

OCUFA Briefing Note

Issue: Faculty Shortages

Date: October 2008

With 27 students for every full-time faculty member in 2005-06, Ontario universities have the worst student-faculty ratio in Canada. The average across the rest of the country the same year was 21 students per faculty member. And in the US, there were 16 students per full-time professor at the universities designated by the Council of Ontario Universities (COU) as peer institutions. Not surprisingly, Ontario universities scored significantly lower on student-faculty interaction than US counterparts in the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) – 40 per cent lower for first year students, 25 per cent lower for fourth year.

Ontario's current student-faculty ratio remains a far cry from the 18 students for each professor in 1990-91 when Ontario's ratio was within 10 per cent of the average in the rest of Canada. Latest estimates for Ontario student-faculty ratios indicate that the student-faculty ratio may have improved to 26 in 2007-08, barely returning it to the level it was in the first year of the "double cohort." To bring Ontario universities simply to the average in the rest of Canada by 2009-10 would require Ontario universities to recruit and retain 5,500 additional faculty members.

Current hiring trends show little promise of further improvements in the student-faculty ratio. In the Multi-Year Accountability Agreements (MYAA) between each institution and the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU) and in annual progress reports, universities indicate the number of faculty by which their faculty complement will increase (or decrease). Actual hiring for 2006-07 was lower than projected, and planned hiring for 2007-08 will barely match that level. Even if that promise is kept, the increase in faculty numbers will be three per cent, essentially the same rate of increase in the number of confirmed applicants for full-time undergraduate studies.

OCUFA's Position

- The Ontario government should seek to establish Ontario as a leader in higher education by improving student-faculty ratios.
- As a first step, the government should set a policy direction and provide adequate additional funding to recruit and retain enough faculty to bring the Ontario student-faculty ratio to the average in the rest of Canada.

Background

The student-faculty ratio directly affects the level of student-faculty interaction, a key indicator measured in the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). As a result of the present student-faculty ratio, students miss out on the opportunity to meet and speak with their professors and are denied an important benefit of higher education. For faculty, the current student-faculty ratio means increased teaching and marking loads, as well as diminished opportunity to mentor and tutor students.

According to Bob Rae's 2005 report to Ontario's Liberal government – *Ontario: A Leader in Learning* – an estimated 11,000 faculty would be required by 2010 to replace retiring university professors and to improve interaction between students and faculty. OCUFA's *Closing the Gap* study concurred with that assessment. It found that, to become a North American leader in postsecondary education, Ontario must bring the student-faculty ratio down to 15-to-1, which would mean filling 10,834 faculty positions between 2005 and 2010 – an increase of 80% in the number of faculty.

In its 2005 provincial budget, the Liberal government announced *Reaching Higher* – its plan for postsecondary education, providing for an additional \$1.2 billion in operating grants to Ontario colleges and universities by the end of five years. It also announced that multi-year agreements would be concluded between universities and the MTCU. Interim Accountability Agreements (IAA) for 2005-06 provided for funding through the Quality Improvement Fund (QIF), which was intended to advancing quality, and aimed at broad based measures such as hiring new faculty.

The interim and multi-year (2006-07 to 2008-09) accountability agreements include faculty hiring intentions. Each agreement identifies the number of net new tenure-stream, limited term appointment, and part-time faculty members the institution intends to add to their existing complement. From 2005-06 to 2007-08, the projected net increase in full-time faculty is 1,342. While 2005-06 showed the largest increase in faculty numbers in percentage terms – 4.4 per cent – almost half were for limited term appointments, typically for one to three years. Since then a greater number of faculty appointments have been tenure-stream. However, the cumulative total is only 1,026, of which barely three-quarters are tenures-stream appointments.

OCUFA supported the elimination of mandatory retirement, but even this policy change will have little effect on faculty numbers. Experience elsewhere indicates that the number of faculty members who delay retirement is sufficient to produce only a small increase in the average retirement age. A majority of faculty will still retire before the age of 65. In any case, the effect of eliminating mandatory retirement is transitional and short-term only. It is no solution to long-term, systemic shortcomings.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

OCUFA Research Papers

- *Ontario University Interim Accountability Agreements: Where did the money go?*, October 2006
- *Closing the Quality Gap: The Case for Hiring 11,000 Faculty by 2010*, April 2005
- *Less Isn't More: Ontario's Faculty Shortage Crisis*, January 2001

Data

Ontario Full-time Faculty and Student-Faculty Ratios

	Full-time Faculty	Student FTE per Faculty
1990	13,717	18
2000	11,700	22
2001	11,833	23
2002	12,246	24
2003	12,820	26
2004	13,300	26
2005	13,557	27
2006	14,148	27
2007	14,602	26

Source: Council of Ontario Universities, and Common University Data Ontario

Additional full-time faculty required to improve 2007 Ontario student-faculty ratio to other competitive levels

	Student-faculty ratio	Additional faculty required
Rest of Canada	21	3,632
Ontario 1990	18	6,910
US peers	16	9,330

Source: Council of Ontario Universities, Statistics Canada; US National Center for Education Statistics

Ontario University Full-time Faculty Hiring (above retirement replacements)

Planned	Tenure-stream	Limited Term	Total	% Ltd Term
2005-06	214	205	419	49%
2006-07	424	134	557	24%
2007-08	426	40	466	9%
Actual				
2006-07	387	71	458	
% above / below plan	-9%	-47%	-18%	

Source: Interim and Multi-Year Accountability Agreements (MYAA) and MYAA Annual Reports