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Ontario faculty alarmed by proposal to overhaul university funding in provincial budget

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Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations (OCUFA)

TORONTO – Ontario's faculty are alarmed by the Doug Ford government's budget proposal to allocate 60 per cent of university funding based on institutional performance. By design, performance-based funding threatens education quality as it rewards institutions that meet specific performance targets while penalizing those that do not. Faculty are also concerned by signals that the government is considering targeting the rights of senior faculty and interfering with university collective agreements.

The Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations (OCUFA) has long cautioned against shifting towards performance-based funding. The government's proposal is especially alarming as it promises to tie university funding to 10 unannounced metrics and ignores the reality that Ontario's universities already receive the lowest per-student funding in Canada. This approach will likely disadvantage small and northern institutions, which already lack the resources of larger universities. Over all, performance-based funding works against quality improvement and punishes students studying at already cash-strapped institutions facing further funding cuts.

"This government irresponsibility suggests that a system that encourages competition between universities will make Ontario a national leader," said Gyllian Phillips, President of the OCUFA. "In reality, performance-based university funding will create a system of winners and losers, putting education quality at risk for everyone."

The 2019 budget is also concerning because it reinforces government signals that it is considering targeting university faculty and staff. This government's budget and proposed funding model will further incentivize the rise of precarious academic positions on Ontario's campuses. If this government is serious about faculty renewal, they must ensure that retiring professors are replaced with full-time tenure-stream faculty and not precariously employed instructors. Good jobs are at the heart of our university system and faculty associations across Ontario believe in the importance of hiring more junior faculty

members in secure full-time positions.

Faculty members are employed by, and negotiate their contracts with universities, not the provincial government. Any attempt by the Ford government to interfere in university collective agreements would violate university autonomy and the constitutionally protected rights of faculty and staff.

“Instead of coming up with half-baked ways to take money away from universities, students, and faculty, this government should focus on investing in education quality at Ontario's postsecondary institutions,” said Phillips. “The government should be helping to create good jobs for faculty forced to work short-term precarious contracts and support students by reversing their decision to cut OSAP grants and attack student democracy.”

Faculty believe in a postsecondary education strategy that increases university funding, removes barriers to attaining a higher education, and creates good jobs. However, this government continues to make rash decisions about Ontario’s postsecondary education system without consulting the faculty, staff, and students who know the system best. It is time for this government to stop making rushed, politically motivated decisions and start listening to faculty, students, and parents.

Founded in 1964, OCUFA represents 17,000 faculty and academic librarians in 29 faculty associations across Ontario. For more information, please visit www.ocufa.on.ca.

For more information or to arrange an interview, contact:
Ben Lewis, Communications Lead at 416-306-6033 or blewis@ocufa.on.ca

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