

# Faculties of the Future

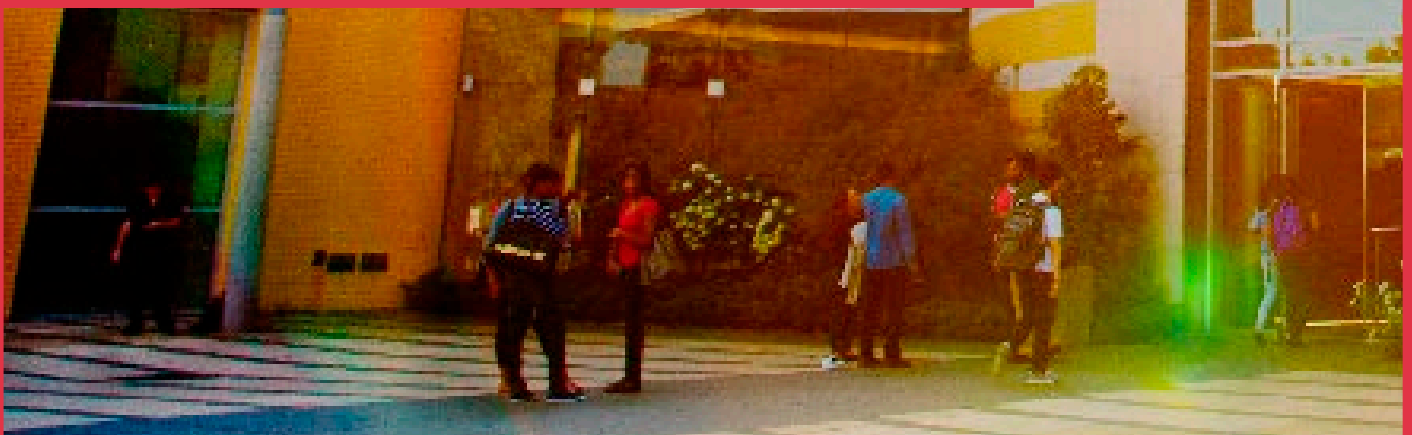
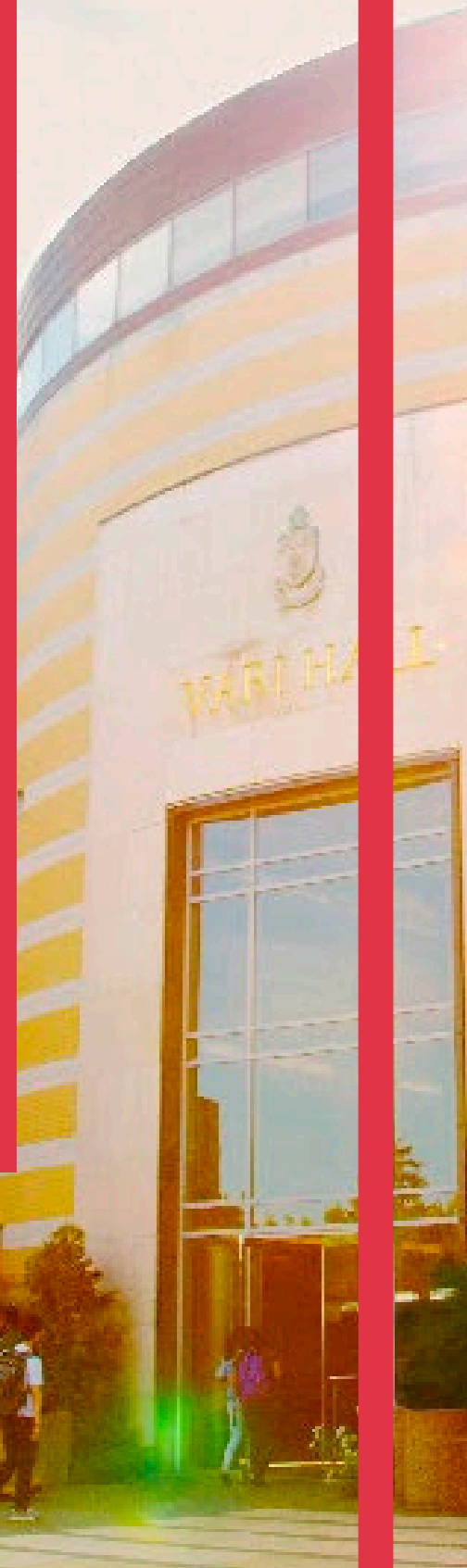
## Draft Discussion Paper

Lisa Philipps, Provost & Vice-President Academic (outgoing), Senior Policy Advisor to the President (incoming), and Professor, Osgoode Hall Law School

September 2024

DRAFT

YORK 



## Table of Contents

Introduction .....	4
What about the Growth of Administration? .....	5
Why Now?.....	6
What Will Success Look Like?.....	8
Principles and Process .....	10
Purpose of Academic Unit Structures .....	11
Current Academic Unit Structures at York.....	12
<i>Divergent Scale and Complexity</i> .....	13
<i>Internal Competition and Duplication of Efforts</i> .....	16
<i>Empowering Research, Scholarly, and Creative Communities</i> .....	18
<i>Equity in Decision Making, Collegial Voice, and Workloads</i> .....	19
<i>Aligning with Enrolment and Funding Trends</i> .....	22
<i>Utilizing Multi-Campus Structures</i> .....	25
<i>Becoming More Financial Resilient</i> .....	26
<i>Potential Gains from Reorganizing Faculties and Departments</i> .....	28
University Restructuring Internationally.....	28
<i>Arizona State University</i> .....	29
<i>University of Alberta</i> .....	30
<i>University of Exeter</i> .....	31
<i>University of Glasgow</i> .....	32
<i>University of Sydney</i> .....	33
Discussion Questions .....	34
Concluding Thoughts and Opinions.....	36

## Tables

Table 1: Group of 12 University Comparisons, 2022-2023 .....	13
Table 2: Number of Departments and Average Department Size (Faculty FTE) by Faculty, as of September 1, 2024 .....	15
Table 3: % of Tenure Stream Faculty versus others .....	18
Table 4: Proportion of Publications in QS Subject Areas by Faculty, 2023 .....	19

**Figures**

Figure 1: Current Faculties, Total-Full Equivalent Students 2023-24..... 14

Figure 2: Tenure Stream Faculty FTEs per Faculty, 2023-24 ..... 15

Figure 3: Full-Time Tenure Stream Faculty FTEs by Department, July 1, 2024..... 20

Figure 4: Student to Academic FTE Ratio by University, 2022-23 ..... 21

Figure 5: Undergraduate Student FFTE to Faculty FTE Ratio, 2023-24 ..... 21

Figure 6: Undergraduate Percentage Enrolment Change over 10 Years (2014/15  
to 2023/24) by Faculty ..... 22

Figure 7: Graduate Percentage Enrolment Change over 10 Years (2014/15 to 2023/24)  
by Faculty ..... 23

Figure 8: STEM Enrolment (2021-22 to 2023-24)-Excluding Markham..... 24

Figure 9: York University GTA Campuses and Faculties ..... 25

DRAFT

## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to launch a collegial discussion of how our academic unit structures at York University might be reinvented to propel us toward the vision and values expressed in our University Academic Plan (UAP) in a changing context for higher education. It is offered as a starting point to engender creative thinking and co-design of new organizational structures that will enable York to function as a more collaborative and adaptive university of the future, and that will showcase and amplify the unique strengths, values, and commitments that define us as a leading academic institution.

This discussion paper is only the first of many steps needed to determine collectively the organizational model that York University should move toward, to position us well to thrive in an era of disruptive change. To be successful this redesign must be driven by colleagues and units themselves coming up with the ideas that will not only remove current barriers, but also inspire and empower academic units to achieve leading scholarly and creative excellence in their respective fields.

It is worth remembering that York's current academic organization is the product of many past evolutions, driven by forces such as student interests, emerging academic priorities and opportunities, and a need to simplify structures that had become overly fragmented, duplicative, or labour-intensive to maintain. Whereas past restructuring initiatives typically focused on a subset of Faculties or departments, however, this one undertakes a more holistic review of the Academic Division and how it should evolve in light of the current challenges and opportunities facing post-secondary institutions.<sup>1</sup>

A pan-institutional perspective is needed because no academic unit is an island. All of York's constituent parts are linked in terms of our institutional reputation, and the efforts and resources that contribute to it. The ability of any unit to provide world class scholarship and education depends on others thriving in their own fields of expertise. Units are crisscrossed by shared students, curricula, faculty networks, and fields of knowledge and creative activity, and moreover, they are financially interdependent. The *Faculties of the Future* initiative is inspired in part by examples of bold, macro-level restructuring at a number of universities internationally, as peer institutions ready themselves for the future of higher education and research.

The Provost & VP Academic will work with the Academic Policy, Planning, and Research Committee of Senate (APPRC) to design a fulsome consultation and co-design process jumping off from the ideas put forward in this paper. Particular efforts will be made to engage the many faculty members who have joined the University in recent years, so that we benefit from new perspective and ideas about what York could look like in future. Hearing from students will

---

<sup>1</sup> This paper uses "academic unit" to refer to both Faculties (led by a Dean or Principal and governed by a Faculty Council) and departments (formally established sub-units of a Faculty, led by a Chair or Director). It avoids the term "School" which is ambiguous as it can be used in the name of either a Faculty (e.g. the School of Arts, Media, Performance & Design is a Faculty), or a department (e.g. the School of Public Policy and Administration is a department within the Faculty of LA&PS). The paper focuses on the so-called "anchor" Faculties that offer academic programs. The Faculty of Graduate Studies plays a critical role in supporting graduate education and research across the University but does not have its own graduate degree enrolments.

also be crucial, in addition to collegial governance bodies, faculty who have experienced previous reorganizations, staff members, Deans, labour union executives, and others. It is worth emphasizing once again the central importance of a collaborative, collegial process of ideation and discussion.

Feedback emerging through this discussion will be synthesized to inform recommendations to APPRC on how the Academic Division could best re-organize itself to foster impactful learning and research programs that meet the evolving needs of students, minimize unhelpful barriers and costs, and project the distinctive strengths and identity of our Faculties and academic units. Implementing any actual changes to academic unit structures will require detailed proposals to be approved through normal governance processes engaging Faculty Councils, Senate and the Board of Governors, followed by implementation plans that respect collective agreements.

### **WHAT ABOUT THE GROWTH OF ADMINISTRATION?**

Some readers will ask whether the answer to budget deficits lies not only in reorganizing Faculties, but in reducing administration. In asking this question, some have referenced the 2023 report of the Auditor General of Ontario. The limited data underlying that report including some unfortunate errors have been explained elsewhere.<sup>2</sup> Nonetheless, it is accurate to point out that the University's administrative apparatus will have to be streamlined and reorganized to be more affordable in a period of lower revenues. That work is already underway through the Administrative projects within the York U Forward Action Plan, designed to achieve efficiencies and reduce the total overhead cost of administration. In addition, compensation for management and senior executive employees is being reduced by 3.6% over the next year, with projected savings of approximately \$5 million.<sup>3</sup>

Yet the need to review administrative structures and costs does not remove the need to also review the organization of our Faculties and academic units.<sup>4</sup> Neither administrative cost reduction, nor academic structure reorganization, can alone provide a full answer to our current challenges or position the University for future success. The Faculties are centred in this particular project because they drive the core academic mission, and are central to addressing the curricular and student experience issues raised here. This paper asks colleagues to think and talk about whether our current academic unit structures could be enhanced in order to better serve our core purposes of providing a world class research and learning environment.

---

<sup>2</sup> Inaccuracies in the OAGO report commentary on certain senior administrative roles are explained here: <https://www.yorku.ca/labour/wp-content/uploads/sites/105/2023/12/2023-12-08-York-University-Response-to-YUSA-News-Release.pdf>. Salary restraint measures have been announced for managerial and senior administrative employees of the University: <https://www.yorku.ca/forward/py-community-area/project-16/>.

<sup>3</sup><https://www.yorku.ca/yfile/2024/07/17/york-u-forward-action-plan-website-launches/>.

## WHY NOW?

The post-secondary landscape is being reshaped in dramatic ways that are likely to accelerate in the coming years. Emerging from the COVID pandemic, universities worldwide are facing stiffer competition to attract students who have more choices as to where and how they might gain the knowledge and skills they are looking for. Labour market needs and jobs are changing with technological disruption, boosting demand for programs in and around STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) and health. Many learners, including a high proportion of those who attend York, are seeking an education that provides greater personalization and flexibility to manage work and other responsibilities, and credentials that will position them well for meaningful, high-quality employment, including opportunities to apply knowledge and gain practical experience through work integrated learning. In a precarious world, these needs must be met in order for students to pursue not just material security, but also their dreams and ambitions to create positive change for their families and communities.

Beyond enrolment trends, the research landscape is also changing with funding agencies dedicating more dollars to problem-oriented, impact-driven research that speaks to urgent social and economic imperatives, often requiring team based, interdisciplinary collaborations. Likewise, governments and the citizens who vote them in or out, are asking more questions about how well universities are serving the changing needs of their students, graduates, and communities.

These are among the key trends that have triggered a notable wave of university reorganizations internationally. New structures are being designed to profile strategic directions, bring disciplines together around pressing global challenges, and usually to create larger and more diversified units that can share a common administrative infrastructure. While financial stresses may often serve as the trigger for these initiatives, it need not limit their vision. It is true that York's current financial challenges increase the urgency of this review, as many areas of the academy come under intense pressure from declining enrolment revenue. However, this paper assumes that academic reorganization will be most successful if it is driven primarily by our aspirations to provide excellent student learning experiences, based on internationally recognized excellence and impact in research, scholarship, and creative activity. In rethinking our academic structures, we have an opportunity to protect what we most value while responding effectively to significant factors impacting the future of higher education, in fulfilling our vision as a leading university.

Like most of our peer institutions, York has a long history of redistributing revenues internally among academic units to account for differential funding formulae, tuition fees, and costs of teaching and research. Redistribution has also been used to help units adjust to declining demand for particular programs, until such time as enrolment can be recovered, or until the unit can bring down costs to match their smaller size. In recent years, internal redistribution was made possible by healthy budget surpluses at the institutional level, generating positive carry forwards of \$204.5M (2017-18) to \$316.8M (2020-21). However, 2023-24 saw a dramatic turn in the University's finances. The proximate causes of this turn have been discussed elsewhere, and amount to enrolment loss, declining real value of government grants

and tuition in Ontario, and increased operating costs in a period of inflation.<sup>5</sup> Though each of our ten “anchor” Faculties has been impacted differently depending on its mix of students and disciplines, all are now experiencing financial challenges to some degree, and the size of in-year and cumulative deficits has grown rapidly in several. York has reached a critical juncture where our budget challenges are so widely shared across the Faculties, that sustainability can no longer be achieved through internal redistribution alone.

Just as no unit is an island, neither is any unit or group of colleagues to blame for the accumulation of external forces that has undermined the sustainability of our sector. Yet as an institution we must grapple with the question of why York has been harder hit by these forces of change than some of our competitors, and with the impact this is having on our resources and on the ability of academic units to be world leaders in their respective fields. By facing these challenges openly and collaboratively we can overcome them and emerge stronger. Rather than stabilizing or returning to a previous status quo, it is more likely that conditions of volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (“VUCA”) will bring further disruptive change that affects the well-being of universities. These challenges can feel overwhelming and many institutions will be tempted to shift into a defensive posture of internal competition over increasingly scarce resources, that risks leading them into a downward spiral. However the strength of collegial governance at York University gives us the ability instead to discuss openly how we are falling short in the current environment, and how we could take proactive steps to future-proof our graduates, and our institution. Being ready to adapt to changing conditions is essential if York is to continue having the positive social and economic impact that has defined us, for our students, campuses, and communities near and far.

Fortunately, York’s rise over the last decade means we are coming from a position of strength. Our collective successes have enabled us to attract outstanding new colleagues to bolster our faculty complement; to expand the number of research chairs and organized research units; to invest in facilities and infrastructure renewal across the University; to increase our community impact through innovation hubs and partnerships; to strengthen our global knowledge networks; and to build up our reputation as reflected in national and international rankings and prestigious awards for our scholars. All of these strengths, along with projections for continued population growth in the city of Toronto and York Region, put York University in an enviable position compared to many of our peers. In the short term, however, we are faced with a budget challenge that cannot easily be solved within our existing operating model.

Rearranging academic unit structures will not bring about recovery on its own, unless it facilitates other critical work on program innovation to appeal to learners of the future, enhances research excellence and reputation, improves our student experience, retention and outcomes post-graduation, and delivers administrative support services more effectively and efficiently.

---

<sup>5</sup> See [York University’s three-year budget plan approved - YFile](#); [Actioning the University’s three-year budget plan approved by the Board of Governors - YFile \(yorku.ca\)](#); [York U Forward Action Plan website launches - YFile](#); [Progress towards a strong, stable future for York University - YFile](#).

A rethink of our academic structures is especially timely in the culminating year of the 2020-2025 University Academic Plan. Given the dramatic changes in the broader landscape since 2020, *Faculties of the Future* provides an opportunity for deeper analysis of the implications for York which can then inform the preparation of the next UAP for Senate approval.

This initiative is also well timed to inform planning for the proposed School of Medicine and opportunities to further expand York’s health-related offerings. Following confirmation by the province in spring 2024 that it is prepared to fund a new medical school at York University, a proposal is in development to establish the School. In consulting with APPRC and the Faculties on this forthcoming proposal, it will be helpful to consider the overall structure and relevant strengths of the University’s existing academic units.

To be clear, however, the need to reconsider academic unit structures exists separate and apart from any decisions on a future School of Medicine. The issues raised in this paper need to be thought through and pathways to sustained academic leadership and financial resiliency clarified for our current array of academic units, regardless of any new ones to be created. Once again, the best path to financial sustainability runs through the academic and research excellence that will draw talented people to York as the world changes around us.

### WHAT WILL SUCCESS LOOK LIKE?

Considering the ideal *Faculties of the Future* is a major undertaking and any recommendations emerging this year would take more than one academic year to implement. Establishing goals and criteria for success at the outset can provide a guiding compass along the way. Feedback is invited on the following suggested goals and measures of success.

Goals of Academic Reorganization	Successful Outcomes
<p>1. Facilitate the pursuit of academic excellence and impact, in a context of rapid change and uncertainty.</p>	<p>More organic formation of interdisciplinary clusters to pursue problem-based research and curricula as knowledge needs evolve. Increase adaptive program design. Increase York’s responsiveness in both research and teaching to urgent issues and topics of the day.</p>
<p>2. Create a leading value proposition for current students and diverse learners of the future.</p>	<p>Organizational structure makes it easier for students with diverse needs to succeed at York. Students have clear and flexible pathways to complete programs, with access to needed supports and advice. Students can easily combine any area of fundamental learning with professional skills that enhance career</p>



	<p>opportunities. Units are supported to deliver on enriched pedagogies (eg flipped classrooms, co-op streams, capstone projects). Improve first choice applications, retention, graduation rates, student satisfaction, post-graduation career and graduate education outcomes. More students from populations underrepresented at universities are coming to York, and completing their programs.</p>
<p>3. Organizational structures promote collaboration among faculty and staff, along with equitable and efficient allocation of resources.</p>	<p>Reduce total number and increase average size of units to include larger clusters of faculty and staff. Increase tenure stream faculty time available for teaching and research while also enhancing collegial self-governance. Create more community for early career and underrepresented faculty members. Strengthen communication and co-planning within and across units. Faculty have better access to shared services. Staff work in larger groups with more back up. Administrative overhead costs are reduced. Internal competition/duplication is reduced. Units are empowered to create educational and research programs that compete externally with the best in the world.</p>
<p>4. Project and amplify York’s distinctive identity and values, including its commitments to social responsibility and decolonizing, equity, diversity, and inclusion.</p>	<p>Academic units are structured to raise profile of thematic strengths that differentiate York. Increased visibility of York’s commitments to inclusive and excellent interdisciplinary education and socially relevant research. Maintain offering of curriculum that centres DEDI. Reputational gains at both the subject/discipline and University levels. Increased competitiveness in attracting faculty, research funding, external partners.</p>

## PRINCIPLES AND PROCESSES

Much has been learned from past restructuring efforts at York. One important lesson is that academic structures are linked to scholarly identities and communities that matter to people. The prospect of changing these structures understandably causes anxiety. However, it can also create excitement and commitment to an aspirational vision, if colleagues are engaged in a process that allows them to co-design new organizational structures. Gathering learnings from our own evolutionary history should be a priority as part of this process.

In addition, a core principle of this initiative should be that any option for change must be considered through the lens of its impact on institutional commitments to decolonizing, equity, diversity, and inclusion (DEDI). Beyond avoiding negative impacts, restructuring discussions should look for ways to enhance the conditions for DEDI in education, research, and collegial life.

Notably, principles to guide restructuring were set out in 2006 by the former Academic Planning and Policy Committee of Senate (APPC) and remain relevant today.<sup>6</sup> APPC advised that a review of structures should attend to the following goals and outcomes:

**“Resources:** Changes of various kinds, including those relating to structures, must be sensitive to resource questions and further the cause of making the wisest possible use of academic resources in line with priorities. The sufficiency of resources is one aspect of proposals. Proponents must also be clear about the resource implications for other activities.

**Differentiation:** The University must continue to foster innovation and collaboration without creating direct competition.

**Student accessibility:** As our structures evolve, we must continue to offer a variety of pathways, harmonize Faculty requirements where appropriate, maximize student mobility and choice, and minimize bureaucratic barriers. Access includes the provision of appropriate academic supports for students.

**Enhancing the University’s profile and impact:** Changes in structure need to maximize clarity and visibility, for external audiences as well as current members of the University community.”

As for process, APPC noted this will vary depending on the particular context, but in keeping with principles of collegial self-governance, it said that restructuring proposals should be developed in a manner that emphasizes:

---

<sup>6</sup> *Review of Academic Structures: Advisory Statement on Planning Principles*, APPC, June 4, 2006.

[start of quotation]

- early consultation among senior administrators and units most directly affected
- input from the ‘grassroots’, including faculty, students and staff most directly affected
- transparency regarding resource and workload implications, at the stage when concrete information can be generated;
- respect for collective bargaining agreements, and the needs of individual faculty members;
- opportunities for the wider community of students, faculty and staff to comment on proposals as they are refined;
- the need to keep Senate and its committees publicly informed of developments as they emerge;
- adequate recognition for those who undertake the work of implementing structural reform;
- careful attention to pacing, to avoid transitions that are either too protracted or too rushed.

[end of quotation]

A full process for engagement remains to be fleshed out with APPRC.

Finally, a good discussion of *Faculties of the Future* will require a commitment to open minded listening and dialogue, as well as mutual respect, fairness, empathy, and care. Those responsible for driving the process will need to be responsive to input received, and to questions that require additional research, data, and transparency. All participants are responsible to ensure that the time spent on this exercise enhances relationships and trust, rather than eroding them. Both the process and the shared vision that emerges should generate optimism that change will produce net positive benefits for the institution as a whole, while best supporting all of its constituent elements.

A discussion of possible restructuring must also proceed from an understanding of where we are starting from.

## **PURPOSE OF ACADEMIC UNIT STRUCTURES**

Faculties and departments are often a taken-for-granted backdrop to academic life, with limited awareness by faculty, students, or staff of the basic purpose or functions of these structures. At its core, an academic unit is a mechanism to organize the work of faculty and staff in delivering a set of thematically linked educational and research programs. It is the structure through which collegial decisions are made about faculty appointments, degree requirements, admissions standards, course offerings, teaching assignments, and other matters that directly shape the delivery of the core academic mission. A Faculty is led by a Dean or Principal, the senior academic administrator, who is appointed by the Board of Governors on the recommendation of the President. The Dean or Principal holds fiduciary responsibility as an officer of the University including for the Faculty budget and resource allocation within it. A department is an academic unit within a Faculty, and is led by a Chair or

Director who is a member of the unit with some responsibilities to organize the academic operations of the department on behalf of colleagues, especially the mounting of courses and programs, subject to the Dean's or Principal's approval from a resource perspective, and with the responsibility of annually assigning teaching duties as the Dean's or Principal's designate.

Students typically are focused on their program first and foremost, both in deciding where to attend university and what courses they will take, in what order. The name or composition of the department or Faculty that delivers the program is generally of less interest to students, though it may affect where they obtain access to academic services such as advising or petitions for academic relief. It is expected that students will move across academic unit boundaries (departments and/or Faculties) to complete different degree requirements, or different credentials within their degree such as a major, minor, or certificate.

Both Faculties and departments generally reflect a concept of knowledge as divided into traditional disciplines (though some have sought to redefine themselves in more interdisciplinary ways). This longstanding concept of a discrete discipline has the value of being easily recognizable to many within and beyond the academy. However it can also have the disadvantage of creating artificial boundaries among fields of knowledge that are in reality quite fluid and constantly changing. Likewise, academic unit structures can create barriers to working across disciplines. This is important in an era when traditional fields of expertise are being broken down or combined in new ways to address emerging labour market and knowledge needs of society.

## **CURRENT ACADEMIC UNIT STRUCTURES AT YORK**

The Academic Division of York University currently has ten Faculties offering degree programs at the undergraduate and graduate levels. Table 1 shows this is within the range characteristic of larger universities in Canada, but notably three of our peers – Carleton, Concordia, and McMaster – have only five or six Faculties. Internationally some universities have reduced this even further, such as the University of Exeter which recently moved from six Colleges with 40 departments, into three Faculties with 25 departments, each with 50 or more faculty members.<sup>7</sup>

These data suggest there is no one answer to the optimal number of academic units, for a university of York's size. However, they do suggest there is a range of different organizational models that can work, including ones with relatively fewer Faculties and departments.

---

<sup>7</sup> See below for further discussion of the University of Exeter's restructuring, and the Data Appendix for additional presentations of data that underpin the discussion paper.

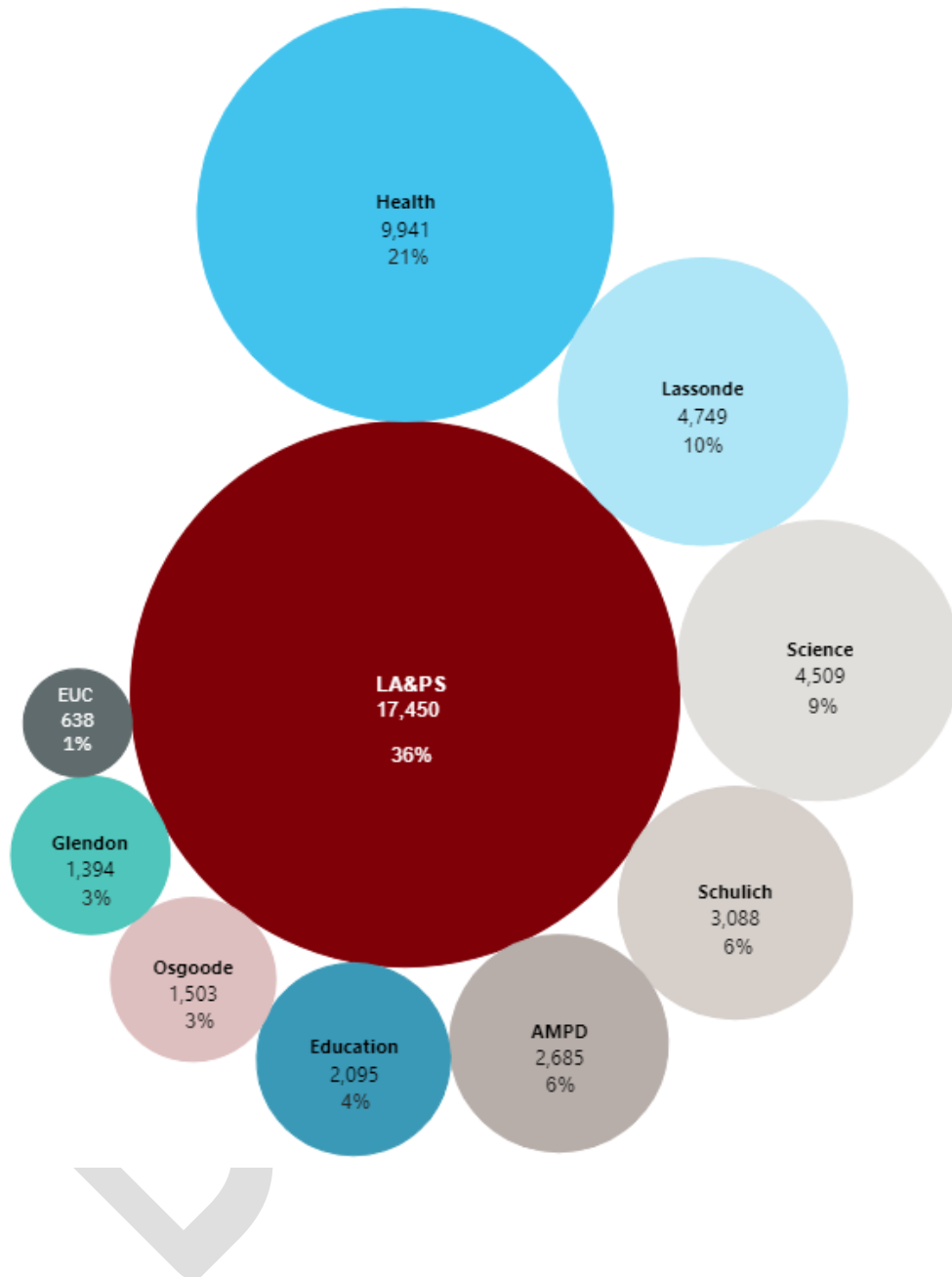
**Table 1: Group of 12 University Comparisons, 2022-2023**

University	# of Faculties	Students (UG and GR)	Academic FTE	Revenue (\$000's)
University of British Columbia	21	68,277	2,991	\$1,842,168
University of Toronto	19	95,874	2,901	\$2,914,385
Toronto Metropolitan University	9	48,783	1,173	\$742,665
Simon Fraser University	9	31,818	1,068	\$643,556
McGill University	11	38,118	1,989	\$874,035
University of Calgary	15	37,197	1,830	\$843,528
Western University	11	43,242	1,323	\$876,330
University of Alberta	13 Faculties organized into 3 Colleges, and 3 Standalone Faculties	43,902	1,536	\$1,117,239
McMaster University	6	37,875	939	\$851,697
Carleton University	5	31,374	1,008	\$531,476
Concordia University	5	38,763	1,077	\$563,388
York University	10	52,791	1,590	\$1,067,980
<b>Overall Average</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>47,335</b>	<b>1,619</b>	<b>\$1,072,371</b>

***Divergent Scale and Complexity***

Some basic statistics show that our current Faculties are characterized by extremes of scale, whether measured by number of students or number of faculty members (note that faculty: student ratios are discussed below).

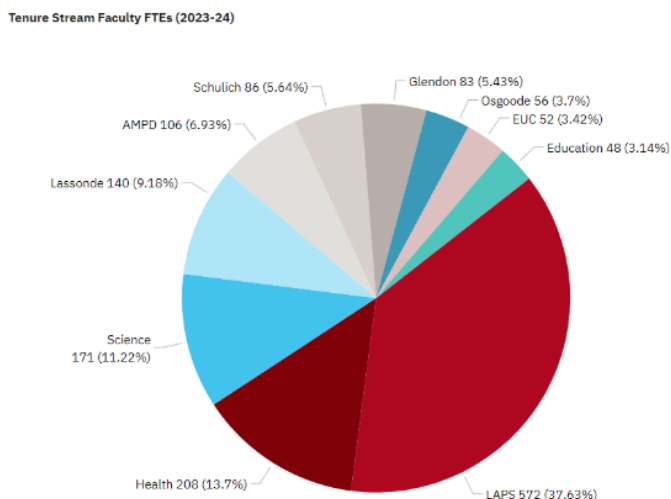
**Figure 1: Current Faculties, Total Full-Time Equivalent Students 2023-24<sup>8</sup>**



<sup>8</sup> This table reflects all Faculty of Education enrolment. However, in several tables within this report, for the Faculty of Education, only BA enrolments are reported. However, the majority of the Faculty's undergraduate enrolments come from the BEd program. These BEd enrolments are typically excluded from new student headcount figures, as BEd students are often concurrently enrolled in another faculty or have completed a program in another faculty before continuing into the BEd. As a result, the exclusion of these enrolments may give the appearance of lower overall enrolment for the Faculty of Education, when in fact the Faculty consistently meets its enrolment targets. It should also be noted that the previous enrolment cap on BEd programs imposed by the Ministry of Colleges and Universities (MCU) no longer applies.

**Figure 2: Tenure Stream Faculty FTEs per Faculty, 2023-24**

Faculty	Full-time Faculty FTEs
AMPD	106
Education	48
EUC	52
Glendon	83
Health	208
LAPS	572
Lassonde	140
Osgoode	56
Schulich	86
Science	171
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,521</b>



Note: Tenure stream only. Full-time Faculty Adjusted FTEs are for the fiscal year. The data reflect FTE splits for cross or joint appointments.

Extremes of scale also characterize our departments. Four of York’s Faculties are non-departmentalized (Education, EUC, Osgoode, and Schulich). The six departmentalized Faculties had a total of 60 departments immediately prior to September 1, 2024, and this has declined to 49 as of September 1, 2024 with the implementation of departmental restructuring in AMPD and Glendon College.

**Table 2: Number of Departments and Average Department Size (Faculty FTE) by Faculty, as of September 1, 2024**

Faculty	Number of Departments	Average Dept Size
AMPD	7	15
Education	1	48
EUC	1	52
Glendon	4	22
Health	5	42
LAPS	20	29
Lassonde	4	35
Osgoode	1	56
Schulich	1	86
Science	5	34
<b>Total</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>42</b>

Averages can be deceiving, and a closer look shows even larger differences of scale between the smallest and largest academic units at York (see Figure 4 below).

Size matters here, on a number of levels. Small Faculties or departments may create tight knit communities of students, staff, and faculty. However, they also experience a number of challenges. A

lack of scale can mean that a minimalist staff complement must attempt to cover all the functions and serve all the constituencies that make up a Faculty, including the operations of Faculty Council and its committees, student recruitment and student services, preparation of

budgets, strategic plans, Integrated Resource Plans, advancement and other external engagement, communications, facilities, local IT services, etc. Staff may have no one to back up their roles, and a small Faculty has less opportunity than a department of equivalent size to access shared administrative supports and infrastructure. A small Faculty may feel that its staff resources are too constrained to pursue strategic goals the way they would like to, while at the same time administrative overhead costs take up a disproportionate share of its budget.

Further, in a smaller Faculty, academic colleagues tend to carry heavier service loads as they must populate a full suite of Faculty Council committees, as well as sending representatives to Senate and all of its Committees. Likewise, smaller departments have fewer colleagues to share the minimum responsibilities of being Chair, Undergraduate Program Director or Graduate Program Director and to populate departmental committees for faculty searches, curriculum development, adjudicating research release applications, or other purposes. At some point, these extra service burdens erode the tenure stream faculty's research and teaching capacity to a point that outweighs the benefits of additional time spent on service. Service commitments can be especially onerous for underrepresented faculty members. Those faculty who are early in career or who identify as part of an underrepresented or historically marginalized group, are also more likely to find themselves isolated as the "only one" within a smaller department.

Smaller scale also limits the degree to which curricular offerings can be diversified to appeal to changing student audiences, and limits the visibility and accessibility of the Faculty's course offerings to students elsewhere in the University. It is harder to be noticed by students in other Faculties, and harder to share curriculum across Faculty boundaries. These barriers are intensified, often to the detriment of smaller Faculties, by rules and requirements that limit the ability of students to broaden their education by taking courses outside their home Faculty.

Large size can create economies of scale and allow a more diverse program portfolio, but at some point, scale can also become detrimental. Departments in a large Faculty may not feel sufficiently connected to engage deeply with the overall Faculty or University Academic Plan, and collegial relationships among units may not be close enough to promote cooperation and collaboration for the benefit of students. Instead, there is a risk of units coming to see each other as competitors to the point of duplicating courses and programs, creating a maze of different program rules and requirements that frustrate student progression and harm retention efforts, and blocking new ideas for program innovation brought forward by other units. The more faculty and units that must be won over, the harder it will be to build consensus toward changes that are perceived as against the interests of any one unit, leading to a loss of student-centric thinking and agility to respond to fast changing external competition.

### ***Internal Competition and Duplication of Efforts***

There is good evidence that internal competition is currently getting in our way, both within Faculties and between them. The Keele campus alone has multiple academic units offering programs and courses in computer sciences/information technology, business and management, economics, film and media studies, health studies, statistics, philosophy,



literature, history, theatre, and Indigenous studies. There are no doubt differences in emphasis and approach that add intellectual depth and diversity for our students and our research culture. However, the proliferation of courses in a subject area can also prevent any one course section from attracting a critical mass of students. Especially in areas of the curriculum that tend to attract small but important audiences, there would be value in bringing those students together across units to form community. Further, the replication of similar-named courses in different units creates student confusion, progression challenges, and administrative burden.

For example, significant advising resources are needed to explain to students which of two similar-sounding courses they should take; why they can take two courses that cover virtually the same material in two different Faculties and receive credit for both; or conversely why the course they took in one unit does not count to fulfill a very similar requirement to complete their major in another unit, so they must enrol for an extra term of study, or take another course or seminar in the same area.

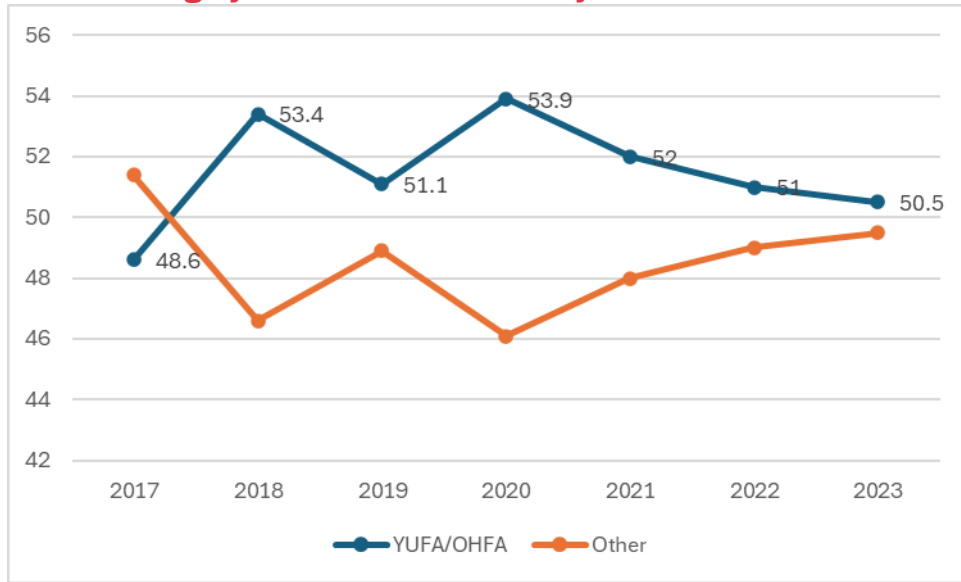
It must be acknowledged that both students and faculty bear the consequences for our lack of internal coordination. Students lose time and other opportunities, incur additional costs, and question if the University really cares about the quality of their overall learning experience. Low enrolled courses are vulnerable to being cancelled, disrupting faculty planning and their ability to teach regularly in their main areas of expertise. York's fragmented academic unit structures unintentionally contribute to these problems. Our retention, graduation rates, and student satisfaction ratings reflect in part the difficulty students have in navigating our programs and progressing along a clear path to timely completion. The third Strategic Mandate Agreement between the province and each of its universities defined performance targets for a number of metrics, several of which are focused on student outcomes. While York has consistently met almost all of its institutional targets, the Auditor General of Ontario found that our performance still lags the sector and recommended that the University develop an improvement strategy.<sup>9</sup>

Having many relatively small units also contributes to course proliferation. The average number of course sections offered across the Academic Division over the last three years was more than double the total teaching capacity of our tenure stream faculty.

---

<sup>9</sup> Office of the Auditor General of Ontario, *Value-for-Money Audit: York University Operations and Capital* (at 33-36), available online at [https://auditor.on.ca/en/content/annualreports/arreports/en23/AR\\_YorkU\\_en23.pdf](https://auditor.on.ca/en/content/annualreports/arreports/en23/AR_YorkU_en23.pdf). Initiatives to strengthen performance on SMA3 metrics are included in the York U Forward Action Plan, and are being monitored by the Office of Institutional Planning and Analysis (OIPA).

**Table 3: % of Teaching by Tenure Stream Faculty versus others**



Once again, this is an unintended consequence of good faith efforts to provide students with a stimulating array of choices based on the full range of our faculty expertise. The problem is that courses are created and mounted at the unit level with limited visibility into what other units are doing. Coming together in larger clusters for curriculum development and course planning would create the potential to reduce the number of competing course offerings in any one term, increase student opportunities to learn from tenure stream faculty, and allow more planful alternating of courses so that diverse approaches to a subject are represented in the curriculum without undermining each other.

### ***Empowering Research, Scholarly, and Creative Communities***

Restructuring could enhance informal research networks and synergies, potentially around specific themes or grand challenges where York is or could be a leader. Research strengths do not map neatly onto academic unit structures, and perhaps especially at York with its long tradition of promoting interdisciplinarity. Using the 5 broad publication categories in the QS University Rankings by Subject Area, many commonalities and complementarities can be observed across Faculties. An important caveat is that this analysis is limited to publications in academic journals listed in the SciVal database, making it at best a partial picture of York's scholarly and creative output.

**Table 4: Proportion of Publications in QS Subject Areas by Faculty, 2023**

**Proportion of Publications in QS Subject Areas by Faculty (2023)**

Faculty	Arts and Humanities	Engineering and Technology	Life Sciences & Medicine	Natural Sciences	Social Sciences & Management
<b>AMPD</b>	7.4%	0.9%	0.2%	0.2%	1.2%
<b>Education</b>	4.3%	0.2%	1.1%	0.2%	5.0%
<b>EUC</b>	4.9%	4.1%	2.8%	3.9%	7.9%
<b>Glendon</b>	5.3%	0.5%	1.6%	0.6%	3.4%
<b>Health</b>	16.7%	6.0%	<b>53.5%</b>	3.1%	22.2%
<b>LAPS</b>	<b>48.1%</b>	13.4%	6.8%	5.7%	<b>32.5%</b>
<b>Lassonde</b>	1.9%	<b>48.7%</b>	4.6%	<b>25.4%</b>	4.4%
<b>Osgoode</b>	2.8%	0.1%	1.4%		4.2%
<b>Schulich</b>	7.2%	4.4%	1.9%	1.4%	<b>15.3%</b>
<b>Science</b>	1.6%	21.5%	25.9%	<b>59.6%</b>	3.9%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

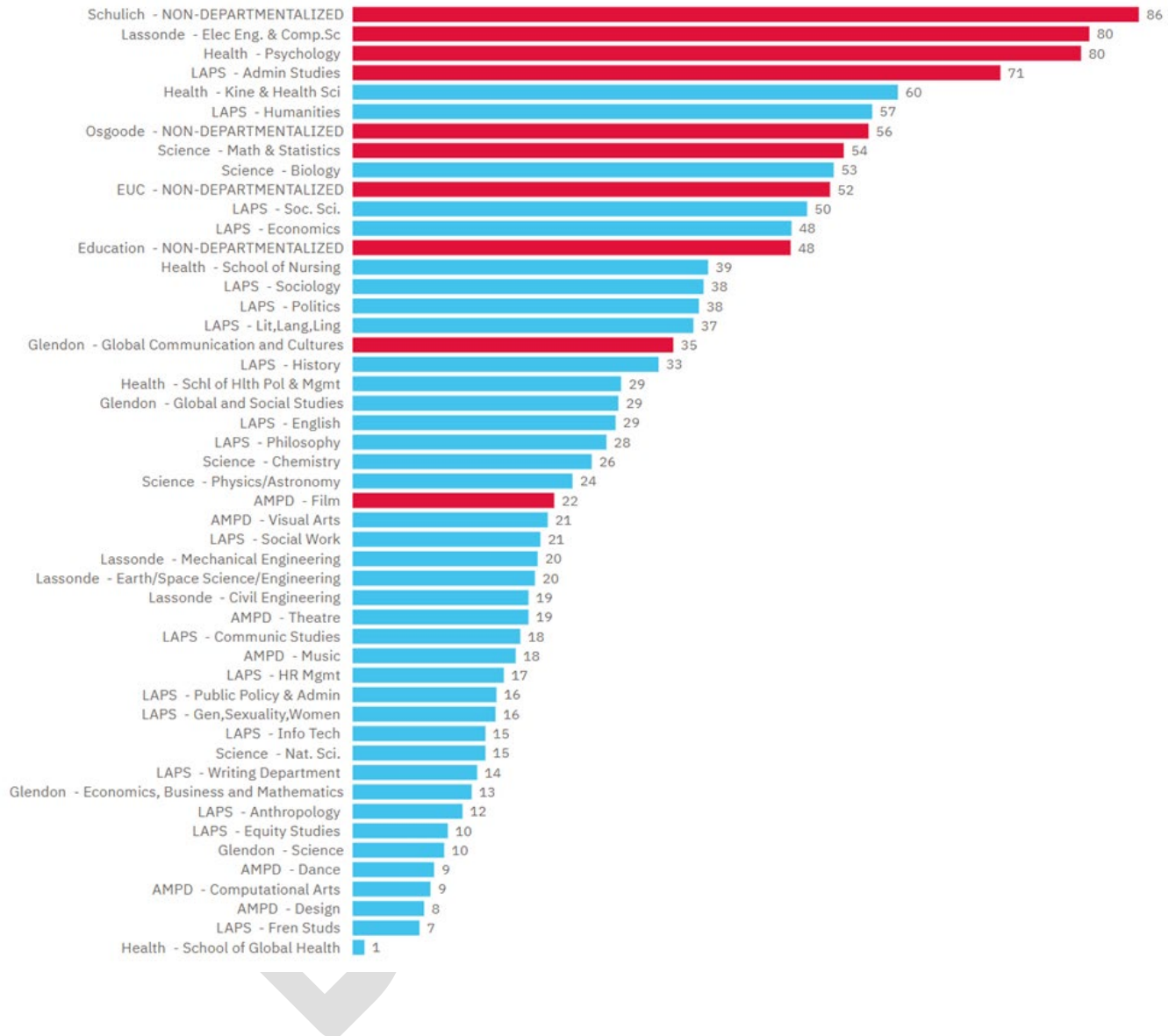
York already stands out for its success in larger team-based, collaborative and partnered research. Lowering the institutional walls among faculty who are logical collaborators on many emerging research questions could help to further leverage this strength, positioning our scholars to attract funding from international, non-profit, and philanthropic sources that are often focused on impacting complex problems facing communities.

***Equity in Decision Making, Collegial Voice, and Workloads***

Differential size among Faculties and departments has raised questions about workload equity and representation in collegial governance fora. In particular, Figure 4 below shows that the nine largest departments at the University are larger than or of similar size to our smaller Faculties. Under our governance frameworks, Faculties automatically have a certain level of decision-making autonomy and voice at leadership and governance tables that is qualitatively different than a department, a distinction that may seem illogical or unfair to our largest departments.

**Figure 3: Full-Time Tenure Stream Faculty FTEs by Department, September 1, 2024**

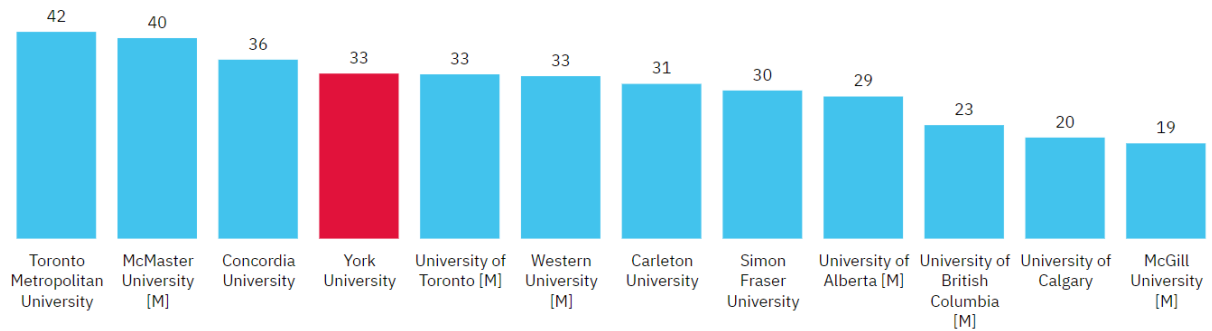
Note: **Red** is used to highlight the largest unit by Tenure Stream Faculty FTEs within each Faculty.



Scale also tends to correlate with larger student: faculty ratios. On average, York's student: faculty ratio is in the mid- to upper range of our peer institutions. However, within York there are significant variances across Faculties, as reflected below.

**Figure 4: Student to Academic FTE Ratio by University, 2022-23**

Student to Academic FTE Ratio by University (2022-23)



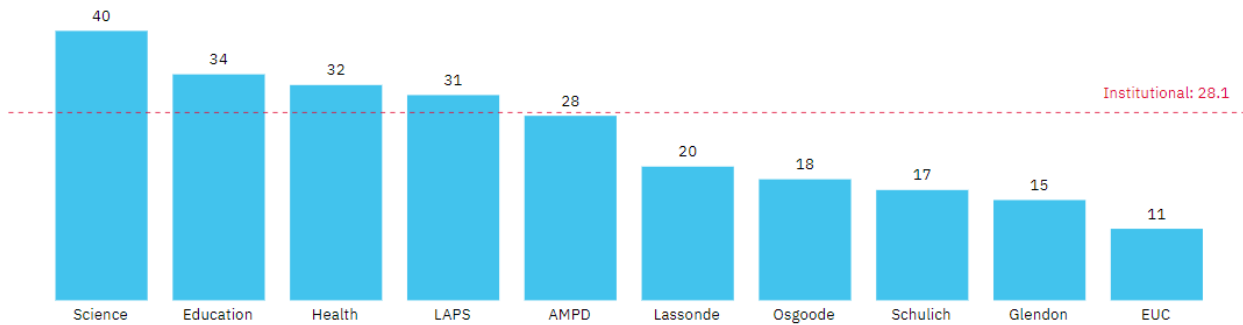
Note: [M] indicates that the university has a Medical School.

Source: University websites and CAUBO

Western University data sources: University website, Statistics Canada, CAUBO, and MCU Enrolment Data

**Figure 5: Undergraduate Student FFTE to Faculty FTE Ratio, 2023-24**

Undergraduate Student to Academic FTE Ratio by Faculty (2023-24)



The Student-Faculty ratio is calculated by dividing the number of undergraduate responsible student Fiscal Full-Time Equivalent (FFTEs) by the number of Full-Time Faculty Tenure Stream Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs).

These variations can be explained in part as a function of pedagogical imperatives for small group instruction, such as in studios or second-language classes, or based on what competitor schools offer in professional programs. On the other hand, they can sometimes reflect enrolments falling below their targeted levels. When Faculties experience enrolment decline, their faculty complement size is often slower to change. Persistent or growing disparities can leave faculty in larger units feeling at a disadvantage in terms of the educational experience and program innovation they can offer to students, their research productivity, or their personal work-life balance.

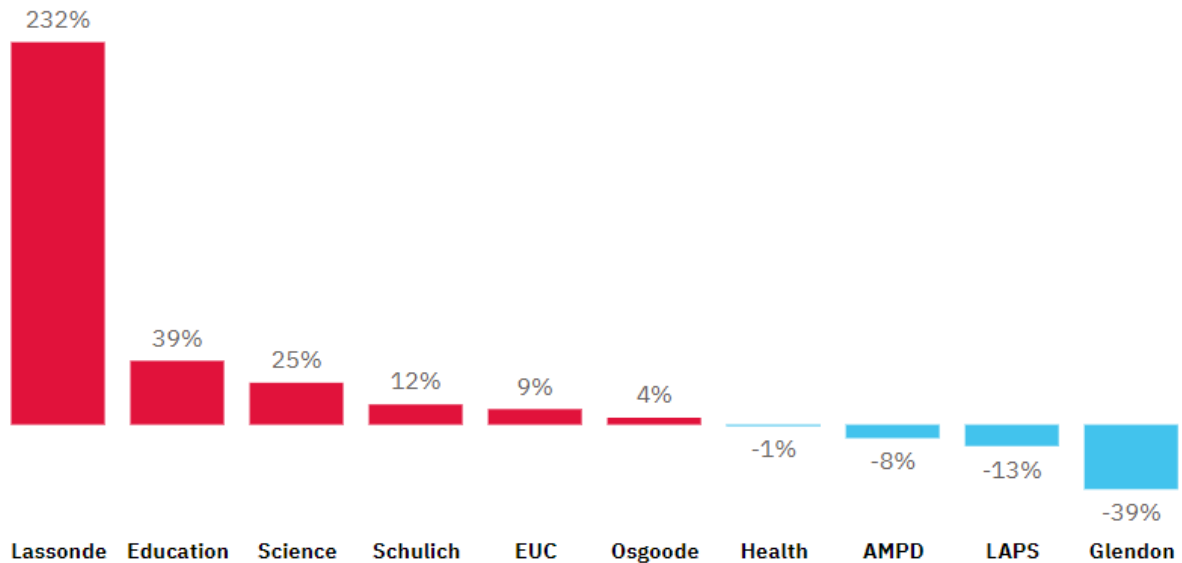
### **Aligning with Enrolment and Funding Trends**

Over the last decade and more a broad shift in student demand has been occurring internationally, with growing enrolment in STEM and health programs and flat or declining enrolment in the social sciences and especially the humanities, leaving many of the latter feeling vulnerable and at risk.

York as a whole has benefited from seizing growth opportunities in STEM and health, but it must be acknowledged that becoming more comprehensive has also been challenging for us as a University that was founded primarily on strong liberal arts, fine arts, and professional programs. Expanding STEM and health disciplines requires new kinds of infrastructure, faculty expertise, and specialized staff supports. There is also a cultural shift involved in broadening the University’s identity. Yet the importance of having responded to new areas of demand is graphically illustrated by changes in Faculty enrolments over the last decade.

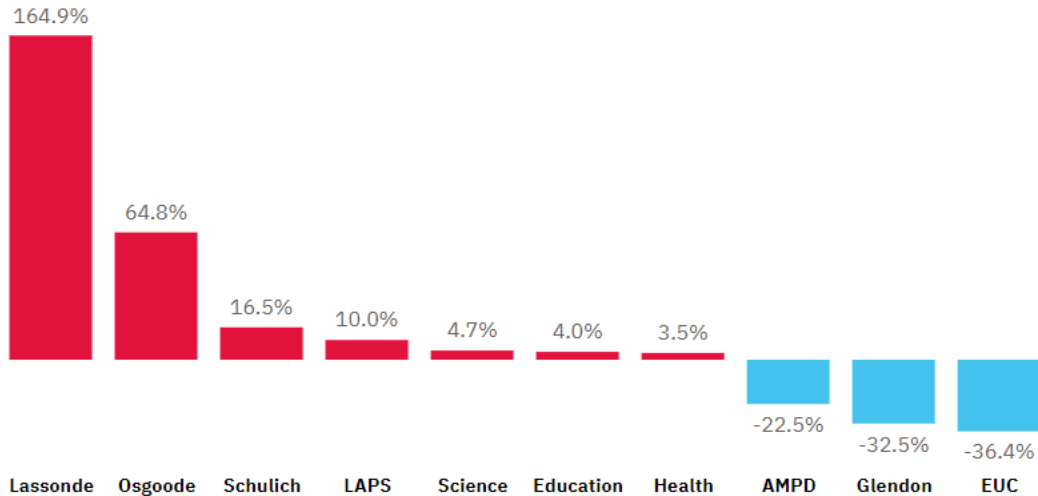
**Figure 6: Undergraduate Percentage Enrolment Change over 10 Years (2014/15 to 2023/24) by Faculty**

Undergraduate Percentage Enrolment Change over 10 years (2014/15 to 2023/24) by Faculty



## Figure 7: Graduate Percentage Enrolment Change over 10 Years (2014/15 to 2023/24) by Faculty

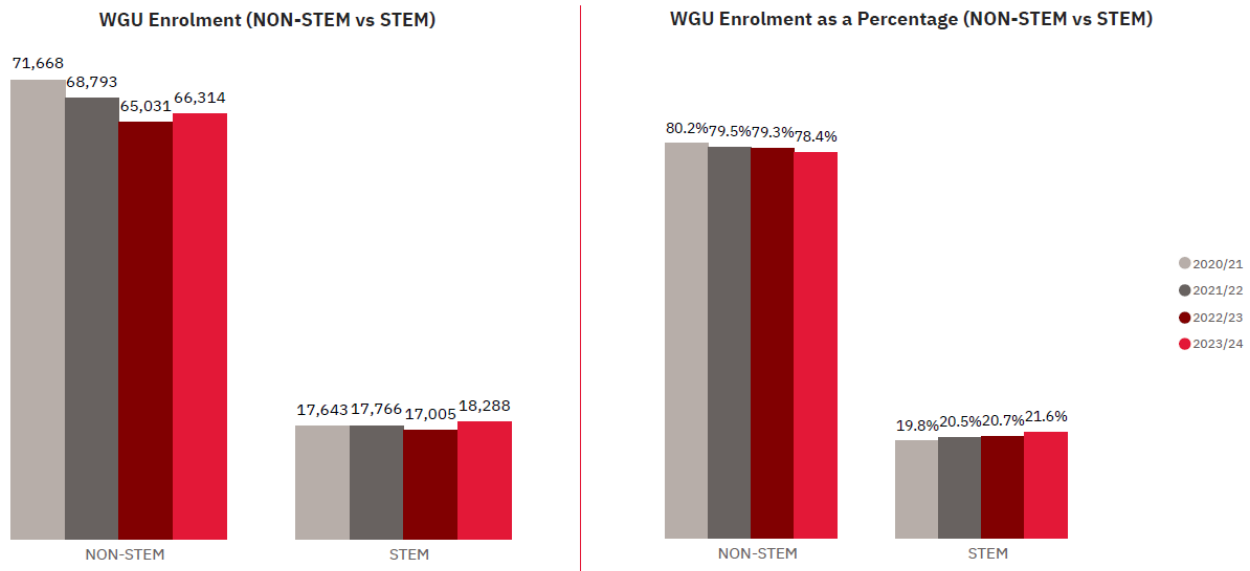
Graduate Percentage Enrolment Change over 10 years (2014/15 to 2023/24) by Faculty



York’s UAP 2020-2025 includes the following important sentence: “We reassert our foundational commitment to the arts, humanities, and social sciences not only as fields of inquiry but as modes of apprehending human existence at this critical juncture.” In keeping with this commitment the University has continued to invest in these areas with faculty appointments, research chairs, seed funds, research centres, specialized facilities, and hosting significant scholarly events such as the 2023 Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences. We have a lot at stake in ensuring the continued vibrancy of these disciplines, which also remain among our best performing areas in international rankings. Not surprisingly, York is also increasingly recognized for its leadership in integrating the humanities and social sciences with STEM, a signature aspect of some of our most high-profile initiatives including the Connected Minds project. Every corner of our University is inflected in some way by the strength of humanities, arts, and social sciences at York.

York’s decision to add capacity in STEM and health areas was nonetheless timely. Governments at all levels continue to signal these areas are likely to be the ones to benefit from any new post-secondary funding. The same principle may inform future immigration policies and affordances for student visas and post-graduate work permits. This points once again to the interdependence of the University’s different parts. By preserving our excellence in traditional areas of strength, while also adjusting the balance of activities over time, we will ensure the overall health of the institution and its ability to respond to evolving needs of the province and country.

**Figure 8: STEM Enrolment (2021-22 to 2023-24) – Excluding Markham**



**Note:** Excludes Collaborative Nursing and Direct Entry Nursing and Markham Digital Technologies enrolments. Includes graduate and undergraduate.  
 STEM includes CIP 11, 14, 15, 26, 27, 29, 40, 41:  
 11 - COMPUTER AND INFORMATION SCIENCES AND SUPPORT SERVICES.  
 14 - ENGINEERING.  
 15 - ENGINEERING TECHNOLOGIES AND ENGINEERING-RELATED FIELDS.  
 26 - BIOLOGICAL AND BIOMEDICAL SCIENCES.  
 27 - MATHEMATICS AND STATISTICS.  
 29 - MILITARY TECHNOLOGIES AND APPLIED SCIENCES.  
 40 - PHYSICAL SCIENCES.  
 41 - SCIENCE TECHNOLOGIES/TECHNICIANS.

Some liberal arts programs in Canada and internationally have been able to attract new student interest by introducing more problem- and project-based learning, providing greater flexibility for students to design personalized, flexible learning plans, and especially drawing a clear link to experiential opportunities and potential career paths. In addition, the growing field of digital arts and humanities offers new avenues for innovation by integrating technology with traditional humanities disciplines, enabling students to explore data-driven research, digital archives, and multimedia projects. Yet maintaining excellent quality can also be done on a smaller scale, and regardless of any new growth in these areas that is possible York should continue to be aspirational in pursuing excellence in the humanities, arts, and social sciences.

York’s current academic structure may not be helping however, to sustain high quality, contemporary offerings in these fields. A multiplicity of similarly named programs are currently spread across two campuses and among many units. Colleagues are confronted with the structural impediments to planning across unit boundaries in an environment marked by internal competition for a limited pool of students, as well as recruitment and other resources. To ensure these vital areas of our curriculum and scholarship can not only survive but thrive, it is worth exploring the possibilities to bring them together in larger departments or schools, whether to concentrate disciplinary expertise or to build synergies across disciplines. Doing so could be conducive to a set of clearly differentiated offerings that is more easily communicated and explained to students. It could furthermore promote a collaborative approach to the pedagogical and curricular innovation that will be needed to sustain York’s position as a top destination for studying the arts, humanities and social sciences. While this work should be

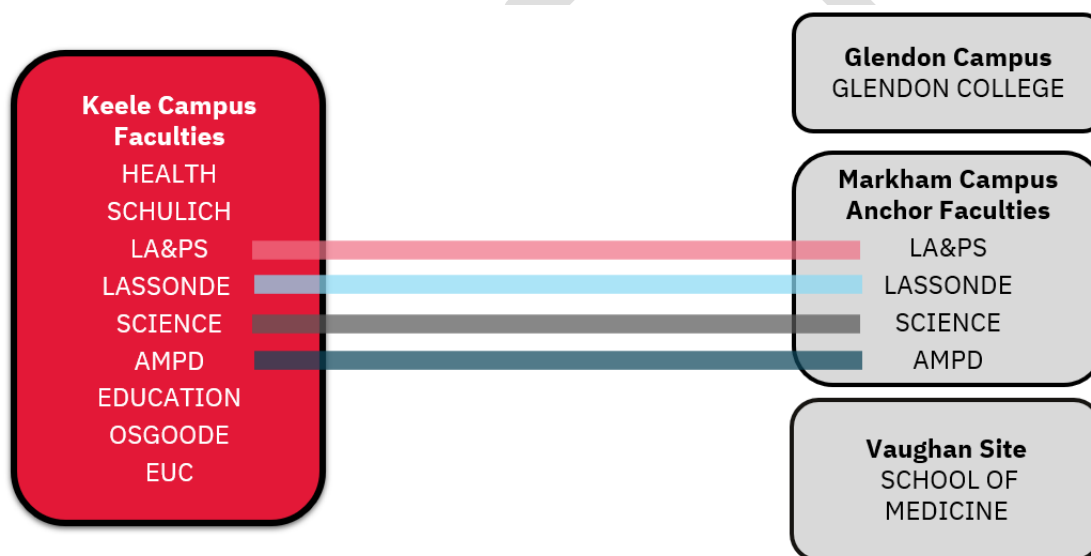


driven by the pursuit of excellence, we should also not lose sight of some of the specific financial challenges that might be helped during these discussions. It is worth noting, for example, that the Glendon campus needs approximately twice as many students as are currently enrolled in order to be financially sustainable.

### Utilizing Multi-Campus Structures

Faculties and departments must be conceptually distinguished from the campuses where they operate. In establishing the Markham Campus, a decision was reached not to create any new academic units, but to have four Faculties extend their operations to a second campus. This path was helpful to minimize competition between the Keele and Markham campuses in designing the programs to be offered. However, it also increases the internal complexity of the four participating Faculties.

**Figure 9: York University GTA Campuses and Faculties**



Note: Inter-faculty teaching is conducted across different campuses.

By contrast, Glendon College operates exclusively on the Glendon campus. This too has its disadvantages, as similar programs are offered at both Keele and Glendon, albeit Glendon has a distinctive set of language requirements. Colleagues who know the cognate programs intimately can point to differences between them. However, this is not apparent from program names and has not been easy to articulate to either prospective or current students. Cyclical Program Reviews have identified the need for more coordination between cognate programs at the two campuses, as discussed by APPRC in connection with the Glendon departmental restructuring proposal approved in 2023-24.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> [senate-agenda-20240215Rev.pdf \(yorku.ca\)](#) Academic Policy, Planning and Research Committee Report to Senate, 15 May 2024.

Again, students often pay the price for the lack of coordination and curriculum sharing between Keele and Glendon programs in disciplines such as History, Philosophy, Linguistics, Politics/Political Science, Sociology, Psychology, Biology, and others. This lack of collaboration has also meant proliferation of similar course offerings, missed opportunities to share staffing resources, and cancellation of low enrolled courses. Glendon has been increasing its efforts to identify course equivalencies and to work more closely with University-level shared services for some functions. However, this has been an uphill struggle given that units plan their programs and courses separately.

A space audit of the Glendon campus has found significant underutilization of the facilities there, and significant deferred maintenance liabilities. A study is currently underway to assess the potential to add more revenue generating uses to the Glendon lands (similar to the Campus Vision and Strategy previously developed for the Keele Campus). This raises the question as part of the restructuring exercise at Glendon about how best to solve the coordination and duplication challenges described above, and avoid fragmenting student demand in areas of the liberal arts where York has an excellent international reputation, but where total enrolment is likely to be smaller for the foreseeable future.

### ***Becoming More Financially Resilient***

The recent decline in financial health of our Faculties provides a further reason to consider academic restructuring. During the years when Faculties such as LA&PS, Health, and Lassonde were producing higher enrolment revenues, operating surpluses were sufficient to cover deficits in some of their smaller departments and in other Faculties. It must be acknowledged that Faculties receiving Operating Support or other cross-subsidies have made significant efforts to improve their budget situation, with valuable contributions to program innovation, reputation, recruitment, student experience, and finding more efficient ways to run their operations. However, the deteriorating external conditions described earlier, along with the general challenges of operating small Faculties, have meant their deficits are not shrinking but in fact rising to levels that can no longer be supported by the rest of the University. Indeed, the larger Faculties are themselves almost all in deficit, especially with the erosion of international student intakes and declining retention. While international applications to virtually all Canadian universities declined due to the COVID pandemic, aggravated by geopolitical turmoil and recent federal changes to visa policies, York has struggled more than some of our competitors to recover.

The report of the Auditor General of Ontario on its “value for money” audit of York University noted that the financial health of several Faculties had begun to decline by the end of the audit period, fiscal year 2022-23.<sup>11</sup> The report concluded that York University remained financially sustainable overall at the end of that year. Rather than a temporary phenomenon, however, this trend worsened in 2023-24. The Faculties collectively incurred operating deficits of almost \$153 million in 2023-24, even though the bulk of their University Fund contributions were

---

<sup>11</sup> See Figure 13 from the OAGO report, November 2023, reproduced in the Data Appendix.

returned to the Faculties through a partial refund, and through the transfer of Operating Support to three Faculties. Only two Faculties achieved a small surplus in 2023-24.<sup>12</sup>

Unfortunately, enrolments are projected to weaken further in 2024-25, relative to both our enrolment targets and to some of our competitors.<sup>13</sup> Several trends are worth noting in the results from the most recent recruitment cycle. While total Ontario high school applications to York remained roughly steady as of the deadline in January 2024, the number of applicants identifying York as their first or second choice university has slipped, making it more difficult to convert those applicants into enrolled students. Applications from outside the country were significantly depressed by negative press about Canada in India, followed by the announcement of a cap on student visas for undergraduate students coming from any country. Delays in issuing visas, and increased visa denial rates, aggravated this situation. Finally, our ability to convert domestic applicants into enrolled students also declined sharply following the CUPE 3903 strike in spring 2024, in the middle of the conversion season. Despite herculean and creative efforts by many staff and faculty to redouble our conversion efforts over the late spring and summer, we anticipate missing 2024-25 domestic undergraduate intake targets by 17%, and international targets by 51%.

This significant enrolment miss in 2024-25 will translate into lower revenues. Fortunately, at least some of these risks were in view when the rolling budget plan for 2024-27 was finalized, and it allows for contingencies which will come close to covering the revenue shortfall in 2024-25. This includes the Markham campus, where contingencies are sufficient to cover a smaller inaugural undergraduate class, a foreseeable risk when launching a brand new program or campus. Contingencies were also planned for the outer years of the rolling budget but may not be fully sufficient to cover shortfalls. This adds to the challenge of achieving our approved budget which requires that we close the University's in-year deficit and return to a modest surplus by 2026-27.

Further analysis and efforts are underway to pivot in response to these conditions and enhance our recruitment strategies and communications to be more competitive. Faculties are rallying to pursue new international recruitment partnerships, to improve their co-op offerings, scholarships, and other attractive features, to ensure that all program websites provide student testimonials and information about career paths, and to accelerate new admissions pathways and program development. All of these efforts and more are critical to regaining our market position. However, recovery will take time in the current environment and is contingent on being adaptive to the "unknown unknowns" that will continue to emerge in this uncertain environment, in terms of government policies, technological disruption, and other external factors affecting student mobility, access, and choices.

Academic restructuring could also play a role in supporting financial sustainability at the Faculty level by pooling and sharing resources more effectively, alleviating the acute

---

<sup>12</sup> See Tables 9 and 10 in the Data Appendix.

<sup>13</sup> See Tables 11-15, and Figures 14-17, in the Data Appendix.

challenges facing some of our smallest Faculties, and replacing the internal competition that happens when planning is siloed, with collaboration for mutual benefit.

### ***Potential Gains from Reorganizing Faculties and Departments***

Returning to the goals and criteria for success discussed earlier in this paper, a consolidation of our structures into (for example) 5 or 6 larger Faculties, with a total of 25 to 30 departments, would support both short term recovery and longer term thriving of York by:

- reducing the number of administrative positions at all levels
- improving access of smaller units to shared support services
- reducing and spreading out service loads for faculty members, especially members of minoritized groups
- enabling more streamlined and student-friendly curricular pathways, to enhance student success, retention, and outcomes
- releasing additional capacity for research, teaching, and pedagogical innovation
- enhancing connections among faculty who may be isolated in smaller units
- combining complementary areas of expertise to create the new interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary program offerings and collaborative research teams of the future

Finding some efficiencies will be helpful in solving immediate budget gaps. But the bigger potential of a restructuring is in the longer term, to profile how York is doing things differently and to make us a top destination of choice for future learners.

## **UNIVERSITY RESTRUCTURING INTERNATIONALLY**

To inform this paper research was undertaken on some of the more ambitious examples of recent university restructuring in Canada and abroad, as a sampling drawn from higher education literature. The research consisted primarily of reviewing selected documents on university websites, some scholarly publications and independent media reports, and where possible conversations with university administrators to learn more about their experiences and advice about the process of restructuring, outcomes, costs, and benefits.

The fact that other leading universities are revising their academic structures is noteworthy in itself. Evaluating their results is neither simple nor uncontroversial, and depends on what criteria are used to define success. However, with each of the summaries below a few high level metrics are provided to give perspective on the current reputation and financial well being of the University in question. If nothing else, these comparators show a range of different organizational models that are emerging from restructuring exercises, and how these are being positioned for competitive purposes.

## **Arizona State University**

The restructuring at Arizona State University (ASU) began in 2002 as part of President Michael Crow's vision for a “New American University.” The reorganization was aimed at more clearly differentiating the institution, enhancing its social and economic impact, and transforming “ASU into one of the nation’s leading public metropolitan research universities”.<sup>14</sup> Significant cuts to state funding formed part of the motivation for undertaking the redesign.<sup>15</sup> The process was extensive and unfolded over several years, with major milestones, such as the creation of new transdisciplinary schools and the consolidation of faculties, occurring throughout the 2000s.

Several strategic mergers and reorganizations were implemented to enhance interdisciplinary collaboration and administrative efficiency. For example, the Herberger College of the Arts merged with the College of Design to form the Herberger Institute for Design and the Arts, integrating creative disciplines like architecture, landscape design, art, and media. The W.P. Carey School of Business also merged with the School of Global Management and Leadership, expanding business programs, including MBA offerings at ASU’s West campus. New interdisciplinary schools were created, such as the School of Social Transformation, which combined African American Studies and Asian Pacific American Studies to foster research on race, gender, and justice. The School of Geographical Sciences and Urban Planning was formed by merging the School of Geographical Sciences and the School of Planning. Additionally, all teacher preparation programs were consolidated into the College of Teacher Education and Leadership, centralizing efforts to enhance the quality of teacher education across the university. Some Schools and programs were made available on only one campus, while others were distributed across two or more campuses.

ASU adopted a new charter in 2014 which captured its identity as “a comprehensive public research university, measured not by whom it excludes, but by whom it includes and how they succeed; advancing research and discovery of public value; and assuming fundamental responsibility for the economic, social, cultural and overall health of the communities it serves.” Its transformation has been widely studied and heralded as successful based on indicators such as its dramatic growth in enrolment and research investment, student diversity and outcomes, philanthropic donations, and rankings.<sup>16</sup> ASU regularly ranks in the top 10 globally in the Times Higher Education Impact Rankings (where York is currently ranked #35), and in the top 200 in both the THE and QS World University Rankings (York is now ranked in the top 400 on both).

---

<sup>14</sup> Office of the President, Arizona State University, “One University in Many Places: Transitional Design to Twenty-First Century Excellence” (April 2004).

<sup>15</sup> See Elizabeth Capaldi, “Intellectual Transformation and Budgetary Savings Through Academic Reorganization”, (July-August 2009) *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning*; and [ASU announces budget reduction plan | ASU News](#) (August 18, 2008).

<sup>16</sup> See for example “[How Arizona State is reinventing the American university](#)”, *University of Michigan Dearborn News* (September 24, 2019).

## **University of Alberta**

The University of Alberta launched a significant restructuring in 2020 in direct response to significant cuts in government funding, amounting to a 34% reduction in its provincial grant over three years.<sup>17</sup> Known as the "University of Alberta for Tomorrow" initiative, it addressed academic and administrative structures simultaneously. Consultations were extensive but brisk, with decisions made within the space of one year, and implemented progressively thereafter.<sup>18</sup>

On the academic side, the University of Alberta consolidated its 18 Faculties into three interdisciplinary Colleges—Health Sciences, Natural and Applied Sciences, and Social Sciences and Humanities—each led by a College Executive Dean. The previous Faculties remain within these Colleges, each with its own Dean. Three Faculties were retained as standalone units based on their service to distinct communities: Augustana Campus, Campus Saint-Jean, and the Faculty of Native Studies. The new structure is intended to promote collaboration across disciplines, allow faculty to focus more of their time on the core activities of research and teaching, and streamline administrative functions by having Colleges offer shared services to their Faculties.

An external review of the College Model completed 18 months following implementation concluded that academic transformation was made urgent by funding cuts and also was necessary to address inefficiencies and opportunity costs related to a previously siloed structure, manifesting in “lack of large research project success” and “missed opportunities for responses from provincial government calls – in both teaching and research”.<sup>19</sup> The review described many challenges for faculty, staff, and students of implementing such a sweeping transformation of both the academy and administrative services in such a short period, yet also found a number of early successes and high potential for the University to make further gains.

In particular, the review observed a culture shift among academic leaders toward greater collaboration and communication across Faculties, units, and disciplines within each College. The Colleges were providing a new framework for pursuing institutional priorities: “For example, from an Indigenous and reconciliation perspective, the infrastructure does not exist for Elders to be associated with every Faculty – but it is being developed to work with each College.”<sup>20</sup> There was consensus the restructuring had created new research potential for the ideation and pursuit of large projects involving multiple units and external partners, and that smaller Faculties had gained access to better research supports. The new opportunities extended to teaching and learning as well, from “streamlining programs and eliminating duplication, to the development of innovative programs and micro-credentials that could be shared between groups.”<sup>21</sup> There was optimism that the College Model was enabling efforts to tangibly improve the student experience through more consistent student services, academic scheduling, placement coordination, and academic integrity regulations, for example.

---

<sup>17</sup> University of Alberta Annual Report 2022-23, at 19.

<sup>18</sup> [Approved model for academic restructuring | U of A for Tomorrow \(ualberta.ca\)](https://www.ualberta.ca/academic-restructuring)

<sup>19</sup> Dru Marshall, *University of Alberta College Model Review* (18 months), February 2023, at 5 (available online).

<sup>20</sup> At 6.

<sup>21</sup> At 8.

The review also found significant areas of frustration with the outcomes of restructuring thus far, including service dissatisfaction as the University adjusts to the loss of over 800 staff members and implements a new operating model. Restructuring both services and the academy at the same time was seen as not ideal, creating confusion between the two. Faculty members remained skeptical about how the College Model added value and perceived a lack of respect for the academy, as well as a lack of transparency and communication. The review recommended that urgent action be taken to address issues of low morale, withdrawal, and disengagement among faculty, attributed to the continued impacts of COVID, financial challenges, and the restructuring all combined, but that overall the new organizational model had significant upside potential to deliver benefits over time, subject to winning buy-in from the academic community.

The University of Alberta has grown its overall enrolment to over 44,000 students in 2022-23, and within that has also grown its international student body.<sup>22</sup> It has set an explicit goal of being recognized among the top 100 universities worldwide, and has now achieved that in the latest QS World Universities Ranking. It has also recovered from a previous dip in its Times Higher Education World University Ranking, placing #107 in 2024. The University entered the Times Higher Education Impact Ranking in 2021 and has risen steadily since then, to current #6 global ranking. In budgetary terms the University reported an operating deficit of around \$40 million in 2019-20 but returned to an operating surplus in each of the three subsequent years.

### **University of Exeter**

The University of Exeter launched its Strategy 2030 around the start of this decade with a central vision “to use the power of our education and research to create a sustainable, healthy and socially just future”.<sup>23</sup> It then undertook a further process in 2022-23 to reorganize its previous six Colleges into three Faculties, each aligned to one of its three strategic themes of “a greener, healthier and fairer future”: Faculty of Environment, Science and Economy; Faculty of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences; and Faculty of Health and Life Sciences.<sup>24</sup> The Medical and Business Schools retained separate identities for reasons of accreditation and reputation, but each School is tucked within one of the three larger Faculties. In the new structure Exeter also reduced its number of departments from over 40 to approximately 25, distributed among its three Faculties and two Schools.

Compared to York University, Exeter is older (founded 1851), has a smaller student body of around 30,000, and a larger faculty complement of over 2700 full-time equivalent academic staff.<sup>25</sup> Notably however Exeter established its own medical school only in 2013 and became a member of the Russell Group of leading UK research intensive universities in 2012. They ranked 10<sup>th</sup> globally in the latest Times Higher Education Impact Ranking; and are currently

---

<sup>22</sup> University of Alberta Annual Report 2022-23, at 22.

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.exeter.ac.uk/about/strategy2030/howwegothere/>

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.exeter.ac.uk/departments/>

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.exeter.ac.uk/about/facts/facts/>

ranked in the world's top 200 universities in both the QS and THE World Rankings. Their two most recent financial statements reported an operating surplus .<sup>26</sup>

The primary driver for Exeter's reorganization was to support the implementation of Strategy 2030, which also emphasizes Exeter's strong interdisciplinary culture grounded in disciplinary strength. Larger departments allowed the University to empower Department Heads with greater budget authority, dedicated staff support led by an embedded Department Manager, and a seat on both Faculty and University executive leadership bodies. Leadership development support for Heads of department has been enhanced as part of the process. Exeter has articulated four defined Principles of Governance: broadly consistent structures; local decision making; streamlining; and engagement, transparency, and equal and inclusive culture. The principle of "streamlining" is defined as follows:

Wherever possible Faculties will take the opportunity to look at whether governance structures are still required or need to be operated in the same way as previously. Faculties will focus on removing duplication and ensuring collective and joined up governance. This will include the most appropriate mechanisms for reporting across the governance structures to reduce bureaucracy and ensure effective decision-making. Faculties will target and report a measurable reduction in the number, frequency and/or length of previous College level meetings.<sup>27</sup>

The University's commitment to engagement and transparency was reflected in a very broad process of consultation on the reorganization, which produced enough momentum over the course of an academic year to move forward with implementation.

### ***University of Glasgow***

Founded in 1451, the University of Glasgow is much older than York and somewhat smaller, with 35,000 students. They welcomed a new chancellor in 2011 who made restructuring a key priority with the goal of enabling the University to compete more effectively with the top institutions in the world. The restructuring was pointedly not motivated by financial pressures, though government did impose some funding cuts after their process had been initiated. A notable feature is the elimination of Faculties altogether, and their replacement with 4 large Colleges (Arts & Humanities; Medical, Veterinary & Life Sciences; Science & Engineering; and Social Sciences). Each College is structured into a variety of Schools, totalling around 20, with an interdisciplinary flavour. These include for example the School of Critical Studies; School of Biodiversity, One Health & Veterinary Medicine; School of Health & Well-being; and the School of Social & Environmental Sustainability. The restructuring has reportedly facilitated more alignment and focus on institutional priorities, and more fluid collaboration across Schools and Colleges to compete in major granting competitions. In recent years Glasgow has solidified its top 100 placement in the THE and QS World University Rankings university, and placed 12<sup>th</sup> in

---

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.exeter.ac.uk/departments/finance/aboutus/financialstatements/>

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.exeter.ac.uk/about/governance/managed/faculties/>



the latest THE Impact Ranking. Their most recent financial report shows an operating surplus in 2022-23, and in two of the four years prior to that.<sup>28</sup>

### **University of Sydney**

The University of Sydney is Australia's oldest, established in 1850. Based on its most recent Annual Report it has over 68,000 students, and realized operating surpluses in its last two fiscal years.<sup>29</sup> Sydney underwent a significant reorganization and streamlining process starting in the mid-2010s, with the most extensive changes occurring around 2016-2017. The primary objectives of the reorganization were to enhance the university's academic and research capabilities, improve operational efficiency, and better position the institution to compete globally.

The university consolidated its Faculties from 16 to 6. The new structure grouped related disciplines into broader Faculties, which were:

- Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences
- Faculty of Business
- Faculty of Engineering and Information Technologies
- Faculty of Health Sciences
- Faculty of Medicine and Health
- Faculty of Science

Within these larger Faculties, the university established schools that are generally defined along familiar disciplinary lines. Notably four schools stand alone, outside the Faculties: Law; Business; Music; and Architecture, Design & Planning. This structure was developed to foster greater collaboration across units while maintaining disciplinary specialization. The reorganization included a significant overhaul of administrative processes. Administrative services were centralized, reducing duplication across Faculties and departments. This streamlining aimed to cut costs and improve service delivery by creating more efficient and standardized processes. The restructuring also sought to align the university's research and teaching priorities with global trends and societal needs. By focusing resources on areas of strength and emerging importance, the University of Sydney aimed to enhance its research output and educational offerings.<sup>30</sup>

The reorganization has been credited with improving the university's financial sustainability, enhancing its research profile, and making it more agile in responding to educational and societal changes. The University of Sydney is ranked in the top 100 institutions by Times Higher Education and the top 50 by QS. It does not appear in the Times Higher Education Impact ranking but ranks 18<sup>th</sup> globally in QS for Sustainability.

---

<sup>28</sup> [University of Glasgow. Reports & Financial Statements for the year to 31 July 2023](#), at 39.

<sup>29</sup> University of Sydney Annual Report 2023, p. 70.

<sup>30</sup> [strategic-plan-2016-20.pdf](#)

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This paper raises many questions that require reflection and input from members of the community, including the following:

1. Do you agree with the goals and success criteria for academic reorganization, as defined on pages 8-9 of the paper (and reproduced below for ease of reference)? What would you add or subtract? Reflecting on each goal, what are the success measures that matter most to you?
2. What insights, conclusions, or additional questions jump out from the data on our current academic unit structures? Are there additional data you think would be helpful in considering the issues raised in this paper?
3. In the case studies of restructuring at other universities, what learnings or insights do you think can be derived for York, concerning either the potential gains, or costs and risks of reorganizing?
4. Is there a specific opportunity or idea you would like to see considered now, for academic reorganization at York?
5. Do you have feedback or suggestions about the principles and processes that should drive this initiative?

Goals of Academic Reorganization	Successful Outcomes
1. Facilitate the pursuit of academic excellence and impact, in a context of rapid change and uncertainty.	More organic formation of interdisciplinary clusters to pursue problem-based research and curricula as knowledge needs evolve. Increase adaptive program design. Increase York's responsiveness in both research and teaching to urgent issues and topics of the day.
2. Create a leading value proposition for current students and diverse learners of the future.	Organizational structure makes it easier for students with diverse needs to succeed at York. Students have clear and flexible pathways to complete programs, with access to needed supports and advice. Students can easily combine any area of fundamental learning with professional skills that enhance career opportunities. Units are supported to deliver on enriched pedagogies (eg flipped classrooms, co-op

	<p>streams, capstone projects). Improve first choice applications, retention, graduation rates, student satisfaction, post-graduation career and graduate education outcomes. More students from populations underrepresented at universities are coming to York, and completing their programs.</p>
<p>3. Organizational structures promote collaboration among faculty and staff, along with equitable and efficient allocation of resources.</p>	<p>Reduce total number and increase average size of units to include larger clusters of faculty and staff. Increase tenure stream faculty time available for teaching and research while also enhancing collegial self-governance. Create more community for early career and underrepresented faculty members. Strengthen communication and co-planning within and across units. Faculty have better access to shared services. Staff work in larger groups with more back up. Administrative overhead costs are reduced. Internal competition/duplication is reduced. Units are empowered to create educational and research programs that compete externally with the best in the world.</p>
<p>4. Project and amplify York’s distinctive identity and values, including its commitments to social responsibility and decolonizing, equity, diversity, and inclusion.</p>	<p>Academic units are structured to raise profile of thematic strengths that differentiate York. Increased visibility of York’s commitments to inclusive and excellent interdisciplinary education and socially relevant research. Maintain offering of curriculum that centres DEDI. Reputational gains at both the subject/discipline and University levels. Increased competitiveness in attracting faculty, research funding, external partners.</p>

## CONCLUDING THOUGHTS AND NEXT STEPS

York University has come far in its first 65 years with remarkable growth and change. Among post-secondary institutions it is a marvel of adaptability. The next wave of change in higher education will challenge us to continue and possibly accelerate this process of reinvention. This paper is designed to stimulate wide ranging discussion within the York community about the directions this could take, and particularly how we could organize ourselves into new academic units that accentuate our distinctive strengths for all to see. Updating our organizational design could be valuable to create the best possible learning conditions for our students and also to mitigate the risks of an ever changing technological, societal, employment, and funding environment.

A full consultation and engagement process remains to be designed in collaboration with APPRC. The hope is to invite participation in a wide range of formats and levels of intensity, whether in person, virtually, or by submitting written comments. Consultations should include governance bodies such as Faculty Councils and Senate, and APPRC members might play a role in engaging their respective Faculties. The moment also calls for different constituencies to be convened outside of formal governance meetings, including students, early career scholars, research centres, and staff who support the work of the academy and its students. Your participation, ideas, and constructive input are welcome and appreciated.

DRAFT