

YORK UNIVERSITY FACULTY ASSOCIATION

Task Force on a Strategic Vision for York University

REPORT

On 20 March 2013 the YUFA General Membership Meeting passed a motion calling on the YUFA Executive and Stewards' Council "to engage a task force to prepare a strategic vision of the university on behalf of YUFA." A few months later, five faculty members and one staff associate agreed to accept that task:

- Kean Birch (Department of Social Science, Faculty of Liberal Arts & Professional Studies)
- Jeff Braun-Jackson (York University Faculty Association)
- Michael De Robertis (Department of Physics and Astronomy, Faculty of Science)
- Craig Heron (Department of History, Faculty of Liberal Arts & Professional Studies)
- Didi Khayatt (Faculty of Education)
- Richard Wellen (Department of Social Science, Faculty of Liberal Arts & Professional Studies)

After deliberation, we now present this document for discussion.

Preamble

Universities and other higher education institutions face a range of external and internal challenges and threats now and in the future. External challenges include the implications of the recent Strategic Mandate Agreement (SMA) with the Ontario Provincial Government. The autonomy of York University and other institutions has been eroded, and universities are being steered towards "vocational relevance" rather than academic excellence. This shift has included the establishment of a "corporatization ethos," which has changed fundamentally how we fulfil our mission. Increasing government interference has been accompanied – perhaps contradictorily – by a continuing decline in direct government funding of higher education and, as a consequence, increasing reliance on student fees. In light of these pressures, the demands of students are going to increase. Internal challenges include the self-imposed Academic and Administrative Program Review (AAPR) and the increasing casualization of teaching and research at York resulting from unclear or unrealistic visions and increasingly managerial decision-making about the goals of much-needed restructuring. Faculty, staff, and students at York University must work collegially and in good faith to understand and resolve these challenges if we are to move forward.

1. What is York?

1.1 What is York's mission?

From its earliest days York University has staked out a distinctive place in Canadian higher education with its emphasis on innovative intellectual and educational activity. We have used a long series of official documents to clarify that mission. While most have been drafted by senior management with some input from faculty, staff, and/or students, they remain open-ended and available to multiple interpretations. There are a number of visions of what York should be, what it currently does, and what it could become in the future.

Going back to its origins, the *York Act (1965)* outlines York's role clearly:

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4. *The objects and purposes of the University are:*
(a) the advancement of learning and the dissemination of knowledge; and
(b) the intellectual, spiritual, social, moral and physical development of its members and the betterment of society.

These objectives are defined more fully in the *York Mission Statement* :

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The mission of York University is the pursuit, preservation, and dissemination of knowledge. We promise excellence in research and teaching in pure, applied and professional fields. We test the boundaries and structures of knowledge. We cultivate the critical intellect.

York University is part of Toronto: we are dynamic, metropolitan and multi-cultural. York University is part of Canada: we encourage bilingual study, we value diversity. York University is open to the world: we explore global concerns.

A community of faculty, students, staff, alumni and volunteers committed to academic freedom, social justice, accessible education, and collegial self-governance, York University makes innovation its tradition.

They are also evident in the *Provostial White Paper (2010)*, entitled "Building a More Engaged University," which emphasizes the aspiration "to be Canada's Engaged University, we will be seen as an innovator in pedagogy, making use of social media and other forms of technology to meet evolving student needs and creating life-long learning opportunities for part-time, mature and returning students. Our university will be a global magnet for students who will see York's diversity as exemplifying and modeling values of global citizenship." This will be achieved through:

- Pursuit of academic quality in teaching and research.

- Becoming a more engaged university “terms of collaboration between higher education institutions and their larger communities (local, regional, national and global) for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity” (p.8).
- Setting benchmarks for priority areas.

These aims are reiterated, in slightly different ways, in the *University Academic Plan (2012)*, entitled “Enhancing Academic Quality in a Globalized World.”

- *York University community overwhelmingly believes that the top priority for the next five years must be a renewed focus on academic quality.*(p.2)
- *[I]nstitutional commitments to the advancement of knowledge across the full spectrum of disciplinary and interdisciplinary activities and to the promotion of excellence and critical exploration, as well as to academic freedom, social justice, accessible education, and collegial self-governance.* (p.3)

The combination of academic quality and shared values is repeated in the *York University Strategic Research Plan: 2013-2018 (2013)*, entitled “Building on Strength.”

York University is committed to excellence in research and scholarship in all its forms. Informed by a strong commitment to shared values, including the promotion of social justice and the public good, we aspire through our research to better understand the human condition and the world around us and to employ the knowledge we gain in the service of society. (p.4)

The *Strategic Mandate Agreement (2014)* repeats these themes about York’s role and mission, though somewhat less clearly:

York is a comprehensive, research intensive university that is committed to pursuing excellence, student success, outreach and partnership by engaging students, faculty, staff, alumni and external partners in a joint venture that transforms teaching into learning, research into discovery, and service into citizenship. (p.4)

These documents offer a common resource for different groups within the University to share. Yet they also open up conflicting interpretations of their meaning and space for competing alternative visions.

1.2 What makes York different?

York is not a unified, cohesive community, bound together by complacent consensus. Rather we value debate and disagreement. It is our disparity, our diversity, our differences, our disagreements that makes York such a special place. There is much about York that we need to protect:

- **Uniqueness** - We are distinct from all other universities in Ontario and Canada, reflecting a progressive, alternative university tradition unique to York and only a few other institutions around the world. We have unique programs and units, unique strengths and weaknesses, and a unique international reputation.
- **Global concerns** - We are a global university, with faculty, students and staff coming here from around the world and tackling global issues (such as climate change) together. We have an international reputation for the range and quality of our programmes and units, as well as our research and institutional distinctiveness.
- **Critical attitude** - We are a university historically committed to a comprehensive and liberal arts education with the aim to create students who can think critically for themselves, building on the critically-engaged work of faculty members. We bring together research and teaching as we push forward academic and public debate, as well as learning.
- **Innovative perspectives** - We are a university where faculty members are free to experiment, think and do in our research, teaching and service, as well as encourage it in students.
- **Interdisciplinary approaches** - We are a university in which we frequently – and insistently – cross boundaries, question assumptions and engage and collaborate with others outside our disciplines and our usual mindsets.
- **Openness** - We are a university open to difference and diversity, in which we support and promote equity across this diversity within the campus and beyond.
- **Accessibility** - We are a university which encourages and supports access to knowledge and learning so that it does not depend on wealth, status, or inheritance.
- **Democratic governance** - We are a university based on the principles of collective governance, in which decisions are made by those affected by them and not a distant leadership.
- **Practical focus** - We are a university that is engaged with communities around the world, as well as ones closer to home, in order to help solve problems facing an array of different peoples. We engage with a broad range of people and groups, not just business and government.

1.3 Where is York heading?

York is at a crossroads. York's senior administrators regularly present us with grim visions of the future, along with paths forward that might alleviate the gloom - differentiation, prioritization, online learning, and other forms of restructuring. There is a serious risk in these proposals that teaching and learning could be demeaned, and research largely commodified and commercialized. If faculty and librarians represented by YUFA want to avoid those outcomes, we need to consider what we want York to be and what we need to do to create that change. This does not mean harking back to some mythic golden age; it means rigorous debate about what our future university could and should look like. It means asking searching questions about York's role in the larger world. We desire a process that is positive, hopeful, and respectful.

2. Collegial Governance

2.1 Our Model of Self-Governance

Universities have a long tradition of self-governance that in many ways sets them apart from other institutions in civil society, most particularly from business corporations. University faculty members expect that academic decisions should be made by the *collegium* – the collectivity of their academic colleagues. This tradition of governance is rooted in the autonomy and freedom of academic scholarship and the professional competence that academic training and peer regulation is meant to assure. The right of scholars, teachers, and librarians in the university to make decisions about the academic life of the institution is pivotal to our identity and practice as professionals. It is our academic freedom.

York has had an especially rich history of collegial governance. Departments, schools, and research units have long expected to be able to make key decisions about academic planning for recruitment and promotion of colleagues, curriculum, and academic and pedagogical standards. Each unit has a set of committees, comprised largely of faculty members, for dealing with these matters. At the next level of governance, faculty councils and their committees have had responsibility for approving curricular and other innovations from individual units and for setting overall academic policy for all instructors within the faculty. On a campus-wide level, the university Senate is the supreme body for academic decision-making about education and research. The York Act sets down its broad, expansive powers:

The Senate is responsible for the academic policy of the University and may recommend to the Board the establishment of faculties, schools, institutes and departments, and the establishment of chairs, and may establish councils in the faculties, schools or institutes established, and may enact by-laws, rules and regulations for the conduct of its affairs, and, without limiting the generality of the foregoing, has power,

(a) to consult with the Board and to make recommendations as to the appointment of the Chancellor and the President;

(b) to determine and regulate the standards for the admission of students to the University, the contents and curricula of all courses of study, and the requirements for graduation;

(c) to conduct examinations and appoint examiners;

(d) to deal with matters arising in connection with the award of fellowships, scholarships, medals, prizes and other awards for academic achievement;

(e) to confer the degrees of Bachelor, Master and Doctor and all other degrees, diplomas and certificates in all branches of learning that may appropriately be conferred by a University;

(f) after consultation with the Board, to confer honorary degrees.

This is a vision of governance that gives the *collegium* indisputable rights and responsibilities in determining the academic direction of the university. In contrast to its counterparts at some other post-secondary institutions, the York Senate has had a history of lively, effective engagement with academic affairs. It remains York's most important public forum for deliberation on university policy, where faculty, staff, students, and administrators can speak to each other. In recent years, the chairs of Senate have often taken particular interest in encouraging participation in those debates.

YUFA helps to sustain that model of collegial governance through the collective agreement (CA) that it signs with the university administration. The CA delineates procedures for hiring new faculty, for granting tenure and promotion, for establishing teaching workload, for protecting intellectual property rights of members, and for defining and guaranteeing academic freedom. It defends the "existing practices" of collegial governance. And it explicitly defends the prerogatives of the Senate. Article 18.28 says: "In exercising its role in the academic planning process, in particular through its decisions concerning the disposition of the University's resources, the Employer shall respect the role of Senate in academic matters...." The CA also provides a formal procedure for launching grievances wherever these clauses appear to have been violated. Like the craft unionists of old, the professoriate has used unionization to sustain and protect collegial governance.

The managerial powers of senior academic administrators overlap a good deal with collegial decision-making. Under the York Act, the President is expected, on the one hand, to merely "supervise and direct the *implementation* of the educational policy and general administration of the University, the teaching staff, officers, servants and the students thereof" [emphasis added]. But, on the other, he or she can recommend the establishment of new

faculties, schools, institutes, programs, and projects, to recommend the promotion, tenure, or dismissal of faculty and other university employees, to examine all the activities of the University, to recommend to the Board or the Senate regulations to govern university activities, to establish “presidential committees to study and to recommend action on matters affecting the University,” and to exercise “such other powers and duties as from time to time may be conferred upon or assigned to him by the Board.” The President delegates some of his or her responsibilities and powers to a number of vice-presidents and to deans of individual faculties.

Over the years, senior academic administrators have nonetheless had to learn to work within the framework of collegiality. As holders of the purse strings, they could shape collegial decisions about new hires or new programs, but more often, at the level of the Senate and individual faculties, they were expected to exercise leadership in helping to guide the *collegium* in its deliberations (the chairs of departments and schools, although formally appointed by deans, are generally chosen by their colleagues and remain in the YUFA bargaining unit). Between the powers of senior academic administrators and those of the *collegium*, there was customarily room to negotiate.

2.2 The Threats to Collegiality

In recent years the senior administration has been steadily and unilaterally appropriating more authority for responsibilities that should lie within the *collegium*. A new managerialism has brought about a new autonomy among administrators and a penchant for pursuing their own agendas and reducing collegial input. This has been a process of greater centralization and less transparency, since policy now tends to take shape outside the open forums of the *collegium*. Searches for new deans are closed, shortlists are not made public, candidates no longer make public presentations to the university community, and faculty are no longer polled on their preferences. At the faculty level, deans (and/or associate deans) have intervened aggressively in the collegial decision-making process within academic units, especially over appointment procedures and promotion and tenure. At the campus-wide level, the Senate has been marginalized in some significant academic decision-making, notably about a new research centre (CIGI), a program prioritization exercise, and a new campus – all involving issues of major academic policy traditionally within the purview of the *collegium*. A practice has developed of presenting information in densely packed Power Point shows and asking for questions, and/or providing an online Q&A page, all of which is misleadingly called “consultation.” Real consultation must be a serious exercise in discussion, debate, and deliberation, not simply a question-and-answer session. Leadership in a collegial environment should involve bringing ideas and proposals to be developed, critiqued, and reshaped, not simply unveiling finished packages to be rubber stamped.

The new managerialism in the university has many features of private-sector corporate management. In contrast to collegiality, it operates more hierarchically, expects more upward reporting and accountability, and has also required a significant expansion of administrative staff to instruct, advise, and monitor chairs and directors of academic units, chairs of committees, and non-academic staff (according to the York *Factbook*, between 2000 and 2013,

the number of senior executives and CPM at York increased by 56 per cent and YUSA staff by 41 per cent, while the number of full-time faculty grew by only 26 per cent). The drain on the university budget that this expansion of administration had entailed is not fully known at this point, but the negative impact on morale is palpable among academic colleagues.

2.3 What Needs to Be Done

These changes in managerial policy within the university call for a determined response from faculty and librarians on two fronts: on one hand, the re-invigoration of the collegial decision-making powers of the Senate and faculty and library councils and, on the other, new demands in collective bargaining to incorporate language and procedures into the CA that will shore up the rights of the *collegium*, and that can then be defended through the administration of the agreement. Wilfrid Laurier's faculty association, for example, was able to get the following clause inserted into its agreement:

The University acknowledges the rights and responsibilities of Members to participate in the formulation and/or recommendation of academic policies and procedures within the University through duly constituted collegial bodies and committees. The involvement and participation of members in the selection of senior administrators is accepted and supported by the University.

YUFA should also be prepared to use Article 18.28 to challenge through the grievance process any initiative that bypasses or marginalizes the Senate's legislatively defined prerogative to make academic policy.

Overall, we must insist that academic staff, both professors and librarians, play a decisive role in making academic decisions and setting educational policy if post-secondary institutions are to fulfill their purposes. This process must involve oversight and transparency in financial matters.

3. Research

What distinguishes universities, particularly York University, from other post-secondary educational institutions is their commitment to both research and teaching and to teachers who are researchers. The establishment of a vibrant research culture is essential for any major university to fulfill its mandate.

In the following, we identify the strengths, challenges, and threats to research cultures at York University, and some responses that could lead to a stronger research culture that would better position York for the future.

3.1 Strengths

- The most recent focus on the enhancement of research culture across the university has met with some successes; the 2014 Times Higher Education and World university

Ranking listed York University among the top 100 in the world and fourth in Canada Social Sciences, Humanities, and the Arts.

- Many Organized Research Units (ORUs) have garnered significant attention nationally and internationally, illustrating the importance of interdisciplinary research undertaken at York University and the mobilization of this knowledge for the benefit of all Canadians.
- The recent creation of the Lassonde School of Engineering is the most visible sign of York's commitment to become a more comprehensive, research-intensive university, while retaining and building upon its traditional strengths in the Liberal Arts, Fine Arts and professional schools.
- With its scholarly strengths and demographic advantages, York University is poised to play a prominent role among the most influential universities in Canada in the twenty-first century.

3.2 Challenges

There remain significant challenges before York is able to achieve its full research potential. Some of these impediments to the enhancement of research cultures at York are structural, while others are attitudinal. These include:

- **Support for research** – There continues to be inadequate support for research at the Faculty level. Moreover there is often a lack of coordination between decisions and policies made in the office of the Vice-President of Research and Innovation (VPRI) and the practice of grass-roots researchers.
- **Organized Research Units** – There is often considerable distance between research carried out by ORUs and research performed within academic units. ORUs have been encouraged to become too independent and therefore have become somewhat detached from the faculty research culture. A better balance is needed to advance the overall research culture at York.
- **Teaching load disparities** – High teaching loads in some Faculties relative to colleagues in comparator institutions is deleteriously affecting research productivity.
- **"Star" system** – Funded chairs, notably the new York Research Chairs, can be encouragements to research excellence, but they also tie up funding for research in fewer hands and contribute to resentment among colleagues about unfair workloads.
- **Metrics** – York University's academic complexion is unique among major universities in Canada, with nearly 80 per cent of faculty members being eligible for SSHRC (rather than NSERC or CIHR) funding. Metrics based on "input" – the amount of external funding awarded to York researchers, for example – will not provide an accurate picture

of the quality and quantity of scholarship undertaken at York University. Some senior administrators continue to use metrics better suited to a more heavily NSERC/CIHR funded institution.

- **Faculty mentoring** – The lack of a substantial mentoring program in all Faculties is particularly harmful to early scholars who are attempting to establish an independent research program, as well as teach new courses and take on onerous service roles.
- **Teaching only streams** – An increasing reliance on “teaching only” positions, whether full-time or contract, will have a negative impact on York’s research culture by reducing the number of researchers and possible research synergies that are essential for an interdisciplinary university.
- **Few rewards for research excellence** – Faculty colleagues, like everyone else, are encouraged by the acknowledgement of their research accomplishments. Such recognition is too infrequent in many units and Faculties.

A failure to improve the research culture at York University could have profound consequences. We would not be fulfilling our mission with respect to research and teaching (which is illuminated by research), but this also could have negative repercussions in a provincial context where universities might ultimately be distinguished as “research” or “teaching” institutions.

3.3 What Needs to Be Done

The single most effective change to improve research at York University is to strengthen our research culture: by valuing all research performed at York and acknowledging our researchers; by improving communications and transparency between the senior administration – especially the VPR&I’s office – and grass-roots researchers, ORUs and among faculties. More specifically:

- **Research Excellence** - While all university faculty members are normally expected to engage in research, teaching and service, external perceptions and an institution’s external ranking (and therefore funding) is closely tied to its “research excellence.” York University must therefore aspire to research excellence, though without sacrificing that which makes York distinctive (e.g., its commitment to social justice, diversity, equity, etc.)
- **New Faculty** – New faculty are ultimately the key to this institution’s future. It is thus important that newly hired faculty must be capable of establishing a strong, independent research program, particularly in key areas of research engagement (e.g., strategic areas targeted by University and Faculty) and of attracting high-quality graduate students. It is important to ensure that new faculty are provided with appropriate support in order to build their research program, particularly during the critical pre-tenure (i.e., pre-candidacy and candidacy) periods. This should include:

- ***An effective and comprehensive mentoring program*** (concerned not just with research, but focusing on teaching and service as well) that would offer sound advice and guidance to new colleagues, allowing them to build their independent research programs in a timely fashion.
- ***Some reduction in teaching and service contributions.*** It is unrealistic to expect a colleague, no matter how talented, to establish a research program and attract high-quality students in the first 5-6 years without a modest reduction in teaching and/or service.
- **Tenured Faculty** - Tenured faculty must be encouraged to maintain a vibrant research program through:
 - ***Peer-reviewed teaching releases*** which include post-release assessment. Research course releases are most effective for faculty members who intend to complete a well-defined research project. They might, however, also be considered for faculty members who wish to change directions on research and who propose well-defined programs.
 - ***Access to high-quality graduate students*** and, where applicable, research assistants or postdoctoral fellows. We worry about the impact of much higher international graduate student fees.
 - ***Sufficient administrative (and computing) support*** for research, including the identification of all relevant opportunities and sources of funding, as well as professional advice on the structuring/writing of award/grant applications. It must be acknowledged that some of the highly regarded research undertaken at York University cannot be measured strictly by level of funding. Faculty members in this category, however, still need to be aware of and apply to relevant opportunities that could raise research profiles in their areas even if these opportunities are not grant-related.
 - ***Opportunities for “interdisciplinary interactions”;*** i.e., broadly themed sessions that would bring researchers from disparate units together periodically, possibly leading to research synergies that ordinarily would not have germinated.
 - **Reduced Teaching Load** – Professorial-stream faculty members currently teaching more than 2.0 courses per year should have their course load reduced to that level. A recent YUFA bargaining survey showed that almost all York faculty teaching 2.5 courses believe that their teaching load is higher than the great majority of their colleagues at comparable universities.

4. Teaching

4.1 Our Strengths

York has a proud record of high quality teaching and learning. Our instructors have established an enviable reputation for innovative pedagogy of many kinds, often infused with our trademark spirit of interdisciplinarity. We also have a well-established practice of putting our best scholars in the classroom at both the undergraduate and graduate levels to enrich their teaching with the fruits of their research. Yet, there are growing trends in the structures of teaching at York that are threatening our abilities to deliver the best learning experiences.

4.2 Who Teaches?

Students arriving in York classrooms are now encountering a complex new hierarchy of instructors in five distinct but overlapping categories:

- **Professorial tenure stream** - The traditional full-time teacher-scholars, whose ranks have begun to shrink through attrition and the expansion of other categories.
- **Alternate stream** – A group of faculty who are hired only to teach, with a heavier workload than the professorial stream (as much as 3.5 courses per year) and without any expectations that they will engage in scholarship other than research and writing on pedagogy. For many years, no more than 3 per cent of full-time faculty, this category will expand to 15 per cent of the total full-time faculty under the current YUFA Collective Agreement.
- **Contractually Limited Appointments** – These faculty are full-time but normally limited to no more than three years (and often less). Their teaching load is generally higher than that of professorial tenure-stream faculty. Their numbers have been particularly high in the Faculty of Liberal Arts and Professional Studies, where in recent years one in ten faculty have been contractually limited.
- **Contract faculty** – Hired by the course under the CUPE 3903 Unit 2 Collective Agreement and not assessed on any scholarly output, these faculty direct a large and growing number of courses across the university. They are hired only for one academic year (or term) at a time, often with little time for course preparation.
- **Teaching assistants** – These include both full-time graduate students and contract faculty, who do most of the frontline work in the small groups within the many large lecture courses.

The precarious employment of the last three categories hampers the ability of those instructors to deliver the highest quality teaching, as they scramble to prepare new courses within tight time frames. Yet they handle a majority of the teaching at York.

4.3 Challenges to Good Teaching and Learning

- **Large classes** – York has handled its financial pressures by expanding enrolments dramatically – from under 39,000 in 2000 to nearly 55,000 a decade later. Especially at the first and second year, it funnels students into enormous lecture halls filled with hundreds of classmates. That can be a far-from-ideal setting for the best pedagogical work.
- **Distance from students** – Full-time faculty are often at a great distance from undergraduate students. As the average ratio of full-time faculty to students continues to hover at about 1:36 (according to the Provost’s 2014 report) – with no sign of decreasing - it is difficult for many students to connect with faculty and to benefit from more personalised instruction.
- **Credentialism** – A university degree has been re-conceptualized in public discourses as a direct link to specific jobs in the labour market. Students now bring to their academic programs a far more utilitarian approach to learning, and thus put new pressures on instructors to tailor their teaching to market expectations.
- **Student cynicism** – Students are now under enormous financial pressures. Tuition fees have soared, and students consequently feel pressure to work for wages for thirty or more hours a week. Student debt has nonetheless mounted to shocking levels, and yet job prospects after graduation continue to look grim. Not surprisingly, many students enter their classrooms with resentment and cynicism about having to shoulder such financial burdens with an uncertain outcome, and refuse to engage with the academic demands of their programs (not reading or attending classes, for example). Faculty are constantly aware of the rising difficulties of motivating and engaging such students.
- **The electronic revolution** – Faculty are under relentless pressure from governments and university administrators to embrace “technologically enhanced learning.” The rapid spread of Power-Point through York classrooms, the introduction of Moodle for managing courses, and the rising call for fully online courses without clear evidence that they are effective has challenged the skills sets of many faculty and added new workload demands. As the provincial government launches its Ontario Online initiative, there is growing uncertainty about who will prepare, deliver, and, over the long term, maintain the new online courses and how their intellectual property rights will be protected. We must do everything we can to ensure that these initiatives are do not sacrifice academic quality and integrity for financial savings.

4.4 What Needs to Be Done

- ***Increasing the full-time faculty complement*** is vital to confronting the challenges of precarious employment and beginning to reduce class size. Students are better served by instructors with continuity of employment.
- ***Developing careful policies on online teaching*** will be essential to ensure that the pedagogical advantages (and not merely the apparent cost saving) are clearly assessed and debated, and that the intellectual property rights of those developing the courses are protected. We need to examine provincial initiatives in online teaching to ensure that faculty members and academic units do not lose control over their curriculum and that students are not shortchanged when academic work is de-skilled by the proliferation of reusable instructional content.
- ***More opportunities for professional development as teachers*** would help faculty members in improving their instructional methods.
- ***Reduced teaching loads*** could give faculty the time to become better teachers.

5. Finance

5.1 Context

Like all of Ontario's universities, York is badly in need of improved public funding. For many years York's academic policy and planning process has been developed against the backdrop of warnings about financial austerity. The recent Academic and Administrative Program Review (AAPR) is probably the most obvious case, as it has purportedly been introduced in order to rescue York from unsustainable budget deficits. Each year we hear of the need for increasingly onerous cuts that will make it difficult to replace retiring full-time faculty or to bring the teaching load of York faculty more in line with our counterparts at universities with similar research ambitions.

The level of financial alarmism that has accompanied most of York's internal academic planning initiatives over the last decade seems misplaced. Upon examination we can see that York has managed its finances well, posting a nearly balanced budget over the past five years despite significant turmoil in financial markets. The recently announced return to health of York's pension plan has been very welcome. The spring 2014 budget report to Senate shows that the pension savings achieved by higher employee contributions and better markets has freed up over \$38M in new funds for new strategic investments, which have not yet been specified. Unfortunately we do not yet see any evidence that York's academic community will have much say over how this money is spent.

5.2 Challenges

We should not be naïve about the considerable cost of pursuing academic quality and protecting the professional integrity of our work in an expanding and multifaceted postsecondary system. As universities serve an ever larger segment of the population, they are being asked to be more accountable and efficient. This makes it even more important to see how some of the measures for achieving accountability may actually be counterproductive. Increased competition, ever-increasing performance-based reviews, and the privileging of “marketable” fields and disciplines run the risk of reinforcing academic conformity, threatening academic freedom, and building the expectation that a university should be run like a business. The strong emphasis of the AAPR process on calculating the efficiency, output, and market demand of academic programs has raised a great deal of concern about whether such a narrow approach to institutional planning, and the pervasive expansion of an “audit culture” entailed by it, will really result in improving academic quality.

5.2 What Needs to Be Done

- ***Improving the transparency and the consultative structure of York’s budget and planning process*** would bring a number of benefits. The greatest and most important would be to strengthen the role that York’s faculty and academic community can play in shaping the future priorities of our university. YUFA should continue to use its resources to study, analyse, and discuss the governance challenges at York, including the role played by financial information and control within academic decision-making.
- ***Faculty and librarians should have more influence and critical examination*** over resource allocation issues and ensure that academic quality for students and for truly independent and innovative inquiry is not traded off for financial savings.
- **We must see university budgets for what they are, namely choices** – arguably political choices – about the priorities that should drive the organization of academic work. Faculty members need to play a leading role in formulating and making those choices.

6. Moving Forward

York University is facing profound challenges to its historic commitment to collegial decision-making, a rich research culture, and high-quality teaching. Many of the threats arise from provincial government policies that deprive Ontario universities of adequate resources and insist on new utilitarian models of post-secondary education. Yet the responses of York’s senior management to these new pressures are equally disturbing. YUFA members must therefore be ready to work with other faculty associations and staff and student groups, as well as members

Attachment 2

of decision-making bodies at York, including the Senate, to question every new initiative that poses a threat to what is valuable about York and to pose alternatives. The way must be tried.