario Agreement were never actually given to the higher education sector because of uncertainty about federal commitments. The new CST arrangements should eliminate this uncertainty. Therefore, the Ontario government has a responsibility to use this funding to augment rather than replace previously-committed provincial funding for post-secondary education.

OCUFA is calling on the government to make capital and operating investments in the 2008 budget that would help to protect and improve the quality of post secondary education in Ontario. Hiring 5,500 new faculty at a cost of \$440 million would bring Ontario’s student faculty ratios in line with the national average and help to reduce class sizes.<sup>4</sup> Improving infrastructure with \$260 million would provide the needed classroom and lab space on university campuses and fix the facilities at Ontario universities that are in a state of poor repair. Supporting vital basic research would ensure Ontario remains innovative and forward thinking.

### **1. To ensure quality, Ontario needs to invest more in faculty hiring**

Most pressing is the need to address Ontario’s faculty shortage stemming from the pressures of growing enrolment and a wave of pending faculty retirements. Ignoring this issue could compromise quality in the classroom. The situation is already critical. Lecture halls crammed with students are becoming an increasingly common sight. OCUFA’s analysis shows that over

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<sup>4</sup> This number does not include the faculty that are required to replace faculty that are retiring.

the past three years faculty hiring continues to lag the number of students applying to university. Not only are universities not promising to hire enough faculty to keep up with applicants, but they are not even hiring the faculty they have promised.

Many studies, including the Rae Review, agree that new professors need to be hired by the end of this decade, to deal with faculty retirements and increases in the number of students -- and to bring our student-faculty ratio up to the national standard. Today, despite increases in the total number of faculty, there is still a gap of 5,500 if Ontario wanted to reach the national average of a student –faculty ratio of 22 to 1.<sup>5</sup> This goal cannot be achieved overnight. University hiring processes are complex and time-consuming and the longer we wait the worse the situation will get.

Enrolment pressures are expected to continue. Coupled with the advancement of the knowledge-based economy, demand for a university education is not expected to wane. In Ontario, full-time university enrolment climbed by more than 100,000 from 1996 to 2006. Participation rates have continued to rise from 21.9 to 28 per cent, even after the effects of the “double cohort” have worn off. The Council of Ontario Universities expects the 2008-09 enrolment level for funded students will be 37,000 higher than the Reaching Higher forecast. In addition, it appears that the number of applicants is 5% higher than last year.<sup>6</sup> Graduate enrolment is projected to double by 2013.<sup>7</sup>

To add to an already complex situation, the government committed to expand the number of graduate students to 14,000 by 2009-10. This expansion is needed and in keeping with developing the talent necessary to ensure an innovative and competitive economy. However, there is no plan in place to ensure the increase in students is matched with a proportionate increase in senior faculty appointments. This is a worrisome situation, given the requirements involved in appointing enough senior faculty (tenured, full-time) who are qualified to teach at the graduate level. Faculty requirements at the graduate level must remain far more stringent and class sizes much smaller than in undergraduate programs.

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<sup>5</sup> This number refers to net new hires and does not include the faculty required to replace those who are retiring.

<sup>6</sup> (COU, *University Access, Accountability, and Quality in Reaching Higher Plan*, 2006).

<sup>7</sup> (COU 2006).

There is no quick fix to a shortage of faculty at the graduate level. OCUFA is concerned that too many of the faculty hiring commitments under the Multi-Year Agreements are for limited term and part-time appointments, which does not facilitate quality graduate education. Such stop-gap solutions at the graduate level are already seriously undermining efforts to improve quality in teaching and research.

The government has been joining with the universities to publicize seemingly large numbers of faculty hires. But unfortunately the interim accountability agreements between the universities and the government showed only a two per cent increase in hiring in 2005-06 – while student enrolment has increased four per cent. This pattern appears to have been repeated for 2007, with an applicant increase of 5.2% and an actual hiring increase of only 2.7%. In 2008 applicants increased by 4.8% while hiring is only projected to increase by 3.8% at the most.

## **2. To ensure quality, Ontario needs to invest more to reduce class sizes**

Ontario's university classrooms are already bursting at the seams. Some class sizes are 500+ and growing – which is evidence of difficult decisions administrators made following years of provincial government underfunding.<sup>8</sup>

Large class sizes at the undergraduate level, and certainly at the senior and graduate levels, affect quality in the classroom and diminish Ontario's ability to compete with universities in other jurisdictions. When elementary and secondary classrooms in Ontario were overflowing, the current provincial government moved swiftly to fund smaller class sizes. University students deserve the same decisive action.

We at OCUFA are not the only ones to notice the challenges faced by the province's post-secondary system. A poll OCUFA commissioned last year revealed that nine in 10 people

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<sup>8</sup> (OCUFA 2006).



surveyed told us that while the quality of higher education in Ontario matters to them, only one in 10 had seen any improvement in quality.

The poll found Ontarians measure the deterioration in quality in our universities by the increase in class sizes. They told our pollster that smaller classes coupled with a low student-faculty ratio are what make for quality. We raise this not to impugn either the government's record or its intentions but to emphasize that current levels of funding have not been adequate to make up for the drastic cuts of the last decade, and the public is noticing.

### **3. To ensure quality, Ontario needs to invest more in university facilities**

Another critically needed investment is in the capital area. Ontario's universities are experiencing a space shortage of 1,080,000 net assignable square metres,<sup>9</sup> up from 727,000 the previous year.<sup>10</sup> Coupled with the deteriorating physical conditions of many aging university buildings owing to deferred maintenance, the province's campuses are in desperate need of repair to ensure they are safe for students, faculty, and staff. The previous government's SuperBuild program led to new buildings on campus, but it was problematic on two fronts: it failed to address all the capital needs for Ontario campuses (especially the need to repair aging buildings) and its private matching funds requirement privileged some campuses over others, and some capital projects over others.

In September 2005, the Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Universities announced "special one-time funding" of \$250 million to repair and modernize buildings on Ontario campuses.<sup>11</sup> The government has also announced \$550 million in funding over four years for capital expenditures related to the expanding the population of graduate students by 14,000 by 2009. This is a start, but only the beginning. The COU has estimated that the capital costs of doubling

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<sup>9</sup> (COU 2006)

<sup>10</sup> (COU 2005)

<sup>11</sup> (MTCU 2005)

graduate enrolment alone would be \$2 billion.<sup>12</sup> What's needed is a longer term capital plan without strings attached such as the matching funding requirements that weakened SuperBuild.

The Auditor General recognized the severity of the problem of deferred maintenance when he said that there has been a "significant backlog of necessary renewal projects that have been deferred for lack of funding." OCUFA strongly supports the Auditor General's call for an immediate investment to repair the crumbling infrastructure in Ontario.<sup>13</sup>

#### **4. To ensure quality, Ontario must invest in non-commercial research**

Ontario's total investment in R&D compares poorly to other industrialized nations. Our investment in research and development, as a proportion of GDP, is 14 per cent below the G7 average.

Notably, it is our business sector that is underperforming. In Ontario, business R&D spending as a proportion of GDP lags its G7 counterparts by 16 per cent. Ontario governments have been trying to encourage business to invest more in R&D by channeling public money into "commercially viable" R&D projects. The Ontario Ministry of Research and Innovation's strategic plan, for example, is geared almost exclusively to aligning "investments in research with industrial needs and opportunities..." Many of these R&D projects are conducted by universities.

One problem with the Ontario government's approach is that universities are required to support these commercial projects, meaning they have to divert faculty, graduate students, facilities, equipment and money away from basic research. Government policy, therefore, seems designed to encourage business R&D activity and funding on the cheap – and on the backs of universities.

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<sup>12</sup> (COU, *Advancing Ontario's Future Through Advanced Degrees*, 2003).

<sup>13</sup> (Auditor General, *2007 Annual General Report*, 2007).

As a result, our greatest R&D strength – Canada’s high level of university R&D spending – is being threatened by government policy initiatives that would require universities to redirect scarce resources from basic research to commercial research. Ontario universities, lead the G7 nations in research expenditures by universities – by 36 per cent.

There is also the even greater danger that commercial criteria will actually hurt our overall R&D results by skewing our research program increasingly away from basic research – the very research that has led to the greatest commercial innovations.

Strength in basic research is a feature of all strong economies. Basic research, including in the social sciences and humanities, is crucial to reaching those very laudable goals the government has set for poverty, environment and health care.

## **Conclusion**

Increasingly, the labour market requires a university education. University graduates held 29.4% of jobs in 2007, compared to 18.7% in 1990. University graduates tend to earn higher incomes and so contribute to the health of Ontario’s economy by paying taxes, consuming goods, and engaging in the knowledge-based job market. Furthermore, a number of studies examining Ontario’s economic future confirm the essential role of a healthy university system. The Panel on the Role of Government in Ontario and the Task Force on Competitiveness, Productivity, and Economic Progress are examples of government-appointed bodies that recommend greater investment in post-secondary education to remain competitive in the economy and to ensure our universities are competitive with those in Canadian and U.S. jurisdictions. In short, what is good for Ontario’s universities is also good for Ontario’s economy, environment and health care system.

OCUFA shares with the government the objective of promoting excellence and quality in Ontario’s universities. To achieve that goal, it is now critical that the government invest in our universities the resources that are required.

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