

INAUGURAL ONTARIO CURAC REGIONAL CONFERENCE “HAVE YOUR SAY!”

Ken Rea (Toronto) and Joan Cunnington (OCRA - Seneca)

The first Ontario CURAC regional conference was held at Ryerson University on October 15, 2012. A committee led by Sandra Pyke of York University met several times during the preceding months to plan the event. A round-table discussion format was chosen to address topics of interest, three of which emanated from the Drummond Report. All Ontario CURAC and Ontario college retiree associations received conference announcements to forward to their members. Those registering chose topics in order of preference from eight possible options. Each session ran for one hour, guided by a facilitator who encouraged input from participants around each table, fulfilling the conference theme, “Have Your Say!” Some 40 registrants represented retirees from the Universities of Toronto, York, Queen’s, Wilfrid Laurier, Ryerson, Lakehead, Carleton, Brock, Windsor; and Centennial, Seneca, and St. Lawrence Colleges.



Facilitators for each topic summarized the discussions during a plenary session which concluded the one-day conference.

Peter Russell reported that those discussing Topic 1 on the recommendations of the Drummond Report respecting post-secondary education faulted it for lack of attention to the possibilities of online teaching, its tendency to treat post-secondary institutions as departments of government, and the political risks inherent in the “tiering” of such institutions in terms of function. However, support was given to recommendations aimed at facilitating “laddering” to make it easier for college students to access university degrees.

Doug Creelman’s groups for Topic 2 generally supported the Drummond recommendations relating to health care although the report was seen more as a set of suggestions of things requiring attention than specific actions to be taken. The report was criticized for failing to include social and community services as part of the health-care package.

Janet Rowe's groups discussed Topic 3, the proposal to establish a single pension fund administrator for all university and college pensions. This was interpreted to mean the consolidation of Ontario University Pension funds which would result in a total investment fund of approximately 10 billion dollars. Representation, consideration of investment strategies, and possible risk were discussed.

Al Stauffer's Topic 4 group reviewed the concept of co-housing which involves creation of a community of some twenty individually-owned homes built around a core of shared meeting and dining facilities. The possibility of engaging CURAC in exploring the feasibility of this type of development for post-secondary retirees was also discussed.

Donald Gillies' groups, which discussed Topic 5 relating to retiree relationships with faculty and staff unions and associations, found great diversity in the nature of these relationships, but explored a number of possible ways of improving them, such as by persistently reminding former unions and associations that retirees are still here and "this is who we are."

Ken Rea's session on Topic 6, "future meetings and relations with CURAC," concluded that it would be desirable to continue convening meetings of this kind and that attention should now be given to developing a suitable organizational framework either within or outside the existing CURAC/ARUCC structure to make this happen.

Joan Cunnington reported on Topic 7, "Retiree Benefits, Privileges and Perks." This discussion revealed great variances in coverage and cost of the plans at the various institutions represented which led to the recommendation that retirees should be treated more equitably with 'universal' type plans that apply to all retirees regardless of occupation when active.

An unspecified Topic 8 intended to allow participants free choice of topics was cancelled due to lack of subscribers.

Excellent meeting facilities were provided by Ryerson University at the Raymond G. Chang School of Continuing Education and financial support was provided by the Economical Select Insurance Company, all of which helped make the conference a success.

The organizing committee is most appreciative of the support it received and anticipates that another Ontario regional CURAC conference will happen in 2013.