

## President's Report to Senate - Jan. 11, 2013

Let me begin by wishing everyone a happy, healthy and successful New Year. Moreover, we begin the second marathon of the current academic year, and I wish all faculty, staff and students of Brock the strength and insight to see the semester through to its conclusion in good form.

As a rule, I take the opportunity in these reports to provide information about the external context and how it will impact Brock. Often, I comment on emerging government policy, especially at the provincial level, because the Ontario government significantly enables or constrains our operations academically and financially, depending upon that policy framework. One major role of the Council of Ontario Universities (COU) is to assess emerging policy directions and to influence them before they are adopted. And so, I reported from time to time on COU initiatives.

To help frame the emerging external context for you my report this month includes two recent provincial documents which will inform future policy, namely The Auditor General of Ontario's Report on University Undergraduate Teaching Quality released December, 2012 and HEQCO's Preliminary Report on Productivity which was commissioned by the Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities (MTCU) which was also released last month.

Obviously, little has happened on the government front since my last report (in December). That being the case, I wish to begin a conversation about other elements of the external context, namely the academic environment inhabited by other universities in Ontario and beyond, with whom we sometimes co-operate and sometimes compete. I might add that competition is good, because it can drive excellence. And so can co-operation.

Government policy can affect our bottom line and academic aspirations tomorrow. So there is always a sense of urgency about government matters. The dynamics of the competitive educational environment in which we operate tends not to produce dramatic effects tomorrow, so we too often delay considering these dynamics, because the urgent will tend to drive out the important.

At no time since I have come to Brock is the competitive environment in which Brock operates as compelling an issue as it will become, in my view, over the next several years. And the matter boils down to competition for enrolment, for research prominence, for recognition of the impact on students and society and for

the resources that come directly and indirectly as a result. I cannot here produce a comprehensive essay on these matters. What I can do is provide some indication that the situation is compelling, even if not just yet an alarming one for Brock. To these ends, let me begin with just one item, the competition for enrolment.

Brock's academic development over the last decade has been fuelled by enrolment growth. We have been very successful for nearly a decade in increasing enrolment. Not only have we doubled the number of students studying at Brock generally, but we have significantly increased graduate enrolment and steadily increased the entry averages of new students. In addition, the number of new "101" registrants with entry averages of 90 per cent, or greater, has gone up most dramatically.

Our enrolment growth at the undergraduate level is based almost entirely on an Ontario-based pool of applicants. Nearly 75 per cent of our undergraduates come from outside Niagara. Of these, more than half come from the GTA alone, the rest from other, primarily southern Ontario communities. Our enrolment growth is hugely fuelled by the population growth in the Kitchener-Waterloo-to-Oshawa corridor and as far north as Barrie. That growth, in turn, is predominantly the result of immigration to this mega-urban area.

The government predicts that the resulting growth in high-school age youth will slow dramatically and stall before 2020. (We shall see; I am skeptical.) In any case, the Ontario government will begin in several years significantly to constrain its own budgeted envelope to support enrolment growth, based on its demographic predictions. In many other areas of the province, the number of university- and college-age youth has been dropping. Universities like Windsor, Laurentian, Lakehead and Nipissing have to work very hard to make their own enrolment targets. Their locations are a disadvantage. We have greatly benefited from our location just outside the GTA and the Kitchener-Waterloo-to-Oshawa population corridor. (Incidentally, Windsor has been exploring offering its Social Work program in Niagara. Ryerson was exploring offering its communications engineering program in Niagara Falls.)

But as regards competition, we also inhabit a very crowded space. Ten publically-funded universities inhabit it as their "home base." Several more have established satellite operations in "under-served" parts of the corridor, and several more such satellites are being contemplated. In a relatively brief time, all of the "northern" universities will have established such satellites, because this is where the students are located.

But it is not only Ontario's publically-funded universities that seek their enrolments in this population corridor. Forty per cent of Athabasca's students are based in Ontario as well. And private institutions are going to appear in the GTA, either physically or they will project themselves into it via online learning (like Athabasca). A private outfit named Yorkville University operates in Toronto, to name one. More will follow, I have no doubt. And universities across the Niagara River in western New York have projected themselves into our own backyard.

The Ontario government may up the ante on this competition. They have been contemplating the establishment of an open, online university modeled in part on the very successful Open University in the U.K. (for many years led by the former president of Laurentian University, Sir John Daniel). Why is the Ontario government doing this? They are frustrated by what they perceive to be the intransigence of Ontario's universities to develop robust online degree programs, on the one hand, and to embrace open, block-credit transfer among ourselves. So they are contemplating solving it in one fell swoop. Such an open online university would accept en masse the credits of any of our students who opt to continue or complete their studies at the open online university. Indeed, I imagine that if such a university were to be established, it would fully "credentialize" courses completed on the MOOCs as well.

Finally, many of Ontario's colleges are requesting degree-granting authority from the Ontario government. And in order to gain it, these colleges will promise to do all those things that the universities are perceived to be resisting.

Our next round of strategic planning must, among other things, help us find a firm and sustainable footing in this emerging competitive environment. The provisions in our Strategic Management Agreement (SMA) will carry us well for the next three (maybe five) years, in so far as we fully implement them on schedule. But we may well wish (or need) to augment them during this three-to-five-year period. My gut tells me that part of that adjustment lies in vigorously pursuing strategic partnerships to form consortia that can compete well in the academic space that is emerging. In any case, here is food for significant thought during the next iteration of what should always be an ongoing strategic planning process involving Senate and the academic officer of Brock.

In subsequent reports to Senate, I shall endeavour to take up other topics, such as heightened competition for research leadership, and its impact not only on competition for research grants, but also for other resources, that ought to be folded into our ongoing strategic discussions.