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CREATING A NEW UNIVERSITY

Creating a New University in a Time of Political and Economic Conservatism

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Abstract

The University of Ontario Institute of Technology (UOIT) was the first new university to be established in Ontario in forty years and was created in a time of fiscal austerity by a Conservative government led by a Premier with a reputation for anti-intellectualism. In many ways, UOIT represents a new way of thinking about the nature of higher education that was prevalent at the time; in other ways, it was unable to effect a significant redesign of curriculum, administration, or structure.

Keywords: university, design, political, Canada, Ontario Institute of Technology, higher education

Creating a New University in a Time of Political and Economic Conservatism

In 2004, Professor George Fallis of York University wrote that “in [the] post-industrial society of the twenty-first century, the economic mission of the university will flourish and the democratic mission will wither” (p. 53). While the economic mission of the university is clearly still prioritized by the government and university administrations, the democratic impulse as seen in liberal education continues to survive in spite of ongoing critiques of and attacks on universities. The nature and role of universities have been debated for almost as long as universities have existed. Nonetheless, an important reason for governmental prioritization of higher education is the evidence of the continuing importance of a university education to personal, local, and national economic well-being (Van Loon, 2005). At the time Fallis wrote his statement, the University of Ontario Institute of Technology (UOIT) was entering its second year of serving students with an enrolment of less than 1,000. Located in the blue collar, automotive city of Oshawa, Ontario, UOIT was created by the Harris Conservative government amidst controversy during a period of fiscal restraint and a rethinking of the mission of universities. Looking broadly at the historical roots of Ontario universities from the late 19th century through to the 2000s, this paper will explore how the expectations for UOIT were shaped by this history in the context of the continuing corporatization of universities, the growth of the knowledge economy, and the place of the social sciences and humanities in a professions-oriented university.

The early Canadian universities maintained a tradition of a broad liberal education in many of its faculties of arts; however, the vocational role of the university was also apparent. Indeed, the long history of universities shows that some form of vocationalism has always been embedded in their curriculum (see for example, de Ridder-Symoens, 2003), such as with the

training of clergy in early universities. With the rise of scientific thinking and the relative decline of religious belief, an understanding of the university as a place to question and critique traditional thought, privileges, and social norms began to be more common. Many scholars identify the beginnings of modernity at the point when a more objective and detached view of the world developed – a view that was supposed to be free from personal interest, superstitions, and biases.

Professional programs in engineering, medicine, law, household science, and so on were all part of Canadian universities from the mid-19th century (see McKillop, 1994; Axelrod, 1997). As has been well-documented, this liberal education was based on European culture and included significant biases against anyone who was not white, English-speaking (outside of Quebec), Christian, and male. From the 1960s onward, but particularly in the 1980s and 1990s, the curricula of most Canadian universities were challenged and revised to be more inclusive and to encourage more critical engagement. At the same time, awareness of the barriers to access to university grew, which eventually meant that admission requirements were “loosened” to become more inclusive and to open the doors to students who previously had not had the opportunity to attend universities.

As universities began to accept more students from diverse socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds, and from more schools with varying levels of quality, there was an outcry about the decline in standards and the poor quality of students entering university. Over the last three decades, a steady stream of articles and books critiqued the state of universities in Canada, as well as in other countries (see for example, Srigley, 2016; Hanke & Hearn, 2012; Clark, Trick & Van Loon, 2011; Côté, 2011; Côté & Allahar, 2007; Bercuson, Bothwell & Granatstein, 2007; Massolin, 2001; Bercuson, Bothwell & Granatstein, 1984). These critiques have examined

everything from the nature of the millennial student and the work of the professoriate to the funding and administration of the universities. The issues raised by such research worked to call attention to the need to rethink and reconceptualize the curricula, the structure of universities, and the supports for students. Were universities intended to be a place where people received a broad education that created thoughtful and engaged citizens? Or, were universities places where people were simply trained for future jobs? The tension between these two perspectives is strong and continues to impact universities today as fiscally conservative times persist. Paralleling increased concern about the nature of universities and the role of the private sector in funding universities were new government priorities and initiatives.

Newson and Buchbinder (1988) discuss three visions of the university: as a haven for scholars, as a tool for economic growth, and as a social transformer. The stereotypical perception of the university is as a haven for scholars who can pursue research that has no clear relevance to broader society. In this vision, scholars have jobs for life and really do not teach or do much of anything that will improve society or make the world better; nor does it prepare young people for the “real world.” Today, few who work in a university would agree that this is the case, but certainly the perception continues to persist. The second vision, the university as a tool for economic growth, is one that Canadians recognize and is probably the one that continues to be pushed the most frequently some 25 years after Newson and Buchbinder’s (1988) book was published. Newson and Buchbinder (1988) wrote that the corporatization of universities is about [c]orporations’ need for technological know-how, coupled with underfunding of universities, provid[ing] ideal conditions for forging partnerships between the academic and business communities. Such partnerships should be allowed to evolve naturally, through free-market forces. In this way, over time, universities will become

more specialized as they tailor programmes and research to meet the needs of corporate clients. According to Maxwell and Currie, increased funding from corporations for programmes that interest them is the way out of the current crisis for universities. But there is a cost. Universities must be willing to give up, or modify, ‘cherished traditions’ such as academic freedom and institutional autonomy. These traditions are ‘cultural obstacles’ to collaboration, because corporate environments stress profit and commercialization, production deadlines, proprietary rights on new ideas, and a competitive edge in the marketplace. (p. 60)

The needs of industry have been a part of the federal government’s economic strategies since the late-1980s and have had an impact on government funding of university-based research and development (Godin, Dore & Larivière, 2002; Polster, 1998). The corporate-university partnerships are not equal in power. As the ones with the money to invest or withhold, corporations have a disproportionate amount of power, especially if control over the curriculum is shifted from faculty members to non-teaching administrative personnel who may be more focused on maintaining the funding relationships with business. Van Loon (2005) points out that universities help the economy not simply through the commercialization of research, but also by educating “a highly skilled and adaptable citizenry and from the basic research which underlies all creative and productive applied research” (p. 405).

According to Newson and Buchbinder’s (1988) third vision, the university as a social transformer,

educational institutions are to transform the consciousness associated with all social, economic, and political relationships, in order to make possible long term changes in the social structure. They locate this vision in the aims and accomplishments of

polytechnic education as originally formulated by Karl Marx. Polytechnic education is intended to eliminate the gulf between mental and manual work and, thereby, the stratified social relations that derive from the division of labour; integrate theoretical and practical knowledge; make students subjects, rather than objects, of the learning process, so they will be active creative citizens as well as good workers; and stress comprehensive understanding of the relations between the forces of production and the social, political, and cultural spheres of society. (pp. 61-62)

This concept was originally envisioned to place an emphasis on a narrow specialization for the majority of students, while a small elite group of students would enroll in more flexible programmes at universities. The concept of the university as a social transformer, however, is one that has come to the forefront in a broader sense at UOIT. For example, in the Faculty of Social Science & Humanities at UOIT today, the emphasis is on programmes that will contribute to a social justice orientation among students. Rather than following the traditional paths of completing a degree in English, History, Sociology, and so on, most programmes were, and continue to be, oriented so that they meet not only vocational needs, but also to develop the critical thinking, reflexivity, and analytical skills that encourage students to question the world around them and to challenge social norms. In order to achieve this social justice aim, universities must be connected to their surrounding local communities and the broader global community through, for example, practicum placements, which in turn can circle back to building experience and skills for the workplace.

In Canada, because all university degrees require provincial government approval and most funding comes from the government, politics plays an important role in any significant changes to the system in each province. Marshall (2008) commented that the creation of UOIT

with a mandate to focus on “workplace oriented” degrees suggested that Ontario’s “existing degree model somehow falls short” (p. 4). This focus on the workplace is one that came from both the provincial and federal governments’ emphasis on the need for well-trained workers, as well as preparing for Ontario’s anticipated double cohort resulting from the elimination of the fifth year of high school (grade 13 or the Ontario Academic Credit (OAC)) in 2003. Indeed, across Canada there were a variety of efforts to address the perceived need for well-educated workers, with the creation of applied degrees in the community colleges, the building of “hybrid university colleges,” and formal creation of two other new universities (Ryerson University and Thompson Rivers University) in addition to UOIT (Marshall, 2004; Marshall, 2008, p. 9). In order for such new institutions to be accepted as universities, they had to be recognized by the existing universities and to meet the standards set by the quality assessment bodies (such as the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC) at the national level and the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO) at the provincial level). Part of the quality assessment of universities in Canada looks at their level of “scholarly activity” (Marshall, 2008, pp. 12-13). In other words, the level of research undertaken continues to be the standard by which some universities are seen as “elite” or excellent, leaving the others that focus on teaching undergraduates seen as being in some way sub-standard. Indeed the funding afforded research projects often supports more than just the research project: students gain skills and experience when they are hired as research assistants; and, overhead hard costs (e.g., lighting, heating, hardware and software, etc.) and soft costs (e.g., supplies, travel, proportionate funds for support staff in faculties and departments) are expenses assigned to the research fund. Thus, research grants support the university beyond tuition and transfer payments. Research conducted with

community and corporate partners also enhances a university's reputation and helps to bring in additional funds, again benefitting the university.

Between 1990 and 1995, Bob Rae's New Democrat Party (NDP) were in power in Ontario and introduced many new austerity measures that eventually led to the party's defeat in 1995. These measures included cuts to universities, among other groups (Gidney, 2002; Hanke & Hearn, 2012). After the NDP was defeated by the Progressive Conservative party in 1995, Premier Mike Harris began implementing his *Common Sense Revolution* (CSR). Intended as both an election platform and an articulation of "a set of convictions and a course of action that would keep a Tory government on course throughout its years in office" (Gidney, 2002, p. 234), the CSR focused on job creation, economic recovery, and the reduction of taxes, regulation, and bureaucracy. According to the premier, the plan was intended to make government more efficient and effective. The government introduced many changes to the primary and secondary streams of education, including writing new curriculum, amalgamating school boards, and eliminating grade 13, among other things. For universities, this meant reduced funding and a corresponding loosening of restrictions on tuition fees, a situation that continued into the 2000s (Boggs, 2009). The concept of the knowledge-based economy and the information society were both coming into the limelight and the rhetoric around them shaped the government's responses to the university community. In the CSR, the Conservatives claimed: "Our universities and community colleges have suffered from government's failure to set priorities. A lack of sufficient funding has resulted in lower quality service to students" (p. 12; also Ontario Hansard, June 1, 1998). Their solution was to begin "charging students a fairer share of the costs of the education they receive." They justified this increase with the following explanation:

In 1992, a university student's tuition fee represented only 19% of the total cost of his or her education for the year. In the 1950's, by contrast, tuition fees represented 35% of the total operation costs of a university program. We propose to partially de-regulate tuition over a two year period, enabling schools to charge appropriately for their services. This will enable Ontario taxpayers to save \$400 million while maintaining funding for our post-secondary system at current levels. (CSR)

In anticipation of any outcry about preventing some people from going to university, the government also introduced a new income-contingent student loan program.

Access to higher education is central to our long-term economic potential as a province. We will implement a new income-contingent loan program, similar to others being introduced around the world. Our plan, to be called the Equal Opportunity Education Fund, will mean that no student with appropriate qualifications will be denied access to funding. Student loans will be repaid in the years after graduation, as a percentage of income on each student's provincial income tax form. Because repayments under this program are geared to future income, students will never be required to repay more than they can afford. Estimates differ on the total cost of establishing such a plan. However, experts agree that such programs, with strong private sector involvement, can become self-financing in the medium to long-term with considerable future savings to taxpayers. (CSR)

Given Harris's reputation for anti-intellectualism and the fiscal constraints being imposed on universities, universities had to find new ways to bring in money since, in the first two years of Harris government rule, education expenditures decreased by \$1 billion resulting in a 14.3% cut in funding for universities (Martin, 2012). This decline in government expenditure continued

throughout the 1990s with the result that “post-secondary education funding fell by 21 per cent during the ’90s, while enrolment increased by 8 per cent” (Martin, 2012) with the result that “by the end of the century, Ontario's per capita university funding rank had fallen to tenth out of 10 provinces” (Martin, 2009). These changes led to increased debate over the role of the university and its relationships with the corporations (from big banks to information and communication technology companies and pharmaceutical companies, among others) that could provide significant infusions of cash; these relationships were especially important for newer universities without strong alumni donations and endowments.

In many respects, the concept of a university in Durham Region did not come out of the blue; however, the government’s decision to fund one caught many people by surprise. Although founding president Gary Polonsky did not plan to build a university in Oshawa when he first arrived as the new president of Durham College, he was keen to “bring the university experience” to Oshawa – even though Trent University had offered courses in Oshawa since 1974. Between 1989 and 1999, efforts were made to create a more formal and cohesive offering of university courses on the Durham College campus, with the Durham Alliance for Training and Education (DATE) and the Durham University Centre (DUC) created in 1996. In 1998, DUC was transformed into the University Centre of Durham (UCD) which helped to stabilize full-time university programming in Oshawa.

The original vision for the new university was to create the “MIT of the North.” This vision came from an off-the-cuff phrase used by Polonsky in his pitch to then-premier, Mike Harris. As Polonsky describes the situation, he felt he was losing Premier Harris’s attention and interest as he described a more traditional style of university that would cater to the east of the GTA in Durham Region and its surrounding areas, so he came out with this idea of the “MIT of

the North” (Interview). While the lofty vision was perhaps too far outside of Canada’s university tradition and too far advanced for a new university, the core idea of creating a new university that focused on technology-related professions formed the kernel of UOIT. Additionally, this mandate allowed UOIT to differentiate itself from other existing universities which was important in establishing its unique identity in a crowded higher education arena (McKenzie & King, 2016). The focus on technology is not surprising given the culture of technology that exists in Canada. The culture of technology, according to Barney (2007), is depoliticizing in that technology is not seen as political and connected to power; technology is seen as an apolitical tool that everyone needs to learn to use and to accept. Indeed, as seen in Canada’s “innovation agenda” over the last few decades, technology is front and centre of a vision for a better future for all Canadians.

In the 2001 budget, the Ontario government announced \$60 million in funding for a new university in Durham Region. At this point, the proposed name being used was the Ontario Institute of Technology (OIT). The language used in the announcement made clear that it was to be a university designed to cater to the market needs for workers; that is, to prepare students for careers, and those careers were expected to be ones that required practical skills embedded in a theoretical grounding. This phrase ‘training for careers’ often generates the idea that this role applies to community colleges and not appropriate for universities. Of course, universities have always educated and trained young people for careers as doctors, lawyers, clergy, engineers, and more recently, as teachers and nurses, and so on. However, the insertion of the phrase “theoretical grounding” (p. 58) softens or balances the vocational emphasis to bring the concept of a university education into play (Government of Ontario Budget, 2001). Nonetheless, the

unconventional name and neo-liberal vocationally-oriented mandate caused confusion which impacted the university's public identity for many years (McKenzie & King, 2016).

The university's vocational role was reiterated throughout the budget, with the addition of the word "applied" in front of the fields (i.e., "will prepare students for careers in such important fields as the applied health sciences, business and information technology and advanced manufacturing") and included the concept that students would be able to "move seamlessly between college and university programs" (p. 58). A year later this list of "market-driven university programs" was expanded to also include "applied science, advanced manufacturing, policing and community safety ... applied arts and nuclear technology and safety, and scientific and technological teacher education" (Government of Ontario, 2002). These program ideas were supported by the special mission of the university to provide career-oriented university programs and to design and offer programs with a view to creating opportunities for college graduates to complete a university degree (UOIT Act, 2002). This idea of students moving "seamlessly between college and university programs" (p. 58) begs the question of how the programs are different if such seamless interchange can exist between college and university programs. Currently, many universities offer bridging programs; however, in the context of establishing a new university in early 2000, it seemed unclear as to what was intended. Indeed, one MPP in the debates following the introduction of the UOIT Act, referred to the Act as turning Durham College into a university, which is clearly not what was happening. Even today, anecdotal evidence suggests that some people still think of UOIT as part of Durham College although they are separate institutions.

In the 2002 budget speech, post-secondary education was emphasized as key to future prosperity in "a global, knowledge-based economy" in which post-secondary education must be

responsive to “the needs of students and employers.” Focusing on SuperBuild funding for new university spaces in preparation for the double cohort after the elimination of the fifth year of high school in Ontario, Janet Ecker, then the Minister of Education, announced investment in new buildings and labs and spaces for students, as well as “research, capital and advanced-skills initiatives.” The investment in research was constructed in terms of realizing the social and economic benefits, as well as successful commercialization of research, thus emphasizing the economic potential of research. With the 2002 budget (in contrast to the 2001 budget), the new university was referred to as the University of Ontario Institute of Technology:

As part of our plan to expand post-secondary capacity, the budget bill I am tabling today includes the establishment of the University of Ontario Institute of Technology in Durham. This new institution would provide innovative and responsive training that would allow students to earn a degree, diploma or other credential, depending on their program of choice.

The mandate of UOIT was very specific. According to Bill 109, the Act that created UOIT, the university had a “special mission” to provide “career-oriented university programs” and to provide opportunities for college graduates to gain a university degree. The wording begs the question of what is the role of a university and how can it create university programs that are also career-oriented, responsive to the market-driven needs of employers, and targeted at community college graduates. If a university is intended to provide a broad-based liberal education, how can it also have a vocational focus? Similarly, the wording suggests that the university would offer “degree, diploma or other credential depending on their student program of choice” which led to confusion over whether UOIT was a university, a college, a polytechnic, or a reinvention of Durham College. Interestingly, in the Hansard transcripts dated 25 June 2002,

Progressive Conservative MPP Marilyn Mushinski (Scarborough Centre) stated: “parents and students have been asking for: post-secondary education that prepares students for careers that call for practical training and theoretical grounding. ... It’s simply smart thinking to ensure that your graduates have the knowledge and the skills that they need to find the jobs they want.”

Again the question is raised about the role of the university and how it is (or should be) different from a college. A parallel here might be Ryerson University which started out as a polytechnic institution. In fact, it is in this same bill that Ryerson’s name was officially changed to be Ryerson University removing reference to “polytechnic”, although it had achieved full university status in 1993. Thus, while a new university of technology was being created, another was shifting to eliminate the ‘polytechnic’ in the name.

Critics raised many concerns about the new university, some of which were about the process of its creation, while others referred to the nature of a university education. In the Hansard transcripts dated 3 June 2002, MPP Dwight Duncan asked about the lack of debate on the creation of a new university, also noting that UOIT had hired staff, set up a web page, and taken other steps beyond simply planning that suggested that they were operating based on assumption that the Legislature had already passed the Bill. He raised the question of whether this was a case of contempt, since the bill had originally been blocked by the “the third party” in December. NDP Peter Kormos called Duncan’s request for an investigation a delaying tactic to prevent the bill from being passed; Kormos stated that the NDP wanted the bill to be passed. Chris Stockwell concurred, noting that it was common practice for the civil service to move forward when legislation is drafted. The Speaker of the House eventually ruled that the House could proceed with the Bill that day as announced.

In the question period following the introduction of the UOIT Act, Liberal MPP, Marie Bountrogianni commented on the “the bill on Durham College turning into a university.” She noted three major concerns that other colleges and universities had about UOIT: (1) there had been a 15% cut to colleges and universities in 1995 when the Harris government came to office. She said that the colleges and universities were “telling us that they [had] a lot of unfunded students.” She noted that the colleges and universities had still not recovered, the double cohort was looming, and they needed money to plan but the government has not told them how much money they will be getting. In the midst of this uncertainty, she noted that \$60 million going to Durham College: the established universities were suffering in order to open a new institution. (2) She went on to discuss the lack of consultation with stakeholders, noting OCUFA’s (Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations) statement that it “believes it is ill-advised to establish a new institution until the appropriate resources are provided to existing universities in the province.” (3) She also raised concerns about quality assessments, noting OCUFA’s statement that “[t]his is especially troubling given the inadequacies of UOIT’s mission, objectives and governance structure. As indicated by” the Act, it [sic] “is not a university but an applied degree-granting polytechnic college with a highly circumscribed mandate, flawed governance structure and no guarantee of academic freedom and tenure.” She also raised the concern that while a university education should be about gaining skills for employment, it should be about more than this.

In the Hansard transcripts dated 25 June 2002, Bountrogianni also noted that it was the process that the opposition disagreed with the most. She complained that the original Bill 65 had been rolled into a ‘super omnibus’ bill attached to a budget bill (109) and that there was not enough time to debate the provisions for the new university. She pointed specifically to the

following issues: that “the public had not heard both sides of that argument”; that the college was being turned into a university (which was an inaccurate statement: it was never the intent to change the college into a university or create a university-college); quality (specifically, that the president Gary Polonsky did not have a doctorate, although he was pursuing one); and, quality of the programming (although she did note that the recruited deans were “excellent people”).

The UOIT Act comprised one of four parts to Bill 109. With regard to UOIT, Conservative MPP Dianne Cunningham stated that UOIT:

would provide innovative and responsive training that would prepare students for a highly competitive and knowledge-based economy. Our government is working to be sure that we are ready for students to enrol in 2003, which will be another important year of increased enrolment in this great province. (Hansard, 3 June 2002)

This clear statement mandated that the university must be ready to provide classes for students in a little over a year from the date of the bill. Thus, we have a new university, created by a conservative government to provide a market-driven curriculum for a knowledge-based economy. In one sense, an opportunity to create a new form of higher education existed, one that could have met the vocational needs of students while maintaining the benefits of a liberal education. It could have been an institution that completely revolutionized the nature of higher education.

From some of our research, it is clear that many of the components of the university system that could have been changed were not. For example, the tenure system is in place because it was too hard to attract strong academics and researchers to the university without it. There is some debate over whether governance is different at UOIT or not. For example, UOIT has an Academic Council instead of a Senate. In some peoples’ eyes, they are the same, but for

others they are very different.¹ While programs such as engineering and nursing are all accredited in the same way as at other university programs, some differences do exist. In the Faculty of Social Science and Humanities (SSH), for example, there are no traditional disciplinary departments such as history, English, philosophy, and the like. The programs were designed to be interdisciplinary and career-oriented (i.e., legal studies, criminology, communication, and forensic psychology). The first more traditional program, Political Science, was created from the Community Development and Policy studies program in 2016 and includes courses such as introductions to political science, psychology, sociology and the like as part of a foundational year for programs in SSH.

The vocational nature of the original programs are clear. The naming of the faculties at UOIT provides interesting insights into this ‘vocational nature’ and into the evolution of the university. At its creation, there were to be six “Schools”: Advanced Manufacturing; Business and Information Technology; Education; Health Sciences; Nuclear Technology and Safety; and Justice and Community Safety. In 2001/2, the name for what is currently the Faculty of Social Science and Humanities was the School of Justice and Community Safety which in April 2002, became the School of Justice; in 2003 the School of Criminology and Justice; and in 2006 the Faculty of Criminology, Justice, and Policy Studies. Today, only the Faculties of Education and of Health Science have the same names; the rest were changed by the time UOIT opened its doors.

Following the lead of the federal and provincial governments, market-driven research is promoted at UOIT. While those attracted to the university in its early years had a pioneering spirit, most of those who designed programs and courses had trained and worked in the

¹ On issues of academic governance, see Jones, G., Goyan, P., & Shanahan, T. (2004).

established universities and tended to follow the well-trod paths rather than creating new and innovative ways of teaching and researching. Certainly, innovation in market terms is happening, but it is happening within the parameters of accreditation restrictions, government approvals of programs, and societal pressures. As well, faculty are concerned with how graduates will fare in the job market and in graduate school; if grading, for example, is completely different from that in other universities (e.g., a Pass/Fail model), will graduates be as competitive when applying to graduate schools? While it is important for universities to differentiate themselves from other universities, they also need to be seen as legitimate in order to attract students and faculty (McKenzie & King, 2016). Although UOIT was a completely new university, much of what is being done is not much different from other universities. This is a situation that can be reassuring, students can know they are getting an education at least as good as at other universities, but also disappointing since nothing completely new has been created and the curriculum is not radically different from other universities. For example, in writing about the progress that Canadian universities have made for Indigenous students to access postsecondary education since the early 1970s, Battiste, Bell, and Findlay (2002) note:

Enhanced accessibility has not, however, been accompanied by a comparable change in the presumptions and content of university curricula and disciplinary knowledge. ... Moreover, the injustice of this situation is aggravated by postsecondary institutions that persist in offering a fixed menu of European heritage programs and courses toward which everyone is expected to gravitate “naturally” or be force-marched in the name of “real” knowledge and intellectual nourishment” (p. 84).

It was not until 2014 that any institutional effort was being made to make UOIT’s curriculum inclusive of indigenous knowledge and history.

Changes within the Faculty of Education illustrate some of the successful alternative approaches employed. In its early years, the Faculty of Education discussed applying the pass/fail model for its full teacher education program for the consecutive education students similar to the model tested and subsequently discarded at the Faculty of Education at Queen's University. For consecutive education students, a Pass/Fail model makes sense; they already have an undergraduate degree and are attending a one-year teacher education program (until it was changed to a two-year program in 2015). Generally, graduate program admission is based on the results of an undergraduate degree; their education program results would not be considered for acceptance to a graduate program and are not prerequisites for such a program. After lengthy discussions, the Faculty decided to apply the pass/fail model to elective courses that would be available exclusively to teacher education students. At the time of this discussion, the concerns expressed in other Faculties (such as, how graduates would fare in the job market and in graduate school) were not determined to be of as great a concern since the course grading was not considered for graduate school and employers, generally school boards, do not request academic transcripts but rather teaching practicum or placement reports. Today, some school boards requesting academic transcripts but place a much greater emphasis on the teaching practicum or placement reports.

More recently, the Faculty of Education narrowed its focus to concentrate on a Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM)-based program. In its Intermediate Senior program, the only teachable subjects are the sciences (biology, chemistry, physics, general science), mathematics, health and physical education, English and history; in the Primary Junior program, the teaching of mathematics, digital literacies, and science is emphasized. Both programs focus on application of digital technologies to support the academic and teaching aspects of the

courses, again accentuating knowledge and skills that can be applied in teaching settings. These restrictions limit enrollment to individuals who have the background in these areas or want to learn with an emphasis in these disciplines. In part, this program attempts to respond to school boards who have expressed a need for teachers knowledgeable in these fields.

The creation of the University of Ontario Institute of Technology was a significant break with the past where in 40 years no completely new university had been created in Ontario (Ryerson University, previously named Ryerson Institute of Technology (1948) and Ryerson Polytechnic Institute (1964), was granted full university status in 1993 and renamed in 2001). Public commentary and political debate preceded UOIT's creation and opening; regional interest was high from the start even with existing institutions disagreeing with and lobbying against its development. Given the austere financial situation in Ontario in the late 1990s, it is surprising that a new university would be founded since this announcement would represent a major financial commitment. Located in a Conservative stronghold, UOIT opened its doors in 2003 to students at a time when a provincial election was in the making. The seat was retained by the Progressive Conservative party, but the provincial election was won by the Liberal party, a result that did not bode well for the university. The university was initially a blank slate intended to service students from Durham Region and Northumberland County, but now accepts students from across Canada and around the world. UOIT's story is one that illustrates the challenges and opportunities faced by both established and new universities as they navigate an unstable economic environment amid calls for ensuring the employability of graduates. Although the mandate of UOIT was initially viewed as one that did not fit the more traditional perception of how a "real" university was structured, the comparatively unique nature of its programs allowed

it to be differentiated from existing universities and attracted students and faculty looking for something new.

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