

Université de l'Ontario français

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Normand Labrie, Ph.D., MSRC

Interim President

Université de l'Ontario français

For more than 40 years, hundreds of people, if not thousands, have worked hard to ensure that Ontario has a French-language university. Well, we now have in Ontario a new institution called the Université de l'Ontario français (UOF), an institution that is vital for francophone communities, for Ontario as a whole, and for the entire country. This institution was created by the *Université de l'Ontario français Act, 2017*. This Act gives the UOF a provincial mission that we intend to fulfill as a multi-campus university through affiliations with other postsecondary institutions that offer French-language programs in various regions across the province, as well as through any other form of partnership with these institutions. The first campus is planned for Toronto, but the Université de Hearst has expressed interest in affiliating with the UOF, and the universities of Saint Paul and Sudbury have also expressed interest in considering some form of association or affiliation. A plan for a feasibility study has been proposed to this end.

Our university will be a magnet for francophones in Central-Southwestern Ontario, who suffer from a glaring lack of postsecondary education in French, all while French-language education at the primary and secondary school levels is growing rapidly and is known for its excellence. And, if I may add, while French immersion programs are extremely popular with families of all linguistic backgrounds.

Central-Southwestern Ontario, which already accounts for one-third of Canada's population, is experiencing the highest population growth through immigration and inter- and intra-provincial labour mobility. This region will soon represent half of the province's Francophone population. Moreover, the region is a major centre for innovation and economic development at the national and international levels. In these few words alone, I am sure you already understand all the potential that comes with creating this new French-language university in Toronto, a university that is not only designed in sync with its time, but that also anticipates the future needs of young people and employers.

Over the past year, we have made considerable efforts to establish the conditions required to open the UOF in September 2020. Indeed, just this past November 21st, we published on our website the report of our first year of operation. While much work remains to be done by 2020, we are confident of the project's success.

According to our forecasts, the Université de l'Ontario français will begin with a cohort of 300 students (full-time equivalents) in 2020, reaching about 2,000 students ten years later. Therefore, by 2030, the UOF will reach the size of Bishop's University, the smallest of the three English-language universities in Quebec, after McGill and Concordia, which together total more than 60,000 students (full-time equivalents) enrolled in English-language programs, of which there are more than 10,000 Canadian students from other provinces and more than 12,000 international students.

While every other university grapples with the challenges of adapting to the new conditions of the contemporary world, such as globalization, human migration, cultural diversity, or digital transformations, the UOF has the privilege of starting out from scratch and distinguishing itself from traditional universities.

Created in the 21st century, the UOF has no history except for that of the political project carried out over more than forty years by the Francophone communities who claim their own institution, governed by and for Francophones. It has no institutional traditions of its own, it has no liabilities. It can therefore develop into a forward-thinking institution that can serve as a model for other universities in Ontario, as well as elsewhere in the country and around the world. It is a unique opportunity!

The UOF has designed its academic programming around three major components.

The first and most distinctive component of the UOF is a set of four transdisciplinary academic programs. These programs are not limited to traditional disciplines, instead they deal with contemporary and complex objects of study, questions that require multiple disciplines in order to fully understand them, analyze them critically, and imagine appropriate means of intervention. Our first four programs will focus on issues that face our society and that build on the strengths of the region: human plurality, urban environments, the globalized economy, and digital cultures.

The second component of our academic programming focuses on professional programs, such as education, social work, law, and health sciences. These programs will be carefully selected to meet the most pressing needs of Francophone communities. Most often accredited by professional orders, these professional programs will be offered in collaboration with our partner universities. The first of these programs will be an alternative bachelor's degree in education, for those who hold another bachelor's degree, delivered on a part-time basis for teachers who practice by means of a letter of permission until they earn their qualifications. This program will contribute to solve the shortage of French-language teachers in Ontario.

The third component of our academic programming focuses on students enrolled in English-language institutions in the region who seek to enhance their French-language skills by taking their elective courses at the UOF, thereby improving their French and their ability to practice their profession bilingually. In this way, students who are working towards their chosen profession in programs that are only offered in English in the region (such as in health care, speech therapy, history or engineering), will be able to enhance their French-language skills at a professional level.

What also differentiates the UOF from other universities is its pedagogical approach. The UOF has adopted an inductive pedagogy, which involves directly observing reality before finding a conceptual and theoretical explanation. It has adopted a pedagogy based on collaboration between students, faculty, and society at large (institutions, organizations, private sector). It has also opted for a pedagogy that relies on digital platforms and will offer most of its learning activities in co-modality, in other words, in person and online.

The UOF has also adopted an experiential pedagogy which confronts students with the realities of the labour market and of social engagement throughout their curriculum (during both formal learning activities and workplace internships). Furthermore, the UOF will become a hub for the development of Ontario's francophonie, society, and economy, by partnering with some fifteen Francophone institutions and organizations from across the region and integrating them in the UOF's academic mission, as well as its permanent facilities, in order to create a transformative synergy for both the university and these organizations in what will be known as Francophone Hub of Knowledge and Innovation. One of these hub partners, the Centre francophone de Toronto, is well-positioned to offer services to UOF students in its areas of expertise which include immigration services for international students, housing, health services, social services, legal advice, etc.

In designing the UOF, we drew on prominent studies from leading organizations such as the OECD (The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development), the Conference Board of Canada, the Royal Bank of Canada, among others, all of whom agree that university education must be transformed to adapt to the world of the 21st century. We have a duty to prepare future generations for a society and a labour market that are undergoing profound change.

We also drew on some of the best new universities in the world: for example, Quest University in British Columbia, a private university created in 2007 with tuition fees as high as \$ 35,000. We at the UOF want to offer an education of equal quality but in a public institution that is accessible to all, regardless of one's financial capacity. We were also inspired by the University of Bozen-Bolzano, created twenty years ago for the German linguistic minority of Northern Italy, which is ranked among the ten best small universities in the world. Furthermore, we were inspired by Azim Premji University in India, created in 2012 thanks to the generosity of billionaire Azim Premji who donated his fortune to create a model university to raise the standards of education in his country.

The UOF is determined to open its doors with a first cohort of 300 students in 2020, as mandated by and committed to Francophone communities. We already have the commitment of many of the most distinguished institutions and organizations in the country and around the world to support us in this endeavour. Groupe Média TFO, for example, provides us with essential support by granting us space in its offices and by providing us with services in human resources, communications, marketing and IT/digital support. Ryerson University, the University of Toronto, the University of Ottawa, and Laurentian University have also graciously allowed us to draw on their administrative and academic policies in order to develop our own. In the rest of Canada, the Université Laval and the Université de Montréal have offered to provide the UOF with some

of their administrative services as well as some courses that align with the UOF's programs. Similarly, the Érudit Consortium has made the UOF a strategic partner in the development of its national platform for access to open access scholarly publications. In France, the UOF has already benefited from the expertise of colleagues from, among others, the Universités de Paris 3 and Paris 4 Sorbonne, and we have been assured of the collaboration of Paris 1 - Panthéon-Sorbonne, of the Grande École de Génie CentraleSupélec (a French institute of research in engineering and science), as well as the Conférence des Présidents d'Université (an organization of university presidents).

However, in order to ensure the enrollment of students in our undergraduate programs by 2020, we must fulfill five conditions.

First, on October 1, we submitted our four academic programs for approval by the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities. We expect the Minister to forward them to the Postsecondary Education Quality Assessment Board (PEQAB) in order for our program proposals to undergo an external peer review process. Time is of the essence. The evaluation process normally takes several months. If the evaluation process does not begin immediately, the UOF's ability to welcome its first cohort of students by 2020 will be seriously compromised.

Second, when the UOF's first Board of Governors was appointed, two conditions were established in order for it to transition to the status of a permanent Board. According to the minister's original regulation, the first condition was for the Board to adopt the university's administrative by-laws. This condition was fulfilled on September 19th. The second condition was for the Board to appoint an internal member, which it fulfilled on July 1 with my appointment as interim president. On July 18, the Ontario government established modified the regulation by including additional conditions that required the university to develop a series of administrative policies,

such as an executive compensation plan, a policy on access to information policy and protection of privacy, a policy on sexual violence against students, a policy on freedom of expression, and two policies on public sector accountability. These conditions are being fulfilled.

Third, we negotiated a lease with very favourable terms with a prominent developer, Daniels Corporation, for a site in downtown Toronto, in close proximity to subway lines and to our other university partners, as well as in compliance with the parameters imposed by the Ontario Treasury Board, what would be handed over to the UOF in January 2020 for interior design work and fit, and ready for students by September 2020. All of this is while working in an extremely competitive real estate market. The Daniels site is a private project zoned for post-secondary education and two other institutions (George Brown College and OCAD University) have already retained their space in this location. This site is also located in the 'innovation corridor' and is therefore an ideal site for a new university of the 21st century. The lease was agreed upon on July 18. Since then, we have been waiting for approval from the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities to finalize it. Although we have lost our exclusivity clause due to delays, it is not too late to secure this site which remains available. The Daniels Corporation has just renewed its offer under the same conditions until January 18, 2019. Without imminent government approval, the university may not be able to welcome its students in 2020.

Fourth, the university's start-up costs were estimated at \$84 million by the French-language University Planning Board. The Planning Board indicated in its report that the creation of educational institutions in minority communities has generally been supported by the federal government, which is able to contribute 50% of the investments. According to the rules associated with the official languages programs, it is up to the provincial authorities to submit a request to the federal government. To date, no official steps have

been taken by the province to our knowledge. We expect the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities to begin negotiations as soon as possible.

Fifth, the UOF was able to begin operations thanks to a pre-approval by Ontario's Treasury Board from the UOF's start-up funding of \$ 8 million in 2018-2019, and \$12.5 million in 2019-2020. To date, only the first part of the funding for 2018-19 has been paid to the UOF, for a total of \$1.5 million, and the Ontario Government has indicated in its budget statement that this financing would be suspended. We expect the Ontario government to restore start-up funding as planned. The UOF's ability to fulfill its mission is at stake.

The Université de l'Ontario français is pleased that the Government of Ontario has chosen not to repeal the 2017 UOF Act in its 2018 Economic Outlook and Fiscal Review, and we look forward to meeting with the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities who has shown an interest in dialogue. We also acknowledge the Government of Canada's willingness to consider the possibility of funding the UOF under the Action Plan for Official Languages. Lastly, the UOF also acknowledges the extraordinary support shown in recent weeks and days across the country to preserve this university institution and its mission to give young people of all ages access to a world-class university education, in French, and to serve as a national and international model of a truly 21st century university.