

Presidential Search

Advisory Statement to the Presidential Search Committee

This advisory statement reflects responses by Senators, Senate committees and Faculty Councils to the questions posed by the Presidential Search Committee.¹ Respondents were encouraged to situate their comments in the context of the University Academic Plan 2015-2020, Senate's most recent, explicit and comprehensive expression of academic priorities. The UAP takes into account both internal and external dimensions of planning since the two are inextricably linked. Senate expects that the next President will embrace the UAP and work assiduously to ensure the achievement of its objectives. Although the new UAP is forward-looking, those who contributed to this statement reminded Senate Executive of enduring values, goals and commitments. York is a metropolitan university, one that embraces excellence, equity, academic freedom, social justice, access and innovation. Faculty members, students, librarians, staff and alumni are heirs to a legacy of vibrant, creative interdisciplinarity that will continue to be a hallmark of our academic activities. We foster critical inquiry that begins in classrooms, libraries, laboratories, studios and serendipitous spaces, but relates to and impacts on every facet of society beyond the University. We assert the value of liberal education and informed, critical citizenship, and to prize the Humanities, Social Sciences, Fine Arts and basic sciences. We continue to develop professional programs and applied studies. These values are expressed through teaching, learning, research, service to the University and engagement with communities locally, regionally, nationally and globally. The next President should embody and project these values. Our UAP is based on an understanding that "society's reliance on universities to drive creativity, innovation, knowledge, and community engagement through teaching and research continues to intensify." The President must give life to this assumption through express convictions and concrete actions.

York's Distinctiveness and Strengths

A common theme running through the responses received by Senate Executive points to the University's diversity as both a defining characteristic and a strength – a "model and beacon," in the words of the UAP. This is especially so in terms of the student body. It must also be increasingly true in terms of the faculty complement. Diversity is inextricably linked with inclusion.

York's progression – both in its growth and the quality of its academic endeavours is exceptional among universities. Throughout its history, York insisted on foundational principles of access, social justice, quality and interdisciplinarity. While our values are not exclusive to York University, says the UAP, "taken together, they represent a unique and authentic combination that guides academic planning at a public institution."

¹ What makes York University different from other universities / what strengths should York continue to build upon? What challenges and opportunities do you see for York University over the next few years? What should be the goals and priorities for the next President and Vice-Chancellor? (Alternatively, you may wish to just finish the sentence: "I hope that the next President does ...".) What experience and/or leadership attributes should York University be seeking in its next President and Vice-Chancellor – and are there any characteristics of York itself that the next President should exemplify? What else should the Search Committee be considering?

York takes its responsibilities to society seriously, and has absorbed a disproportionate share of growth in the system. In doing so it has helped the provincial government to realize public policy goals (not least in response to the double cohort). Size is advantageous in myriad ways, giving students wide choices and providing platforms for collaboration and innovation. There has also been a cost to nearly constant growth of the past. The University has been strained during times of rapid growth with discounted funding. The next President will arrive at a time when enrolments have fallen or levelled in some programs and Faculties, yet continue to rise in others. Offerings and allocations should be aligned with demand and need, but we must not leave programs to wither capriciously. Careful stewardship will be essential to ensuring that York lives up to its Strategic Mandate Agreement commitments as well as internally-defined targets. It is particularly important that the President lead and support efforts to revitalize graduate education.

The University's location is also relevant. It has a presence in Jane-Finch/University Heights, North Toronto, Markham and the downtown core. As a result it creates intersecting spokes of social, cultural, political and economic impact and promise. By virtue of this, the President of York University becomes not just the leader of an institution but also a major figure in the Greater Toronto Area. The President should be a strong representative of York but also share the limelight with the students, faculty members and staff. York is compelled to be a good neighbour to those residing and working close to the Keele campus and the President plays a key role in ensuring York fulfils that role. At the same time, York has an international reach and the President should have a global viewpoint.

Challenges and Opportunities

The University's reputation is not commensurate with its excellence and impact. It has often been unfairly portrayed. This is not to say that there are not real, consequential issues to address – safety among them -- but to underline that the new President must be ready and able to take the steps necessary to enhance perceptions while addressing underlying causes. The UAP stresses “strengthening...communications and advocacy for York.” While often oriented to the external environment, improved intra-University communications are also necessary. The President should be positive in outlook, narrating “the York story” in compelling ways.

With an ambitious fund-raising campaign gearing up, the President will have an especially important role in advancement and should possess a commitment to this. In a time of budgetary constraint, it is essential that we enrich investments in faculty complement renewal, bursaries, scholarships and innovative financial arrangements for students, in research and teaching, and in new and refurbished facilities.

Concerns have been expressed that collegial governance is eroding and that academic freedom needs an especially vigorous defence in the present climate. The University's Mission Statement defines our community as one “committed to academic freedom, social justice, accessible education, and collegial self-governance” while the UAP speaks of “meaningful collegial engagement of faculty, staff and students in the development and implementation of the priorities, objectives and initiatives reflected in our planning documents.” The next President must give more than lip-service to collegiality, which is not just a bedrock principle but a proven pathway for productive, harmonious, rigorous and

supple processes. The President must be transparent, accountable, receptive to new ideas, oriented to dialogue, and both proudly willing and demonstrably able to uphold ideals.

Looking outward, there are signs of a worrisome erosion of university autonomy and de-funding by governments, increased competition, and trends that de-value the Liberal Arts, discovery research, and creativity. At the same time, there are significant opportunities to build relations with a wide range of actors from every sector of society to our advantage. This includes joining with others in the University community and beyond to counter phenomena that threaten society's betterment. It also encompasses seeking out partnerships for research, experiential curriculum and the kind of immersive, interactive education that complements traditional modes of learning.

Presidential Goals and Priorities

The President must, of course, set priorities. In academic terms, priority-setting should be guided by the University Academic Plan. It should also respect the goals established by constituent academic units, and reflect a deliberated, sophisticated understanding of the University's plurality. A significant, sustained priority should be building bridges.

The UAP stresses that "academic quality has been the overriding imperative for York over the last five years and it must continue to be so in everything we do for the next five years." The President must be vigilant in the pursuit of quality, capable of developing, applying and documenting strategies for its attainment. This applies to administrative structures and decision-making models, which some feel now bear the stamp of a corporate paradigm, as well as to academic offerings. A high priority must be placed on the University's budget and finances in order to achieve the objectives of the University Academic Plan and accomplish other goals referenced by respondents.

Experience and Leadership Attributes

The next President should be an individual of distinction, resourcefulness and dedication. The successful candidate should commit to the University as it has been and as it is today; but should have a vision of all that it *can* be. The UAP sets out guiding directions and desired destinations. The President must help steer the way. Desirable traits include a focus on equity, a heartfelt desire to listen and learn, an ability to inspire, perseverance and dynamism.

It is generally expected and often strongly expressed that the individual selected will come to the job from a career in the academy, preferably with recent experience as a researcher and teacher but certainly with an appreciation for the duties and workplace experiences of faculty members. The President must have an astute grasp of the postsecondary policy landscape, the dynamics of a large public institution, and the special role played by universities. The President should be an articulate communicator, an influencer of debates about postsecondary policy in the provincial and federal arenas, a compelling public face for York, a strong voice for all of our academic programs, an adept navigator in a changing world, a defender of the public university, and a literate reader and adapter of practices elsewhere that are conducive to success.

The President should have a commitment to sustainability, one of York's world-leading attributes, and an aesthetic sensibility that matches the University's artistic and creative soul. Our campuses can and must be ever more inviting and safe in every sense of these words.

York is a bilingual university. It also aspires to an ever-more prominent presence on the national stage of a bilingual country. Proficiency in both French and English is highly desirable. At a minimum, the President should be comfortable presenting York to the world in both official languages.

Other Considerations

The concluding passage of the UAP enumerates the major changes that will occur in the next five years.² Looking ahead five years, the University Academic Plan states that "there will be many moments to celebrate York and to display our attributes as well as our significant contributions to our students and to society." The next President will lead and support celebrations, and extoll (and perhaps, yes, to explain) the contributions we are making and will continue to make. The President's role in presenting the University to the world is instrumental. APPRC advises that the University "needs and deserves a defender, but it will thrive with a champion."

In the section of the UAP focused on "enabling the plan" a commitment is made to developing "high quality and effective administrative service models to support academic priorities, expanding the shared services approach, and empowering staff and local planners with appropriate career / skills development." It will fall to the next President to ensure that our University services are modern and effective while maximizing the resources available for academic activities.

² "Profound change" is associated with the Markham campus, further program innovation and comprehensiveness, tangible improvements in program quality, scholarly achievement and pedagogical innovation, the School of Continuing Studies, the advent of enrolment demand, Glendon as a francophone hub, the subway stations at Keele, the fund-raising campaign, and urbanization.