

Faculty of Environmental Studies

What distinguishes York from other universities? Besides our commitment to social justice, interdisciplinarity, and community engagement, York has a reputation for research and education on sustainability: environmental, social, and cultural. While most other universities have comparatively small environmental studies or science programs, significant research and education on sustainability runs throughout York. The recent Task Force on Sustainability Report (still in draft form), demonstrates this. It found faculty engaged in teaching and research on sustainability working in LAPS, Osgoode, Schulich, Lassonde, Science, Education, AMPD and the Libraries.

Both culminating and stimulating this university-wide attention to questions of sustainability is the Faculty of Environmental Studies. An important legacy for York -- as the first ES program in North America, the most interdisciplinary and probably the largest ES program in Canada -- FES carries forward the York brand of social justice and engaged scholarship by being uniquely focused on the links between environmental and social justice issues. FES reflects university-wide efforts on sustainability by supporting joint undergraduate certificate, graduate diplomas, and degree programs with every other Faculty in the university.

Above and beyond the curricular and research activity on sustainability, York has been recognized for its major efforts on campus sustainability, winning consistent recognition as among the top ten percent of For the fifth year running, York University has ranked among the top 10 per cent of universities in the 2014 GreenMetric World University Ranking on sustainability.

Why is it important that sustainability be a value, goal, and framework for the next University Academic Plan? Social attention to environmental issues has gone through a sea change since FES was founded. Climate change, now recognized as a scientific fact and a significant challenge to global society and to biodiversity, is a challenge demanding education and research on numerous fronts. Refugees, species extinction, disaster management, city building, food production, accessibility of water, flood management, energy use, legal liability, mental and physical health, cultural preservation and expression; the list of the arenas comprising the challenge of climate change is long and touches every discipline in the university. One might say, without exaggeration, that climate change is the largest challenge facing humanity for centuries.

Municipal, provincial, and federal governments are making these issues a priority and are likely to do so at increased levels in the future. The sustainability of biological and social/cultural environments in the face of climate change is more and more the focus of industry, civic, and cultural concern. Public and private investments in solutions and strategies of mitigation and adaptation are growing and we can reasonably expect them to continue to grow. Which universities are responding to this growing concern? York has an opportunity to raise the profile of the considerable work being done already on sustainability, and to position itself as a guiding light in the upcoming storm. The Academic Plan should commit to raising the profile of our work on environmental issues and their connection to social justice, and position York as **the** sustainable university in Canada.