

OCUFA Briefing Note

Issue: Enrolment Increases

Date: July 2011

During the course of the provincial Liberal government's *Reaching Higher* plan for postsecondary education, university enrolment increased by 14 per cent from 2005 to 2010. The smallest increase occurred in fall 2007 as undergraduates in the "double cohort" completed their programs. Most recently, undergraduate enrolment in fall 2010 was 3.5 per cent higher than the previous year; graduate enrolment increased by 3.8 per cent. Currently, the number of secondary school students applying for fall 2011 rose by two per cent from the previous year. (see resources section)

In June this year, the provincial Liberal government announced its new plan – *Putting Students First*. The plan includes increasing the number of spaces at Ontario colleges and universities by 60,000, including 6,000 graduate students, by fall 2015. This follows an announcement in Budget 2010 that the government intends to increase the enrolment of international students by 50 per cent at the same time. If successful, enrolment at Ontario universities will increase between 9 and 12 per cent. Graduate enrolment will increase by 11 to 17 per cent in the next five years.

Reaching Higher provided for a welcome increase in funding, but unexpected increases in undergraduate enrolments meant that the added funding was not enough to improve per student funding. As a result, hiring of full-time faculty was insufficient to reverse worsening student-faculty ratios: at best the deterioration was temporarily halted. Because it appears that per student funding will remain approximately the same, before adjusting for inflation, *Putting Students First* is unlikely to change that situation.

OCUFA's Position

- Improving quality and student-faculty ratios must be a priority if Ontario is truly to put students first.
- Funding levels and faculty hiring above current trends are necessary to meet the quality goals of *Putting Students First*, requiring more than \$1 billion in additional annual operating funding to meet the standards set by other jurisdictions in Canada and the US.
- Additional capital funding is also required to increase and improve the physical infrastructure to accommodate increased enrolments and ensure a quality educational experience for students.

Background

After a decline in enrolment during the early years of the Mike Harris Conservative government, the number of students at Ontario universities has grown steadily since 1997. There was a 13 per cent spike in 2003 as the “double cohort” of high school graduates entered undergraduate programs.

Due to inadequate government funding for Ontario universities, overcrowding in classrooms was inevitable in the double cohort years, with predictable negative results for the quality of the student educational experience. Not surprisingly, student-faculty ratios worsened, rising to 27-to-1. Even after the double cohort had graduated from their Bachelor’s programs, that ratio barely fell to 26-to-1 and preliminary data for 2010 indicates that the ratio is worsening again and well above the average of 19 students for each full-time faculty member in the rest of Canada and 18 students at US peer institutions.

Maclean’s university ranking data showed that, on average, in each year between 2003 and 2005 about half of the first- and second-year students at Ontario's Comprehensive and Medical/Doctoral universities were in classes of at least 100. The proportion in Ontario's primarily undergraduate universities rose from 28.6 per cent to 33.1 per cent between 2003 and 2005. These data are no longer collected, but other class size data show that the proportion of first year classes with more than 100 students has been increasing since 2005. Average class size data are not available, but our analysis indicates that average class size for first year students could easily have increased by 25 per cent over the past five years.

Enrolments are expected to continue increasing over the next five years as the Dalton McGuinty Liberal government seeks to ensure that 70 per cent of Ontarians have postsecondary credentials and to increase the number of international students by 50 per cent. Last year, Ontario Budget 2010 announced increased operating funding for colleges and universities to provide an additional 20,000 student places. And now the McGuinty government has announced *Putting Students First*, a plan to increase the number of college and university students by 60,000 by fall 2015. That includes 6,000 new graduate places. It includes a promise of \$309 million in additional funding by 2013-14.

If the enrolment targets are achieved, per student funding will remain virtually unchanged and will fall behind inflation. This does not bode well for reducing student-faculty ratios, especially as participation rates (the number of full-time students as a proportion of 18-24 year-old Ontario residents) increase. More people are expected to seek a university education and follow enrolment in graduate studies increases.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

OCUFA Research Papers

- *The Case of Elusive Class Size Numbers*, OCUFA Briefing Note, March 2011
- *A Failing Grade: Ontario's treatment of post secondary education is falling behind its global competitors*, November 2007
- *Leading Higher: Funding for Ontario Universities*, October 2007
- *A Tale of Two Expansions: Intergenerational Equity, Quality, and Funding Fairness for Today's University Students*, September 2007
- *Quality in the Balance: Undergraduate Education in Ontario at Risk*, May 2007
- *Quality at Risk: An Assessment of the Ontario Government's Plans for Graduate Education*, March, 2007
- Michael Doucet, *The Maclean's Rankings and Ontario's Universities: A Comparison of the 2003, 2004, and 2005 Results*, January 2006
- Hugh Mackenzie, for OCUFA and the Ontario Coalition for Postsecondary Education, *Funding Postsecondary Education in Ontario: Beyond the Path of Least Resistance*, December 2004
- *Reaching for the Top: What results could well-funded Ontario universities achieve?*, June 2004
- Michael Doucet, *Ontario Universities, the Double Cohort, and the Maclean's Rankings: The Legacy of the Harris/Eves Years, 1995-2003*, March 2004

Other Reports

- Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, *Accessibility in Ontario's Postsecondary Education System: An Interprovincial Comparative Analysis* (Dr. Torben Drewes, July 2008)
- Council of Ontario Universities, *Ontario Universities: Strategic Partners in Provincial Prosperity – Managing Growth in University Enrolment and Enhancing the Quality of the Student Learning Experience*, June 2008
- Council of Ontario Universities, *University Access, Accountability and Quality in the Reaching Higher Plan*, November 2006

Data – Enrolment, Participation Rates and Undergraduate Applicants (next page):

OUAC issues several releases on the number of undergraduate applicants and applications. OCUFA uses only applicant data. Each applicant may submit more than one application; the actual number of applications may be affected by the cost of additional choices (\$35 each in addition to a \$105 initial fee for three choices), or anticipated competition for spaces (e.g., double cohort). OCUFA uses February release data as a preliminary indicator, which follows the application deadline for high school students. Data in subsequent releases may vary and may include non-secondary applicants, who do not have an OUAC-set deadline. OCUFA does use September confirmation data, which include non-secondary applicants.

Full-time Equivalent (FTE) Student Enrolments & Participation Rates*

	Undergrad	Graduate	Total	% annual change	Participation rate
2000	234,717	29,199	263,916		22.6%
2001	245,228	31,024	276,252	4.7%	23.0%
2002	264,617	33,670	298,286	8.0%	24.3%
2003	299,914	35,756	335,670	12.5%	27.0%
2004	315,922	36,913	352,835	5.1%	28.0%
2005	331,611	37,755	369,366	4.7%	28.8%
2006	338,692	40,117	378,809	2.6%	29.2%
2007	337,407	45,508	382,915	1.1%	29.0%
2008	342,425	47,931	390,356	1.9%	29.1%
2009	356,740	50,508	407,247	4.3%	30.0%
2010	369,064	52,419	421,482	3.5%	30.7%

* FTE is calculated using Statistics Canada methodology: number of full-time students, plus number of part-time students divided by 3.5. The participation rate is calculated as the number of full-time students as a percentage of the 18-24 year-old population.

Source: Annual fall enrolment data from Council of Ontario Universities (to 2004) and Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities; population data from Statistics Canada.

Secondary School Applicants for Full-time First Year Undergraduate Enrolment

	Secondary School Applicants	% annual change
2000	58,624	
2001	59,844	2.1%
2002	69,305	15.8%
2003	101,949	47.1%
2004	71,771	-29.6%
2005	73,956	3.0%
2006	76,300	3.2%
2007	80,362	5.3%
2008	83,813	4.3%
2009	84,691	1.0%
2010	87,407	3.2%
2011	89,181	2.0%

Source: Ontario Universities' Application Centre