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## Memorandum

Date: November 28, 2006

To: Robert Tiffin  
Vice-President Students

From: Lorna R. Marsden, C.M. PhD.

Subject: **Executive Response to the Report:**  
**STRENGTHENING YORK'S NEIGHBOURHOODS**

The evolution of the colleges at York University has been almost continuous since their creation about 40 years ago. I am grateful to all the members of this Task Force, and particularly to the Chair, Vice-President Tiffin, for a thoughtful and thorough review of the current circumstances.

The most recent University Academic Plan approved by our Senate combined with the Multi-Year Accountability agreement with the Government of Ontario, have presented us with new and compelling goals. Both documents have timetables and a focus on measurable outcomes. Both documents make much of the need to pay closer attention to the student experience in the classroom and outside it. We have a range of measures of student performance, satisfaction and activities. We need the instruments to ensure that we reach our objectives with respect to the student experience.

In the classroom (laboratories, studios and performance areas), we have some existing and focused institutions for delivering on promises. We have the Centre for the Support of Teaching, the Counselling and Development Centre, the academic writing programs, the classroom technology and wireless presence and many other programs serving both faculty and students.

Outside the classroom we have many fewer focused institutions. Among those few are the sports and recreation programs and the activities provided and promoted by clubs and student governments. The needs of students and especially first-year students and commuter students go well beyond this and the Colleges are the best and most comprehensive institutions for providing opportunities, a supportive environment and measuring results on a consistent basis.



The goal, captured well in the recommendations from this Task Force, is to provide the conditions for the Colleges to perform this essential role in the University under today's circumstances.

Therefore, I strongly endorse:

I: those recommendations that focus the role of the Colleges on the vital provision of co-curricular programming and the required diverse cultural experience. Recommendations 3, 4, 11, 12, 13, 22, and 25. Each of these recommendations reinforces our UAP and our commitment to students.

II: those recommendations that assist the Masters to achieve success in implementing the recommendations in I above. These are 7, 5, 1, 2, 6, 16, 19, 17, 18, 20. To be effective leaders in achieving the goals set in the UAP and MYA, the Masters must be able to focus entirely on the quality of the co-curricular experience, their communities and the culture of the College community and the necessary assessment of their work and that of the College s/he leads. Removing the responsibility of residence life - an entire job in itself and other administrative tasks will provide the time to interact more continuously with students, Fellows, their College governments and others engaged in building communities.

Equally, clarifying the lines of reporting to the academic deans will allow the masters to participate fully in building the relationship between the curricular and co-curricular plans that each of our Deans prepares.

And the proposed Council of College Communities will create the ongoing relationships, budget allocations, and accountability standards to ensure the student life outside the classroom is fully understood, coordinated and delivered.

Because the entire University is tied to the UAP and MYA, and because significant change is occurring in the Faculties, it is vital that the VP Academic and the VP Students ensure that recommendation 10 be part of the current restructuring plan. I urge them to do so. Recommendation 9 should also be considered at the time the restructuring decisions are taken.

Recommendations 8, 14 and 15 require the Vice President Students to take the lead, along with recommendation 1, in working with the Deans and the Faculty leadership to plan, implement and provide regular assessment of the success of these recommendations.

Other parts of the University are also involved. Space planning is the work of the vice-presidents and the Master Planning committee. Recommendation 23 and 24 should be referred to that committee. The Master Planning Committee should be asked to prepare a response to those recommendations by June 2007 and to raise in its response the issues of the ripple plans, short-term and long-term timetables, maintenance, and budget issues for consideration at the Council of College Communities, by the Deans, and in the many budget planning groups.

Recommendation 27 requires cooperation well beyond the scope of administrative jurisdiction. While much to be desired it will have to be done through persuasion and perhaps the Council of College Communities could undertake consideration of this recommendation.

Convocation falls under the jurisdiction of the Senate Subcommittee on Honorary Degrees and Ceremonials. Other recommendations relating to Convocation are under review at the present time. Convocation represents the most important academic ceremony for students in their years at University and a major symbolic recognition of their changed status. It is important to faculty, students, graduates and their family and friends. It also represents a very significant budget allocation and the greatest investment of time and resources on a single event by the University. The role and presence of the Colleges and recommendation 21 will be one important consideration in the evolution of Convocation.

Review of the web sites is an ongoing project. This is not an easy task and the work of a single staff person is necessary but not sufficient to provide the necessary communication. Recommendation 26 will be referred to the leading units involved in web site design, management, review and promotion.

I now come to recommendation 28. I have no objection to this recommendation at all. However, we do not have the luxury of waiting until 2009-2010 to assess the effectiveness of these recommendations and their implementation.

The first-year experience of our students from the time they accept our offer of admission to their transition to second-year is vitally important. The effectiveness of the Colleges in improving the experience and involvement, improving retention, reducing the stresses and problems for first-year students needs to be measured beginning in the fall term of 2007-2008. The measurement needs to be simple, valid and widely communicated.

This requires each Master to have a plan for the year starting in the spring of 2007 when offers of admission are made and continuing step-by-step through to the transition of those students to second year. Each Master will need to assess on a regular basis the activities of the Fellows in support of this goal, as well as the work of the Fellows with upper year students. The Deans (or their designates) and Masters who are paired will need to work together to ensure that each student knows about the curricular and co-curricular activities available and to review student complaints, participation and absences.

The Vice-President Students and the Deans will need to see and, no doubt, contribute to the plans each Master prepares on an annual basis and to sign off on that plan. Fellows will need to indicate to their Master the time they will give to the College and those Fellows who are not prepared to be active will need to be replaced by those many faculty members who are prepared to be contributors. The presence of graduate students as Junior Fellows will be welcome and must be planned with attention to their obligations to their academic programs.

The following timetable will provide guidance for the implementation of these recommendations:

**November-December, 2006:**

The Council of College Communities be established by the VPS.

The Residence Life Coordinators be converted to full-time positions and that the HR work required for this conversion be completed in time for the spring term.

The Masters draft their annual plans and open discussions with their probable Deans and with the VPS for budget and space planning purposes. These plans should have a special emphasis on the first-year experience for 2007-2008.

Recommendation 11 be implemented and results reported for September 2007.

**January-April, 2007:**

The Masters' plans be formally accepted by the CCC and the Deans and modes of assessment for success be finalized.

Working with the faculties and the GPDs graduate students be encouraged to apply for Residence Don positions (Student Life duty) and Junior Fellows. Policy and guidelines for these positions will need to be completed in January for roll-out by March.

If restructuring decisions are complete, the VPS with the VPA and the Deans open discussions about college/faculty alignments. The obvious alignments (Bethune with FSE, for example) be finalized. Others may take longer. The Pond Road Residence should be included in these discussions.

Budget allocations for the Colleges finalized for 2007-2008.

A report for the orientation of the new president will be prepared to explain the changes in the Colleges and identify expectations for the coming year.

**May 2007:**

May 1: Masters begin to report to the Dean of the respective Faculty to which her/his college is academically aligned.

The RLCs become full-time and begin reporting to the Manager of Residence Life Programs.

**June 2007:**

The Master and the Dean participate together in June Convocations after discussions with the Office of Ceremonials and Special Events.

**July-August 2007:**

Summer orientation and advising changes implemented to align with Colleges.

**September 2007:**

Orientation put into effect.

**October-November 2007:**

Assessment of results from implementation of these recommendations and measurement of effectiveness.

Plans for the 2008-2009 year ahead reviewed by the Council of College Communities and Deans and performance objectives established.