

**Report to the LUFA-Council on the  
OCUFA January 23-24, 2009 Workshop  
“Accounting or Accountability in Higher Education?”  
Submitted by Lorraine Mercer, President/Steward of LUFA-H**

The intent of this workshop was to provide scholarly and practical knowledge on the topic of accountability in colleges and universities with the expectation of developing informed dialogue, debate and discussion amidst faculty associations. OCUFA was very successful in providing expertise to address the topics, including: an overview, models to avoid from an international perspective, reviews of student surveys and public rankings, contextualizing the changing scope of higher education worldwide, and finally entering into dialogue rather than a monologue.

Keynote speakers were exceptional during this day and a half workshop. Professor Theresa Shanahan, lawyer and professor in York’s Faculty of Education took on the task of providing the overview by placing accountability in context. She indicated that historically, higher education was always accountable; it was driven by *internal* forces to maintain standards. Currently, however, *external* forces for transparency, globalization, internationalization of higher education, and neo-liberal ideology “drive the bus” for accountability. Accountability in terms of performance indicators is on the increase; this is a market-based accounting model having little connection to education. These “excellence markers” are socially constructed and power oriented, conforming to what is socially determined as good education and thus reproducing the dominant discourse. In this case, it’s a discourse of consumerism resulting in defining higher education through standardization and quantification. The true results are a decrease in freedom for critical thinking, creativity, local control and process and in increase in output measures, competition (as opposed to collegial creativity), and education for a global economic competition. In this context, the Social Sciences and Humanities are at great risk.

And where is the resistance to take place, asked an audience member? “In the academy,” was Dr. Shanahan’s response, “in making the public aware of the issues so as to garner their ultimate support and to challenge the cost of all the accounting.”

Dr. Joy Mighty’s example of accountability transformed into decontextualized performance measures demonstrated external forces at their worst. Her teaching and learning center’s “measures” were down; specifically, there were fewer faculty attending the workshops. She knew why, substantial numbers of faculty had retired, current faculty were teaching overloads, and therefore, they had no time for workshops. But the performance measures didn’t take this into account and an investigation, research and report were required for an accounting. And that cost money. In an ironic twist, Dr. Mighty had to cancel the remaining faculty training in order to fund the investigation, research and report. The OCUFA workshop participants laughed at the irony of the teaching and learning centre’s situation and a sense of “been there” filled the room.

The workshop then shifted to a review of current large-scale systems of accounting and accountability. The Ministry of Education’s “Common University Data Ontario” (CUDA) provides systematic accounting to the public, based on some 40 reports required from each college and university. Laurentian participates in this accounting and its stats are posted on the LU website. Balancing that accounting demand is the Higher Education Quality Council (HEQCO) that presents itself as a council for enabling autonomy. Formed in 2006 by the Ontario Ministry of Education their work is just beginning. According to the website, it supports workshops on quality teaching and funds research on quality programs, teaching, networking and much more. Reports from HEQCO of late address recommendations for the future of Ontario colleges and universities, including the partnerships and articulation agreements that are under review at the Laurentian federation. I found this to be an important new resource for my understanding of the future of the university in Ontario.

I'll wrap it up here, letting you know that the workshop presentations and plans for continued dialogue are posted on the OCUFA website.  
<http://www.ocufa.on.ca/Conferences/2009Conference/slidesandnotes.htm> As you can imagine the power point slides don't really tell the story but a number of the presenters included their notes and/or presentation drafts on this site. Of particular interest was the presentation by Dr. Jamil Salmi of the Education Department of the World Bank. His comments on accountability were balanced, demonstrating that there is a need for accountability and transparency but that it can also become constraining, inefficient and cumbersome. His broader message, however, is about the universities' role in knowledge production in light of the desperate need, on a global scale. He was challenging and inspiring.

Thank you for the opportunity to attend this workshop. Please contact me if you have comments or questions.

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