

**YORK UNIVERSITY RETIREES' ASSOCIATION
MINUTES OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

October 27, 2023

In person (Second Student Centre, Convention Level Room A, York University)
and Via ZOOM Teleconference

YURA Members in Attendance in) in Person

Sheelagh Atkinson, Natasa Bajin, Marla Chodak (Secretary), Grace Chiu, Charmaine Courtis, Jane Crescenzi, Theja De Silva, David Dimick, Steve Dranitsaris (Co-President), Fred Fletcher, Sheila Forshaw, Agnes Fraser, Rosanna Furgiuele, Steve Glassman, Jane Grant, Ian Greene, Debbie Hansen, Ellen Hoffmann, Joan Howard, Claudia Hungerson, Amina Hussain, Melody King (Treasurer), John Lennox, David Leyton-Brown, Edelgard Mahant, Angela Mattiucci, Pat Murray, Elsie Ramkhelawan, Concetta Scalzullo, Harvey Skinner, David Smith, Donna Smith, Lynn Taylor, Mildred Theobalds, Richard Weisman, Diane Woody (Co-President) [36]

YURA Members in Attendance via ZOOM

Romana Bahry, Marilyn Cartmill, Al Doran, Robert Drummond, Margo Gewurtz, Linda Hansen, Walter Heinrichs, Judy Hellman, Stephen Hellman, Rekha Karambayya, Ed Lee-Ruff, Chantal Lishingman, Louise Malisani, Merv Mosher, Véronique Ng, Maria Louise Obrien, Erica Oielgisser, Savitsa Sevigny, Ted Spence, Penny Summers, Patrick Taylor, Peter Victor [22]

Guests In Person: Marisa Barlas, Grant McNair

Regrets: Keith Aldridge, Anne-Marie Ambert, Angus Anderson, Ian Macdonald, Alex Neumann, Roger Kelton, Stan Shapson

Call to Order

Co-President Steve Dranitsaris called the meeting to order at 12:45 p.m.. He expressed appreciation on behalf of YURA to the guest speaker, Dr. Eileen de Villa, for her presentation on public health challenges. He welcomed all those participating, noting that there were about 35 members attending in person and 30 online. He noted that the agenda and various reports would be projected on the screen; that reports in narrative format had been posted on the YURA website, and that members had been notified by email seven days in advance of the meeting. (All reports and 2022 AGM Minutes are also reproduced as attachments to these Minutes.) He specified that in order to allow the meeting to proceed efficiently, all of the reports would be presented; and he asked that members hold questions and comments until item #14 on the Agenda. That item would be an omnibus resolution to approve the Minutes and the Treasurer's report, to affirm an allocation from surplus funds, to accept all reports presented, and to affirm the YURA Executive Committee membership for 2023-2024. Questions and comments would be welcome at that time from the floor or online (online questions using the Q&A function would be monitored). Any online participants wishing to oppose the resolution or to abstain should so indicate using the Q&A function; otherwise a favourable vote would be assumed.

1. Remarks from Co-Presidents

Co-President Diane Woody welcomed members to the AGM. She noted that she and Steve had served together as Co-Presidents in this post-pandemic year navigating some ongoing challenges. Some accomplishments included successful office moves from Central Square to the Bennett Centre and ultimately to the Lorna Marsden Honour Court, which she hoped members would have an opportunity to visit after the meeting. The new office provides natural light in a well laid out space

for work and meetings. As part of the move, Charmaine Courtis and Marla Chodak had assisted in reviewing and, where appropriate, purging accumulated possessions and files; Amina Hussain and Grace Chiu had assisted with unpacking. Diane expressed appreciation to Steve for his leadership in finding creative solutions to issues that arose during the move. She noted that YURA has benefitted from good relationships and the support of other offices, in particular UIT.

The Charity Challenge had been held on the campus on October 3, providing an opportunity to underscore YURA's relevance and dynamic role in the university community.

Diane expressed gratitude to Ian Greene and Charmaine Courtis, past Co-Presidents of YURA. She noted that Charmaine had recently been the recipient of a CURAC award for her contributions.

In the past year, a Memorandum of Understanding between YURA and the York administration, signed in 2012, had been reactivated through a joint committee on which Diane, Steve, and Stan Shapson represent YURA with the main administration contacts being Laina Bey-Cheng (Associate Vice-President Faculty Affairs) and Sarah Whitaker (Executive Director, Academic Planning in the Provost's Office). Several meetings have been held to date, sometimes including other members of the administration, to discuss various topics, including collaboration to strengthen the role of retirees as members of the university community, for example, through YURA's involvement in Congress last spring.

There have also been ongoing discussions about how to recruit members through Pension and Benefits, as part of the consideration of decisions around retirement. In this regard, Diane noted that it is important to stress that YURA is not limited to faculty retirees, but includes members from all groups on campus. This year's membership drive went well; and she thanked Steve, Melody King, Donna Smith, and Charmaine Courtis for assisting in the creation of a smoother process, in which Melody had undertaken the role of registrar. An electronic process had been put in place for membership renewals and payment, with outreach as well to those who prefer paper copies. Guidelines are also being put in place for records management.

Challenges have included planning strategically in the current environment. Diane noted that major outings involve considerable planning and a commitment of funding well in advance. At the same time, something unique and special happens when people are able to come together in person, and efforts are being made to identify ways of bringing members together.

Diane noted the importance of communications and connections. She thanked the website team of Steve Dranitsaris, Steve Glassman and Alex Neumann for their work in updating the website; and Anne-Marie Ambert and John Lennox for their work on the Newsletter. Connections had also been promoted through involvement in YU-CARE and the YURA Café, the latter led by Fran Wilkinson. YURA had also been visible through Congress and the Charity Challenge walk on campus.

Given the significant logistical and financial challenges associated with major outings, Diane reported that an events group would be meeting in November to discuss whether to undertake major outings in 2024 or whether to plan several smaller outings to local venues where participants would arrange their own transportation. She invited YURA members to send their suggestions and comments.

Diane also noted the importance of connections with other organizations to meet the diverse needs and interests of YURA members.

In closing she invited members to send feedback about whether they prefer the hybrid meeting format so that those who are unable to come to campus can participate via ZOOM while those who are able to attend in person have the chance to reconnect with others. She concluded by saying that she and Steve had enjoyed their first year as Co-Presidents and she expressed appreciation to fellow officers Melody King and Marla Chodak (also new in their roles), and to past Co-Presidents Ian Greene and Charmaine Courtis for their stewardship and guidance.

Steve Dranitsaris informed members that Grace Chiu would lead members interested in seeing the new office space to the Lorna Marsden Honour Court following the meeting.

2. Minutes of the AGM held October 28, 2022

It was noted that any questions or changes relating to the Minutes could be raised under Item #14.

3. Business Arising

It was noted that several matters arising would be addressed in the various reports on the agenda.

4. Treasurer's Report – Melody King

Melody King, YURA Treasurer, introduced the financial reports that had been posted on the website in advance of the meeting and that were projected on the screen, including:

- Communications from the external auditor, Colin Deschamps, finding the financial statements from 2021-22 to be in order, and also noting that YURA's accumulated surplus currently exceeds five years of expenses, which is higher than usual for a non-profit organization.
- A Balance Sheet, indicating that YURA had accumulated over \$44,000 in contributions as of September 30, 2023.
- A Statement of Income and Expense (October 2022 to September 2023), indicating receipt of over \$12,000 in membership fees, with increased numbers of members utilizing eTransfer. Melody noted that, while membership numbers were somewhat lower than at the same time last year, they were likely to increase in October. She observed also that income included interest on savings and GICs and an RTO affiliation rebate. She reported that expenses were within the approved budget; and, notably, included replacement costs of computers deemed obsolete, as well as the increased costs of the AGM this year due to the more costly hybrid format. She flagged also that the electronic membership process had resulted in a reduction of photocopying and postage costs.
- The 2023-24 Proposed Budget, based on historic income and expenses. Melody noted that, while the budget traditionally balances to 0, consideration was currently being given to how funds might be spent to support YURA awards and for the benefit of YURA members as we collectively emerge from pandemic limitations.. Expenses include amounts to continue support for student awards, including top-up funds to ensure the pay out of awards even if market returns fluctuate. Increased support was also allocated to the York University-TD Centre's Access to Post Secondary initiative administered by the Provost's Office, which supports students in the Black Creek/Jane-Finch area to apply to university. The in person AGM resulted in substantial costs for IT and food, as would subsidization of potential in person events during the coming year.

5. Allocation of Surplus Accumulated Funds

Steve Dranitsaris referred to the external auditor's comments regarding YURA's accumulated funds, with a surplus of over \$53,000 as of September 30. He reported that the Executive Committee had passed a motion to add \$10,000 to the endowment for the YURA Graduate Student Awards to help ensure that three awards of \$1,500 each could continue to be given and that there would be flexibility to increase award amounts in future. The Committee would seek affirmation to proceed with this allocation as part of the omnibus motion.

6. Affirmation of Executive Committee Membership 2023-2024

Steve Dranitsaris drew members' attention to the list of departing, continuing, renewing, and proposed new members of the Executive Committee, which had been circulated with the Agenda posted on the website. He noted that the Committee would be losing three members who had served it well: Angus Anderson (four years), Sheelagh Atkinson (four years), and Bruno Bellissimo (six years). The new members (Sheila Forshaw, Debbie Hansen and Richard Weisman) had been duly nominated and agreed to stand. He added that the Executive Committee had decided to appoint Bruno Bellissimo as an ex-officio member in order for him to continue to represent retirees on the Pension Fund Board of Trustees. Pat Murray had also been invited to sit as an ex-officio member, in light of her liaison role with AROHE (the US equivalent of CURAC).

7. YURA Activities

a) Newsletter and PTP

The report from Anne-Marie Ambert included reference to the YURA Newsletter (which typically introduces new Executive members and includes an "in memoriam" list, reminiscences, travel, and humour) and mention of the PTP, a more informal and personal communication (health and lifestyle). It was noted that these publications had appeared more frequently during COVID, and contributions were always welcome. Steve delivered the report and expressed gratitude to Anne-Marie.

b) Website

Steve Dranitsaris reported that the YURA website had been reconstructed in 2021 using Wordpress, and was now updated weekly. It includes announcements, information on events and speakers (York, other associations, universities, and community organizations of interest to YURA members), volunteer opportunities for YURA members (for example, to participate in research projects), and links to information about retiring at York and to government websites of interest to seniors. Photographs are frequently updated. He encouraged members to bookmark the site and check the calendar of events.

c) Events

Diane Woody presented the report, noting that, in light of uncertainties due to ongoing health concerns and inflationary pressures, no major outings had been planned during the past year. Efforts had instead been focused on priorities identified in last year's membership survey (communication with members, opportunities for learning, strong connections amongst members and with the University). The YURA café has been an ongoing event, for discussion of topics such as vaccines, the York certificate in aging, the Greenbelt, computer security, and HONK. She expressed appreciation to Fran Wilkinson for organizing this initiative. An upcoming café on November 14 would focus on how climate distress affects us and how we can benefit from wellness practices, led by Harvey Skinner and his partner, Susan Harris. YURA has also collaborated with YU-CARE and

Congress, and will participate in Remembrance Day ceremonies on November 10 (to which all members of YURA are invited). The purpose of the various events is to bring members together for learning and enjoyment. Last year's events included a tour of the Gardiner Museum (organized by Sheelagh Atkinson and Angus Anderson), a Humber River Valley walk (led by Peter Victor), and a Ward's Island tour (arranged by Donna Smith). The YURA website provides information about other events such as the Scholars' Hub @ Home and The York Circle. Diane expressed thanks to the Executive Committee's events planning group, which includes Angus Anderson, Sheelagh Atkinson, Jane Grant, and Donna Smith; and she added that suggestions for future events and activities are welcome.

d) Scholarly Presentation Skills Workshop

David Leyton-Brown presented the report, noting that the opportunity to participate in this initiative enables retirees to maintain a connection to the University and to give back to it academically. It involves retired faculty from a range of disciplines who provide graduate students with constructive feedback on presentation skills and effectiveness. He had participated, along with faculty retirees William Whitla and Ron Pearlman, and the input had been much appreciated. Planning was ongoing with the Faculty of Graduate Studies for 2024 sessions. He noted that Professors Whitla and Pearlman, who had served for a number of years, would be stepping down creating an opportunity for others to participate. David expressed gratitude to them and invited any retired faculty to contact him should they be interested in serving as panelists; he hoped to see a range of areas of expertise represented.

e) 2023 Charity Challenge

Steve Dranitsaris presented this report, noting that 19 members of YURA had participated in the Charity Challenge walk (in conjunction with the TCS Toronto Marathon) in support of the student food bank. Donations of over \$20,000 had been raised and donations can still be made until the end of October. The walk was held on campus this year to raise awareness of food insecurity on campus; a survey had indicated a 1000% increase in use of the food bank and funding is critical to avoid reductions in support. The walk was organized by Sheila Forshaw and Debbie Hansen, and YURA members had been joined by several members of the York community, including Marisa Barlas of Advancement and Nona Robinson, Vice-Provost Students. Steve expressed thanks to the organizers and the fund-raising team, as well as others who participated in the walk and those who hosted the group back at the YURA office. He added that this is the fifth year YURA has participated in this walk and over \$100,000 has been raised in the past for student awards.

f) Student Awards

Steve Dranitsaris presented the report on three student awards. He pointed out that it was not possible to publish full names of award recipients for privacy reasons, but first names and students' programs had been provided. Two William Small awards of \$1900 had been given, together with two mature student awards of \$1200. Only two of the three YURA graduate student awards had been given and efforts continue to be made through the Faculty of Graduate Studies to better publicize the awards to students who could benefit from them. It was noted that the hope had been to have one of the recipients join the meeting, but the student was ill and could not attend. However, thank you notes had been received from recipients speaking to how the awards made a difference in their lives; and Diane Woody read excerpts from several such notes, in which students emphasized how the award had assisted them in their academic journey, not only financially but by providing a sense of validation and confidence.

8. Pension Fund Board of Trustees Report

Bruno Bellissimo, YURA's representative on the Board, presented the report, noting that the Board includes representatives from all unions, as well as the Board of Governors, the CPM group, and YURA. Its role is to ensure money is well deployed and to manage risk, supported by the Pension Fund Investment Committee of external experts. The committee meets quarterly to determine policy, and to review investments and financial statements. He referred to slides, the first of which indicated how funds had been invested, noting that the global equity component had been reduced in light of volatility, with increased investments in infrastructure and real estate. The second slide indicated returns on investments; he pointed out that last year had seen a disappointing loss of over 9% in response to uncertainties in the world. In the longer term, however, the plan has performed better than benchmarks and the plans of most other universities. It would appear that the decision to move funds to infrastructure and real estate had been beneficial. He emphasized that the Board and its professional managers remain vigilant, reviewing performance on a regular basis. The fund is well managed and diversified, and is earning the best returns possible. Increases in the pension fund have far exceeded the rate of inflation. It does not have inflation protections, so the future will depend on how well the fund performs.

9. All University Pension Committee (AUPC) Report

The report was presented by Donna Smith, YURA's representative on the committee, who noted that the committee was comprised of members from each employee group and university management, and deals with the operational side of pensions. It meets three to four times per year. She reported that a major item of discussion for the committee has been around potential changes recommended by the actuaries to the non-reduction reserve, which guarantees pensions remain constant regardless of changes in returns in pension plan funds. She added that the committee will meet next in mid-November.

10. YU-CARE Report

Rosanna Furgiuele, YURA's representative on the York University Centre for Aging Research and Education Advisory Board, presented the report. She described a number of its activities, including the offering of a cross-disciplinary certificate in aging through the Faculty of Health and research in areas such as policy and healthy aging. There were also a number of events and studies in which YURA members were invited to be involved. These included VoltAGE!, a student symposium on aging at which students presented ideas through multi-media projects, for which she and Fran Wilkinson had been judges; a stimulating presentation to the YURA café on the certificate and cognitive aging by Professor Gary Turner; and a future project by graduate students on an age-friendly university global network, for which YURA members could participate in interviews or focus groups.

11. Retirement Planning Centre Advisory Board Report

David Leyton-Brown presented the report, noting that the advisory board includes representatives of employee groups and the administration and normally meets twice per year. He reported that P&B seminars are resuming and the YURA Co-Presidents would be participating in a seminar on November 8 to speak about YURA to those considering retirement. He referred to statistics presented in the report, noting that as of August 31, 260+ employees were beyond normal retirement age. He also commented on retirements by employee groups over the past ten years,

observing that the largest number was in 2021 and that the increase in numbers in that year was mostly among YUSA members.

12. Association of Retired Faculty and Librarians (ARFL) Report

This report was presented by Fred Fletcher, who noted that ARFL is one of the two retiree groups at York, which have shared objectives to represent retirees to the administration, to promote a sense of community, and to give back to York. ARFL represents retirees who were members of YUFA and therefore is involved in collective bargaining issues such as improving retirement benefits for YUFA retirees. Most members of ARFL are also members of YURA. He reported that ARFL's AGM would be held online on November 3, and YURA members were welcome to attend the guest speaker's talk on Indigenizing 21st Century Canada. Next May, ARFL's meeting of members will have a guest speaker who will discuss AI.

13. CURAC (College and University Retiree Associations of Canada) Report

Fred Fletcher presented the report, noting that CURAC, of which York is a founding member, is a national organization for retiree associations; he indicated that he would not be standing for re-election to its Board. CURAC promotes inclusivity in its membership and provides a number of services to its members. Over 40 universities are members of the organization, which represents 21,000 individual members on issues like pensions and other issues affecting seniors. He anticipated that a report would be provided soon on a survey of members about benefits provided by institutions to their retirees. A renewal of the CURAC website is under way. The annual conference had moved to a hybrid format with simultaneous translation. This year CURAC held its first in person AGM and conference since 2019, celebrating the 20th anniversary of its founding. Charmaine Courtis' contributions to YURA had been acknowledged at the conference. He added that next year's conference would be at the University of Waterloo.

Diane Woody referred to the CURAC nomination letter for Charmaine Courtis, which highlighted her leadership as Co-President of YURA, her fund-raising efforts for student awards, her work in the YURA office (including in relation to membership renewals to ensure that membership remained strong during the pandemic), and her role as an ambassador to CURAC. YURA members joined in congratulating Charmaine on her CURAC Tribute Award.

Steve Dranitsaris acknowledged Fred Fletcher's many years of service to CURAC, including his role as Vice-President, chair of the communications committee, and newsletter editor.

14. Omnibus Motion

The omnibus motion, circulated with the Agenda and attached to the Minutes, included resolutions to approve the Minutes of the 2022 AGM, the Treasurer's Report, and allocation of surplus accumulated funds; to accept all other reports; and to affirm the Executive Committee membership for 2023-24.

In response to an online question inquiring whether YURA would take a role in advocating for hearing loss to be added to benefits for retirees, Steve Dranitsaris indicated that this would be taken under advisement. Ellen Hoffmann inquired about who determines the amount of student awards

and whether the amounts could be raised. Steve responded that this is entirely in the University's hands once the awards are established. Charmaine Courtis added that the amounts set were a minimum; and that if the endowment generates more interest income, that could be utilized to increase awards at the discretion of the University.

On a motion by Steve Dranitsaris, seconded by Natasa Bajin, the omnibus motion was approved unanimously.

15. Other Business

Steve Dranitsaris noted that over the years, it had been a tradition to present long stemmed white roses to retiring Executive members as a way of recognizing them and thanking them for their contributions. He acknowledged and thanked three retiring members. Angus Anderson served two terms on the Executive, providing helpful input to planning and organizing events, in particular the tour of the Gardiner Museum and the Charity Challenge. Sheelagh Atkinson also served two terms, contributing to discussions of issues and to events organization, in particular the Gardiner tour, as well as to fund-raising in previous Charity Challenges. Bruno Bellissimo served three terms on the Executive, providing strategic input; he served on the Pension Fund Board of Trustees for six years, providing useful reports, and will continue as YURA's representative on that body and as an ex-officio Executive member.

16. Adjournment

Following expressions of appreciation to the volunteers who had assisted at the door and to colleagues from UIT who had provided technical support, the meeting adjourned at 2:30 p.m. on a motion by Charmaine Courtis, seconded by David-Leyton-Brown.