

Academic Standards, Curriculum & Pedagogy

Memorandum

To: Rebecca Pillai Riddell, Chair, Academic Policy, Planning & Research

From: Franck van Breugel, Chair, Academic Standards, Curriculum & Pedagogy

Date: draft

Subject: University Academic Plan 2015-2020 Consultation

The Senate Academic Standards, Curriculum & Pedagogy Committee welcomed the opportunity to examine and provide responses to the framing questions guiding the University Academic Plan renewal. Members reflected thoughtfully on issues, drawing on their local and pan-university experiences to offer constructive feedback to this critical planning exercise.

1. What sets York apart from other universities?

- a. **York's student population:** in addition to being among the largest and most culturally diverse student population at a Canadian university, the collection of attributes and characteristics of York's undergraduates provide the university a unique basis from which to frame itself. Specifically, many students:
 - Are the first generation in their families to attend a post-secondary institution
 - Work more than 20 hours a week in addition to their studies
 - Spend more than 2 hours commuting to and from campus each day
 - Had entering averages outside of the top tier of high school grades
- b. **History of and willingness to try new directions:** to fulfill York's mission specifically (<http://about.yorku.ca/our-mission/>), and public universities' social responsibility mandate generally.

2. What should be York's academic priorities for the next five years?

- a. **Approaching academic planning through the York-specific student lens: "the students we make"**. While there needs to be a certain degree of aspirational thinking in setting short-term goals (i.e., five-years), grounding priorities and objectives in current realities is crucial. Understanding the successes, challenges, goals, partialities and means of our student base should be the foundation for planning. That knowledge should be paired with York's areas of strength, commitment to innovation and accessible education to identify academic priorities that are symmetrical.

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The Committee embraced the perspective of “the students we make” as an overarching philosophy for York. Each year the University takes in a diverse student body with varying interests, backgrounds, aspirations and academic needs, and enthusiastically takes up the role of cultivating socially responsible graduates who are equipped to make a difference to the social and economic well-being of our communities. To that end, academic priorities should be framed toward the primary goal of providing a transformational education and learning experience to our diverse cohort of students to deliver graduates with critical intellect, employability, leadership qualities, and the capacity and passion to contribute to society.

Suggested strategies to this end might include:

- Refreshing academic programming to ensure alignment with interests, needs and demands
- Establishing broader definitions of student success / achievement
- Imagining new types of equity and merit scholarships/awards that recognize and enable broader definitions of success and achievement
- Enhancing student access to technology / equipment / facilities

b. Improving Student and Faculty Engagement.

For students: To enhance students’ sense of identity and belonging to the University, establish formal mentorship programs, drawing on the experience and leadership of upper year undergraduates to connect, support and inspire new students. This continues the student-centric planning paradigm referenced above in paragraph a.

For Faculty members: Formal mentorship programs for junior faculty members with senior faculty, exceptional teachers and/or prominent scholars in order to build relationships, foster university citizenry, provide career guidance, enhance teaching and research skills, and be made aware of opportunities for collaboration / participation in university activities / governance roles.

3. What are the most pressing challenges facing York now and in the next five years that should be addressed in the next UAP?

- A growing disengagement of large segments of faculty members in university life (for student advising; governance; to be present on campus / time to meet with students; etc.)
- Declining enrolments
- Financial climate, continuing budget cuts
- The public perception of a declining value of social science / humanities undergraduate degrees, coupled with the expectation of career-ready graduates

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4. What are the most compelling opportunities for York now and in the next five years?

- Opening of the subway extension (due before the expiration of the next UAP) and the change in dynamics it will have for the Keele campus
- Establishment of the new campus and programming in Markham
- Changing the message about the value of social science / humanities undergraduate degrees, something York is well positioned to take up with its strengths in this area

c.c. R. Everett, Secretary, Academic Policy, Planning & Research