



Strengthening York's Neighbourhoods

Task Force on the Colleges Report

November 2006

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Task Force Report on the Colleges

I. The colleges in context

A. Introduction

Dr. Marsden established the Presidential Colleges Task Force on June 28, 2005 to re-vision the Keele campus colleges (see Appendix Supporting Documents: Assigned Membership and Terms of reference). In light of the ongoing restructuring occurring at the Atkinson Faculty of Liberal and Professional Studies, the task force decided to focus on the seven non-Faculty Keele campus colleges but has included references to Atkinson College when deemed appropriate.


The task force began meeting in the fall term and has met formally 16 times. In addition, the task force actively sought out the opinions of members of the community and hosted four open forums where over 200 members of the community attended to hear a number of presentations. The task force also established an e-mail address for input (collegeinput@yorku.ca) that was very successful in soliciting views from members of the university community. To ensure that consultation was extensive, specific meetings of the task force occurred with individuals most directly involved with college activities, e.g. Residence Life Coordinators, College Academic Advisors, Masters, Deans and the President. A student survey was also administered by the Institute for Social Research utilizing a survey that had been administered by the same institute and researcher on behalf of the Hare Commission in 1987 that had reviewed the mandate of the Keele campus colleges.

The Keele campus colleges, in part or in whole have been reviewed on a number of occasions, including the *Hare Commission on the Non-Faculty Colleges* in 1987, and the *Task Force on faculties, colleges and the first-year experience* in 1996. Despite the passage of time these reports still have currency with recommendations that resonate with the current task force. This is because there continues to be comments and concerns that are strikingly similar to those identified in 1987 and 1996.

One of the greatest challenges that members faced in engaging members to think about how colleges might best be structured to meet student needs was to encourage participants to go beyond a 'save the colleges' mindset to 'how do we ensure the colleges are a success' mindset. While it would be disingenuous for any task force not to consider the base question of 'should we continue or not?' the question was posed purposely to focus in on the answers.

As a result, members of the task force who may have had doubts about the need for York's colleges are, as a result of this process, fully convinced of their need and potential. If we did not have colleges at York, we would have to create them, or some other semblance.

The other challenge we discovered was that participants for the most part were, understandably so, able only to speak from their unique experience in their college. While this was useful to highlight best practices and individual accomplishments, it does point to a lack of cross communication and



understanding of what the unique York college system is and could be. Simply put, there is a lack of cohesion in the college system.

York is committed to excellence in teaching and research in a dynamic, metropolitan and multi-cultural milieu. We take pride in knowing that the university has thrived because of its desire to be innovative and its interdisciplinary approach. The University Academic Plan clearly recognizes the critical role that the experience of our students will have on our future success. Perhaps because of our size, students and faculty have created and sought out smaller communities. This was a primary motivation in the creation of the college system here at York. We have the opportunity to do something special, to establish caring and creative communities within the large “multiversity” community.

As mentioned, one of the largest barriers we have at York is our lack of trust and cross-communication. This sentiment was heard time and time again by many different sectors of the campus. It is true that decisions need to be made and resources are limited, however it is only by moving beyond the barriers and constraints of the past that York’s colleges can move forward. Members of this task force have made a concerted effort to build trust and rapport with York’s communities and look forward to continuing the dialogue onward to implementation measurement, and reflection.


York University’s Keele campus colleges already possess a storied history for a university approaching its 50th anniversary in 2009. We believe that the York college system can and is able to adapt and make a significant contribution to constituencies over the next 50 years.

Historical perspective

The colleges were originally intended to be a home base for both resident and non-resident students. Each of York’s seven non-Faculty undergraduate colleges describes itself as a community of students, fellows, alumni and staff that enhances the undergraduate experience by offering opportunities for greater involvement in the intellectual and social life of the university through co-curricular programming, social-cultural and sport/recreation activities. The colleges were created in successive years in the following order:

- 1965 – Founders
- 1966 – Vanier
- 1967 – Winters
- 1968 – McLaughlin
- 1969 – Stong
- 1970 – Calumet
- 1971 – Bethune

Each college is affiliated with a Faculty and specific programs selected in accordance with the theme of each college. Upon admission in first year, students are asked to select a college, primarily on the basis of Faculty/major. The Master is a tenured faculty member who is given a 1.5 course release from teaching responsibilities to lead the college.



When the colleges were first established, the Masters reported directly to the President. Following the Hare report in 1987, responsibility for the colleges was transferred to the Vice-President Student Affairs and Campus Relations. Following a re-organization in 1996, the College Masters reported to the Vice-President Academic. In the late 90s however, following a request from the President for clarification on reporting lines, the College Masters recommended that they report to the Vice-President Students.

The colleges have also served as a locus where faculty from various disciplines and orientations might interact, engage in various intellectual debates as well as to socialize in order to create a community. Over the years informal linkages among various faculty have produced collaborative research and numerous joint publications. Faculty members with an interest in the disciplines/themes of each college also undertook to serve as Fellows.


Carole Carpenter, Master of Vanier provided the following summary of the impact that colleges have played in the life of some faculty members:

For most long-term faculty, the association with a college has given them a sense of being part of a community of scholars that goes beyond their discipline, enhanced their academic careers and improved the quality of their life on campus. It was the colleges that long offered what is provided at other universities via a faculty club. It was also the colleges that moved interdisciplinarity from the founding philosophy of York into being not only entrenched in the university's core requirements but also realized through the academic interests and scholarly activities of its faculty."

Each college has an Academic Adviser (college duties constitute 15 hours a week), an administrative assistant, administrative support staff, Residence Life Co-ordinator and Residence Dons. In addition, a College Executive Officer provides general advice and support for the Masters concerning budget management, facilities, health and safety and human resources.

York's colleges are unique entities, following neither the Oxford/Cambridge model (with their own faculty and with primary responsibility for delivering the curriculum) nor the colleges of U.S. Ivy League universities where nearly all students live on campus. For example, Harvard College first-year students live in residences and senior students live mainly in a system of twelve residential "Houses", which serve as administrative units of the college as well as dormitories. Each house is presided over by a "Master" — a senior faculty member who is responsible for guiding the social life and community of the house—and a senior tutor who acts as dean of the students in the house in its administrative role. The University of Toronto has seven undergraduate colleges on its St. George campus. Every Arts and Science student is a member of a college. Each college has its own culture and all of them provide core services for their students, including academic and financial counseling, accommodation, orientation, scholarships, bursaries and social gatherings.

Colleges for graduate students also exist in Canada. For example, Massey College at the University of Toronto includes scholars, distinguished members of society beyond the university community and Junior Fellows. Green College and St. John's College at the University of British Columbia offer a



residential experience for graduate students. Green College is specifically only open to graduate students in interdisciplinary studies.

For many years each college at York's Keele campus did have responsibility for what then were called "College Courses" -- elective credits open to students affiliated with the college and Faculty. Following the release of the *Task Force on faculties, colleges and the first-year experience* in 1996, College Courses were discontinued. The colleges have continued to support the Faculties through the participation of Masters and College Academic Advisers in the development and delivery of Foundation courses designed to develop critical and transition skills in students. The decision to discontinue college courses continues to be a cause for vigorous debate within a segment of the population most supportive of colleges.

B. Linkages to university strategic plans, relationship to internal and external environments

The University Academic Plan has clearly articulated the importance the university places on enhancing and understanding the student experience. This is a key strategic issue for York and critical to our success. The university has entered into a multi-year accountability agreement with the province in which measuring various aspects of the educational experience will be a factor in future funding. The task force believes that York is well-positioned to meet its objectives and the college system will play an important role in the overall academic, co-curricular and social experiences of our students. The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) has now been adopted by all Ontario universities as the instrument to measure the level of engagement of our students.

It should be recognized that the results of NSSE should not be seen as satisfaction indicators. Too often in the past, student surveys have simply focused on the level of satisfaction with various services, e.g. parking, enrolment. The purpose of NSSE is to capture the level of academic challenge, classroom participation, and intellectual engagement of the academic experience at the university.

York is not alone in its efforts to examine how we may enhance the student experience. The University of Toronto, through its *Stepping Up* plan, and Ryerson's *President's Commission on Student Engagement*, have undertaken to develop specific actions that will strengthen their students' experiences.

Research at both Canadian and U.S. universities has clearly indicated that the first year is critical to establishing a sense of "connectedness" to the institution. Providing the support, knowledge and opportunities to become comfortable in a new environment enhances the confidence of students as they undertake their studies and creates an awareness of their environment that promotes involvement.

C. Principles and values

The task force has agreed that the following principles and values are the guiding attributes that the future college system should emulate.

Student focus

This focus of the colleges has traditionally been on students and they have achieved some success, even as enrolments increased and competition for resources strained the university budget. The colleges' impact, however, has been primarily on residential students and a minority of non-resident students. Although students may not have participated in large numbers there is still a strong consensus among students that the existence of the colleges is seen as a positive element of York that could be advantageous to the individual student if one wished to participate. Through the consultation process, it appeared as though the colleges with the greatest connection to their students have been in Winters and Bethune where there is also the strongest linkage with their respective Faculties.

Given the significant growth that has occurred over the past thirty years, individual college enrolment has significantly exceeded the physical capacity of each college. The task force believes that the college system must be restructured if it is to continue to meet the challenges and context of today's university student requirements and experience.


It also does not preclude the colleges from continuing the important role they play in bringing faculty, both active and retired, together with staff and external members as a college fellowship. This fellowship, like all other components of the college system will have a role in engaging students in way that will enhance the experience for Fellows and students.

Shared leadership and collaborative integration

If we truly want the colleges to be successful in their student-focused mandate, then the university must respond by integrating the colleges into the university on a collaborative basis. It is the opinion of the task force that the student is not well served by the current silos of Student Community Development, the Faculties and the colleges. There are cross-functional components in each that require us to move beyond existing structures to collaboratively deliver on the promise of the York student experience.

College system as an interdisciplinary model

York University was founded on an interdisciplinary focus. Consistent with this, the Colleges play a role in ensuring that people with a variety of disciplinary backgrounds come to know and understand those from other disciplines in the context of College life.



While individual colleges may be aligned to particular programs or a Faculty, they have a historical and contemporary role in furthering York's mission as an interdisciplinary university. On a professional and student service side, by engaging academics, students and student service professionals, problems and issues will be examined through a more transparent lens. Further, the colleges are encouraged to engage the external community in its fellowship and build links across colleges.

In many respects the college system seeks to achieve many of the goals of a learning community where students are encouraged to connect ideas from different disciplines through ongoing social interaction with peers from different cultural and disciplinary backgrounds.

York as a city – the college as a neighbourhood

This is a common thread that runs through many of the oral and written presentations to the task force. There is a strong sense that the colleges offer the best opportunity for students and faculty to connect with each other. The task force is supportive of this view and hopes to strengthen this role. Space dedicated to students and faculty plays an integral role in achieving the sense of "neighbourhood", e.g. club offices and lounges.

Trust and collegiality

As we move towards a system of shared leadership and integration, trust and collaboration will be prime values. During the course of our consultations, we heard a sense of uneasiness and skepticism about the university's plans to evolve the college system. One of the reasons why the task force consulted so widely was to re-open channels of communication and start to build a foundation of trust. As recommendations begin to be implemented, this foundation of trust and collegiality will be necessary in order to achieve common goals.

Transparency and engagement in decision making

Decisions, often difficult ones, need to be made in a timely manner. Effective decisions are made when the parties impacted are involved in the decision. Based in part on the value of trust and collegiality, decisions made within the college should be transparent to its members and to engage them where possible. Likewise, decisions impacting the colleges should be made in consultation with the college members.

Colleges as organic entities

The college system will continue to evolve as circumstances warrant. Although founded on historic models we need a current framework that enables the colleges to embrace and take advantage of changing requirements and attitudes.

II. Theme-based recommendations

Over the course of its consultation and deliberation, the task force investigated numerous issues involving the colleges. These issues have been further grouped into themes and most of the recommendations outlined in the summary were derived from the content herein.

D. Core services

Recruitment to conversion to the first day at York: A focus on the first-year experience

As part of York's strategic goal to improve the transition from admitted student to a successful first year experience, colleges play an active role that needs to be properly communicated and included in key transition stages.

The colleges can play a significant role in enhancing our students' experience that occurs outside the classroom. One of the main barriers that we heard was the lack of adequate promotion of the college system. Students need to be better informed about the benefits that their college can provide and the university needs to reach these students at key communication points.

Currently, most first year students only become aware of the college system at their academic advising session, which is a time-pressed session where the focus is primarily on what courses they should enroll in and important academic regulations.

We also know that 25% of undergraduate students that graduate from York did not start here in first year. The Task Force believes that there is much more that the Colleges could be doing to focus on engaging these new students (as opposed to first year) to welcome them into the York community.

Examining the cycle that occurs from admission to first day of classes, we propose a series of recommendations based on each segment.

Admission

Receiving one's admission package is the first of many highlights a new York student will encounter. If we know a student's major, then we are able to assign them a college affiliation. This may change pending residence and individual choice, but by naming the affiliation we signal its importance. To accompany this, there should be a communication component that acknowledges the colleges as a primary vehicle for the York student experience.

Conversion

Throughout the conversion period, students are examining a range of options and are investigating their prospective universities to decide which one is best suited for them. For York, we should better utilize the distinct competitive advantage of the Keele campus colleges in order to convert applicants. This may include:

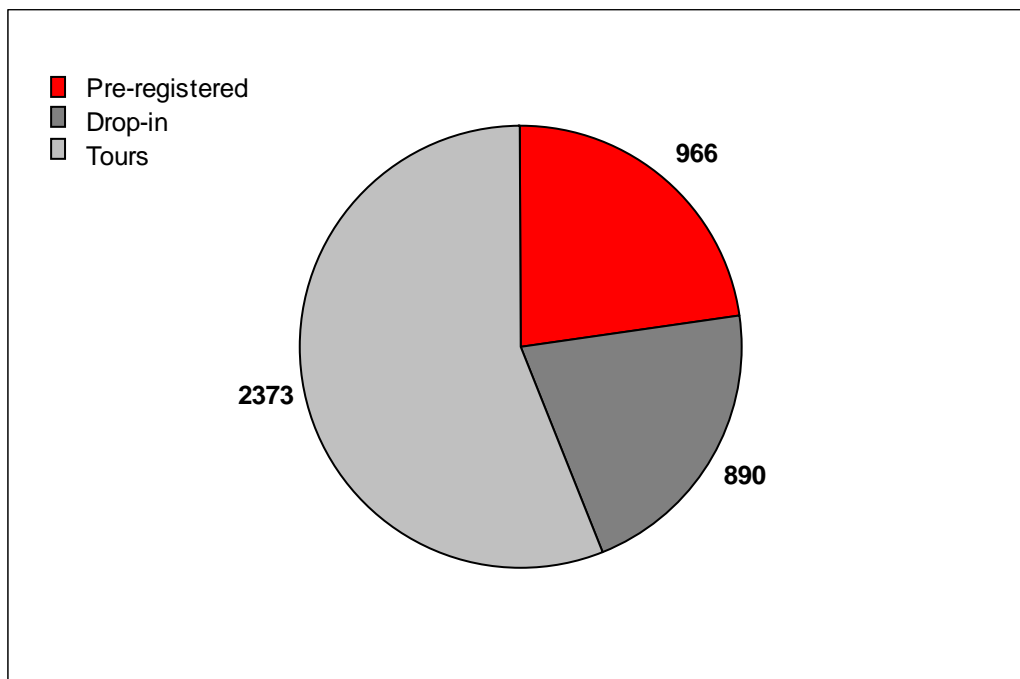
- College students participating in conversion activities
- More active college participation in the March Gala Program
- A common communication piece that identifies the advantages that the colleges offer

Advising

We recognize the distinct importance of both curricular advising and student life advising. Curricular advising occurs through the Faculties and in these sessions, students are asked to focus on enrolment and course matters. As cited, currently, college affiliation is confirmed at this juncture, and while the focus is on academic matters, curricular advising staff should be trained to know the importance of the purpose and mandate of the college system and be able to identify sources where students can go for further information or the timeline for when the colleges will contact them.

Typically, we have waited for students to be on campus in September to begin their student life advising.

This year, through the Division of Student Services and in coordination with the Faculty advising centres, York piloted a new student life advising centre named the “Red Zone” that allowed students and their parents to access a number of non-academic services and gather information on York’s student experience. The colleges were provided space in the “Red Zone” and the staff were trained on the purpose and services provided by the colleges. Through a survey, when asked about the quality of information regarding the colleges and orientation, respondents who received the information ranked it as comprehensive. As one can see by the chart below, the demand for student life advising exists, with many students and parents taking advantage of this information opportunity.





Orientation and the first-year experience

Orientation represents a key component of a continuum of activities that serve to assist students to integrate into their new academic home, adjust to the social environment and enhance the likelihood of their success at York. Research undertaken at Canadian and U.S. universities has clearly indicated that the first year is critical to establishing a sense of “connectedness” to the institution. Providing the support, knowledge and opportunities to become comfortable in a new environment enhances the confidence of students as they undertake their studies and creates an awareness of their environment that promotes involvement.


Investment of resources in ongoing academic and social orientation activities for first-year students sends a powerful message to students and their parents that our university understands the challenges confronting all new students to York and wants to be supportive throughout the transition year. All of this is directly supportive of the university’s desire to recruit and retain very good students.

The task force heard on numerous occasions the constructive and important role that colleges have in relation to academic and social orientation. As already mentioned, this period is critical as students are tuned into the information they are receiving and the relationship between one’s college has the best chance of forming a bond. Every York student should be encouraged to attend their academic and social orientation and the university should promote and identify activities that could increase participation.

Orientation should not only be seen, however, in the traditional sense of summer and pre-class activities. A foundation of information to assist adjustment occurs during these periods but the transition experience of students occurs throughout their first year as they encounter the first results of tests and essays in October and the stress of exams in December. The transition experience of students coming directly from secondary school can also be quite different from those who have been away from the educational environment for some time.

The task force, therefore, recommends that colleges should direct their programming and efforts to enhance the experience of all new students to York. This is recommended in the belief that reaching out to a defined group of students will assist the colleges to concentrate its resources and thus create the opportunities for linkages with faculty and peers at a stage of their academic career when this will have the most impact. This direction should be done in collaboration with other offices that are concerned with the first year experience, such as the newly established Atkinson Centre for Mature and Part-Time Students.

Colleges and the university commit a great deal of financial and staff resources to orientation. In particular, September orientation activities often represent the largest budgetary item for College Councils. Given the importance of orientation, and the investment of resources, a concerted effort must be made to ensure that orientation and the lead up to it, is properly planned and coordinated. The good news is that a great deal of planning already occurs with the Orientation Steering Committee and the York Orientation Director’s Association. This planning should be further



enhanced by identifying collective orientation goals and expected outcomes along with important communication messages.

A number of Colleges also offer summer orientation sessions and these deserve to be further examined and incorporated into a system-wide model for student life advising.

Mentoring & guidance

One of the most important services that colleges can provide is a living bridge between faculty, alumni and students. The foundation of this bridge is apparent in one's first year of study and continues through to graduation. Colleges are ideal hosts to a structured mentoring program since they are in the unique position to develop a lasting relationship with students, faculty, staff and alumni.

Non-curricular advice and guidance offer optimum opportunities for colleges to establish a cycle of involvement and giving back to the college community.


One of the concrete examples of how the colleges provide a valuable service is the colleges' Academic Resource Advisors (ARA). The ARA program was mentioned on several occasions as a needed service that addresses student needs on a more personal and local level. While it is not possible to decentralize student services, these ARAs, who are often senior-year students, currently provide information on university life and extend the reach of the Academic Advisor through an accessible office in a prime location in the college. This peer-based advising program should be enhanced and connected appropriately with Student Client Services and the affiliated Faculty offices through cross-training and communication. Student Services will also benefit from knowing and addressing the questions and concerns arising from the local areas. The program also requires a pro-active approach to engage students who are currently unaware of this beneficial service.

Co-curricular programming: Extending the interaction between faculty and student outside the classroom

Alongside a formal mentoring and guidance program, the colleges can play a constructive role in extending the interaction of faculty and students outside the classroom. One way for this to occur is enhancing co-curricular programming that appeal to members of the university community. Examples of co-curricular programming include guest lecture series, book readings, gallery displays, recitals and the like. To ensure its success, utilization of existing staff resources for event planning and coordination should be coordinated. In the spirit of the interdisciplinary tradition at York, measures should be taken to encourage inter-college programming. Further, to highlight the importance of co-curricular programming, a signature week should be established to highlight the college system's programs.

Convocation

As one may see in the results of the ISR survey, one of the clearest responses we received was in relation to convocation. Students want to experience convocation based on their Faculty or



program of study. However, students also believe that the colleges should have a presence at convocation to reflect the experience colleges have played in their lives as a student.

E. Roles and relationships

Master

The position of Master at York University is as unique as it is pivotal. As academic administrators, they foremost provide leadership in their communities while also being required to be able administrators. Given the importance of this role in relation to the overall college system, the task force spent considerable energy on the role of the Master.

Questions that the task force dealt with were:

- What does the college system require the focus of the college Master to be?
- What is the appropriate balance between leadership and administrative duties?
- How can the Master's expertise and network be best utilized?
- How can Masters be given the resources to succeed?

Through our consultations, we have reached the conclusion that the focus of the Master must be:

- Providing leadership to the college community;
- Being bridge builders and bridge maintainers;
- Embracing a students-first philosophy;
- Orientation and transition programming for first-year students;
- Acting as the link between affiliated academic departments and the college;
- Acting as advisor and mentor to the College Council Student Government.


In order to give the Masters the time to meet this focus, more of the routine administrative functions should be handled by staff. One example of this is the oversight of the college residence.

College Council Student Government

A hallmark of the college system at York is its College Councils. The councils collect a levy from their affiliated students and in return provide a range of services and programs. Numerous leaders within the College Councils came forward to the task force and spoke with passion to the strengths and challenges they face in serving their constituencies.

One agreed component was the need for better skills-based training for student leaders, specifically in relation to team building and financial management.

Also, while most College Councils have a positive relationship with the Master's Office and work constructively in achieving their objectives, there is currently no requirement for the College Council



to be involved in college planning. Given the important role they play, the College Council should formally be part of college planning including co-curricular programming and space requirements.

Finally, given the importance of integrating the academic and co-curricular components, College Councils should play a leadership role and bring together their affiliated departments, and secure an active partnership with related Faculty Student Governments/Caucuses.

Academic Advisor

Throughout our discussions, it became clear that the Academic Advisors play an important role in the college system. According to our survey results, Academic Advisors have the second highest rate of direct contact with students. Only contact with fellow students scored a higher percentage.

The Academic Advisor also plays a key role in developing and implementing many of the College's academic events and programs, including academic orientation. Academic Advisors are also tutorial leaders in the Faculty of Arts Fundamentals of Learning retention program with one of the Academic Advisors serving as the Course Director.

Surprisingly, there is no standard position description for Academic Advisors -- a matter that needs to be remedied to clarify roles and responsibilities along with incorporating the following strengths:


- A focus as an advocate and provider of non-curricular advice for students;
- Acting as primary liaison with program directors, Faculty advising centres and Manager for Student Retention to ensure student issues are being addressed;
- Linkage with College Council on academic events and programs.

Further, the Academic Advisors should be encouraged to meet regularly and share projects, knowledge and best practices.

Fellows

Although active participation by all Fellows is integral to the development of each college as an intellectual and social centre, the role of Fellow is not clear to many students. The level of engagement by Fellows varies significantly across the colleges. For many it appears that being a Fellow means mingling with other Fellows at social lunches/events organized by the Master. In some colleges, Fellows offer their time to serve as an adviser-on-call for students while others actively participate in the delivery of special lectures.

On many occasions we have heard students lament the fact that they have not had the opportunity to interact with faculty members in a more informal, relaxed setting. Fellows can play an important role in being available to reach out to students and provide that contact merely through their active participation in college events. The task force believes that membership as a Fellow entails active involvement in the social and academic aspects of college life, e.g. participation on committees, attendance at functions and lectures sponsored by, or otherwise linked with, the



college. External Fellows, e.g. alumni, should be encouraged to commit to mentoring students interested in following a career path similar to their specializations.

The task force also recognizes that the nature of each Fellow's participation will be tailored to their interests and personal preferences. Participation is, however, essential. The Master should play a key role in working with academic colleagues to define each Fellow's role. The Master should also actively seek out new Fellows in order to ensure a broad base of support and the future renewal of Fellows.

The college can provide a sense of community for Fellows through the provision of office space and through other activities and events such as dinners that may formally recognize their efforts to support students. Fellows can continue to be supported in their academic initiatives, e.g. conferences. Here again the Master can play a role to work with the Fellows to identify ways in which they can be supported.

Several presentations to the task force also indicated that there could be a role for graduate students in the colleges. Some have sought out active participation in the college as a means of connecting with both students and faculty. The task force believes that consideration should be given to expanding the definition of Fellows to permit graduate students to serve as Junior Fellows in the role of "peer advisors" or "student mentors".

Alumni

Alumni have the potential to play an active and constructive role in the colleges and York in general. Alumni should be encouraged to serve as Fellows.

Further, given the recent development of a framework for York Alumni Chapters, college chapters should be formed to bring college alumni together to establish a strong network that will serve both alumni and current students.

With the establishment of these chapters, the York University Alumni Association (YUAA) should consider including constituency representation from the college chapters on YUAA.

As York nears its 50th anniversary, these college chapters are natural linkages and should be included in anniversary planning.

F. Relationship with Faculties

Even though the Keele campus colleges are considered non-Faculty units, they do have an important role in the interlay between the in-class and out-of-class experience. Each Faculty has an Associate Dean who is charged with student affairs and it is necessary for the Associate Deans and Masters to interact and communicate on a more regular basis for awareness and appreciation.

Academic or co-curricular role?

While we did hear from some members of the community that they wished to see the re-introduction of the college courses which were eliminated in 1996, both the Council of Masters and Deans expressed no desire to return to these programs as previously structured. Credited courses are the domain of the Faculties and while they may be housed and promoted through the college, the decision regarding teaching resources and course offerings remain the Faculties' responsibility.

The sense of what the college courses used to provide, namely smaller first-year courses, taught by dedicated faculty that provided an introduction to a learning community, is an aspect that members of the task force believe should be further reviewed by Faculty Deans to determine whether or not this is possible in relation to their academic plans.

This is not to say that colleges cannot provide non-credited learning skills seminars that focus on critical thinking and transitional management skills. Indeed, this would be a useful contribution and continuation of the active role colleges play in academic orientation and the college-housed Academic Resource Advisor Centres. Ideally, they would make use of the various subject matter experts in the various York offices and connect them with students.

One example where this is already occurring, in part, is the already mentioned Faculty of Arts Fundamentals of Learning program which is a non-credited course that allows students facing disbarment an opportunity to stay in university at a reduced course load. The program focuses on critical learning skills that students need to be successful and makes use of the resources in the colleges, specifically the Academic Advisors who present lectures and are tutorial leaders.

In relation to the Foundation courses, the task force was exposed to mixed opinions as to how well they are used to link students into the college. If these links are to continue, additional emphasis should be made by the course director to introduce students to available college services available and how course themes can be introduced through co-curricular activities.

Individual faculty member associations

As the demographics of York's faculty changes and hiring ramps up to accommodate the retiring professoriate, a more concerted effort needs to be made to introduce the role that faculty members may have in the college system and the benefits it will make in their academic and social lives.

Guidance vs. advising

For greater certainty, the task force wishes to note that formal curricular- and program-related academic advising is the domain of the Faculty advising centres. Guidance and advocating/assisting students in their navigation through York is the domain of the colleges, specifically with the Academic Advisors.

G. Relationship with Student Community Development (SCD) and student clubs: Coordination of efforts and communication

As the two main bodies responsible for the non-curricular student experience, greater emphasis must be made to integrate and coordinate activities and programs between the colleges and SCD. Communications between these groups should be shared to ensure consistency.

One example of a shared sphere is the plethora of student clubs that exist at York. While departmental clubs are recognized through SCD, they often wish for a formal association with the college community. Another example is the need for existing content expertise in SCD to be properly utilized in the college system.

H. Physical space

York University, in comparison to other Ontario institutions, is lacking in its built space per student. While the recent building campaign has addressed several pressing space needs, there is an ongoing need to evaluate space and uses.

Control of space

Control of space is a contentious issue for the colleges. There have been re-organizations that have altered space use in college complexes and several members of the university community indicated that this had a large impact on the college. Members of the task force appreciate the delicate situation that York faces in relation to space, but believes that the college leadership needs to be informed and consulted within the construction and space planning framework on the Keele campus.

The task force also considered whether a concentration of space use was appropriate and has determined that colleges and their students are better served when there is a balance in space uses.

One of the concerns that was raised was that the space in the college was not as accessible and open as it could be. If continued investments are to be made to improve the space, it should be accessible to students, even if it is outside normal working hours.

Space audit and priorities

To assist the university to better understand the current condition and most pressing needs for space inside the college complex, space allocation should be systematically reviewed to ensure it is meeting the needs of the college and student community.

I. Residence

Residences form an important part of college and university life. This importance is much more than simply providing students with a roof over their heads, but rather an opportunity for students to enhance their university experience by making the most of the services and programs that exist. Just as we view the colleges as a system, we must view residences with the same vision. The residence life system should have goals that are linked to, and make use of, the college system

Pond Road and future residences

As made evident by the public consultations and the survey results, the relationship between a college and residence is mutually beneficial. The task force believes that every undergraduate residence should be formally affiliated with a college. In 2003, a decision was made to not affiliate the Pond Road residence with a college. The task force believes this decision should be overturned.

Management

The issues facing residence staff have grown increasingly more complex. The level of complexity requires staff that are specifically trained and equipped to address the needs of student residents. To manage and oversee a residence, York has traditionally had part-time residence life coordinators who balance this position alongside graduate studies or another full-time staff position. These individuals then work with the Master on residence matters. This runs counter to best practices established in other university residence life systems where dedicated residence professionals manage the residences in conjunction with a senior student Don team.

The Council of Masters, commenting on the need for clarification on the role of Masters and Academic Advisors, wrote in their document, *Revisoning the College System with a Focus on the Future*, "It can be argued that Masters and Academic Advisors are called upon to do too many things that they ought not do, for instance, oversee the day-to-day operations of the residences rather than focusing on the human and academic needs of the residents." The task force concurs that the focus needs to be on the relationship between the college and its affiliated residents, not on residence management.

To this end, members of the task force believe residences require full time, professional residence life staff that understand and are connected to college life.

To ensure that the college-residence link occurs, the Master needs to retain an ongoing relationship with the residence manager and residence staff.

Further, citing several success stories, members of the task force believe graduate students should be encouraged to apply for Residence Don positions.

J. Affiliation

Undergraduate students

Through an ongoing review by the Council of Masters and the Vice-President Students, College affiliation has become more fine-tuned. For the most part, task force members are satisfied that the current rank order of undergraduate affiliation is appropriate:

- Every first year student be affiliated with a college
- Current practice of linking majors to affiliation is working
- Student choice in college affiliation be retained

There was a disagreement among task force members as to whether affiliation should primarily be determined by residence affiliation or based on major of academic study. This item should be reviewed as required.

One gap that does exist and is a matter of concern for some members of the task force is the funding-affiliation relationship, which has ramifications for college council funding and the kind of services that each student can access.

Graduate students

Members of the task force were pleased to hear from a number of graduate students who spoke eloquently about the positive role that graduate students could play in college life as Junior Fellows. The task force is supportive of graduate student affiliation as long as it is purely voluntary so as not to complicate their other responsibilities and rights.

K. Promotion and communication

Identity


Each college currently operates in a disjointed manner with no consistent identity beside its own banner or logo/symbol. The college system should have an identity of its own, that fits within the greater York brand parameter. Having a consistent identity that unites all the colleges and packages their events and services will allow for a greater profile in a crowded university market.

Staff support

Given the importance of the college system, and the wide range of programs and services it provides, there is a need for appropriate staff support and assigned expertise.

Web site presence

Resources in the form of a staff person have been set aside to update and maintain the college Web sites. Further examination should occur to examine why people visit college Web sites and



what can be done to enhance the Web site as a means of information, connectedness for students (i.e. Links to Fellows biographies, coordinated events listing, photo and video gallery, etc.).

Better use of existing communications channels

York has a plethora of communications vehicles and channels to reach students. Through greater coordination, colleges could tie into existing York electronic messages (e.g. YFile, YLife) along with available college system promotional and advertising opportunities.

L. Role of technology

One of the distinct questions the task force discussed was what role technology can play within the college system. Can, for example, virtual colleges entirely replace a physical one? Time and time again, the answer from students, faculty and staff was a resounding “No”. One aspect of the colleges that makes it distinct is the physical connection between individuals. However, we have heard that an appropriate use of technology can enhance the role of the colleges and the services they provide. In this sense, technology can support the colleges in their mandate. Colleges should have Web-based interactive, informative communications such as message boards, archives of lectures, academic orientation presentations, etc.

M. Funding

In order for colleges to fulfill their mandate and provide core services, they will need to be adequately funded. The Vice-President Students is committed to making the case for funding to allocate resources and ensure a viable college system occurs and thrives.

New funding for the colleges will be based on three principles:

1. The Keele campus colleges represent a system for student engagement;
2. Students, regardless of individual college affiliation, should have the opportunity to access the best the college system has to offer;
3. Funding should be tied to enhancing the strategic role of the colleges.
 - To this end, there should be stable funding to pay for the core services across the system to ensure a base level of experience.
 - This equalization insulates colleges from future enrolment or affiliation changes.
 - Funding should be available to provide programming and services that fit within mandate and strategic goals of individual colleges.
 - Review of transparency and accountability measures to ensure community is aware of spending.

N. Additional aspects that need to be further investigated

Number of colleges

A number of people commented on the total number of colleges at York; usually in comparison with the Oxford and Cambridge models. While the task force gave consideration to these comments, it does not believe that creating more colleges will be the easy fix to the problems facing the system as a whole. As the new college system structure is developed, and the results of Faculty restructuring become known, there should be an examination as to whether or not more colleges are required.

Title of Master


The task force heard from several individuals who felt that some of the titles associated with the college were antiquated and should be changed. An example of one title that has changed recently is *Residence Tutor* to *Residence Life Coordinator*. The prime title in dispute is that of Master, which some members found gendered and hierarchical. The title was defended as both a pleasant traditional link to the past and denotes the special role the individual has in the university.

III. Administrative Structures

The task force believes that the colleges can evolve to play an increasingly more important role in assisting York to enhance the quality of the undergraduate experience. The university's Academic Plan has identified the student experience as a priority and this coincides with the priority established by the Ontario government that has recently established the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO), which will work with universities to maintain high standards in research, teaching, and the student experience. The NSSE will serve as a primary means of measuring York's progress towards the academic experience from the student's perspective.

After significant deliberations and listening to members of the York community it was very clear to the task force that a key element of the future role for the college system rests with the role and reporting relationship of the College Masters. The College Master is firmly based and is guided by the roots of their academic discipline. They seek to incorporate active and collaborative activities within the college and promote involvement in complementary academic and social activities that extend beyond the classroom. Their future role in providing the bridge between the academic and co-curricular experience of our students will be essential. As noted previously, the college is inextricably linked with the academic mission of the university. Each college serves as an integral component of establishing a learning community where students are encouraged to connect ideas from different disciplines through on-going social interaction with peers from different cultural and disciplinary backgrounds. The co-curricular nature of the college is essential to establishing the sense of linkage to smaller neighborhood communities within the broader academic community.

To achieve a renewed purpose and best serve the York community, it was clear that the administrative structure needed to be reviewed.



The task force considered the status quo but is not convinced that this would be in the best interest of the college system or the university.

The Task Force then studied and deliberated on four concrete options.

1. Creation of a senior administrative position in the form of a Vice-President Colleges;
2. A direct affiliation with the Faculties, including a reporting structure to the Dean;
3. Creation of the Council of College Communities; or,
4. Hybrid of options 1 or 2 and 3.

Any administrative structure for the college system should include a capacity for strategic planning, goal setting, assessment and evaluation.

O. Vice-President Colleges option

This proposal calls for a new Vice-President position to be created. Based on examining the historical and current university structure it was argued that the colleges have never had a neat fit within the university structure, and that a Vice-President Colleges, who liaises closely with the Vice-President Academic, Deans and Vice-President Students would address this. Along with supervising the College Masters, the potential oversight of Alumni Affairs was also suggested.

A Vice-President Colleges, it was argued by proponents, would signal to...

"...York University students, staff and faculty the importance of the colleges in fostering community, student engagement, and interdisciplinary activities for faculty. It would emphasize the importance of the colleges in supporting the unique identity of York University. It would ensure that the colleges would pursue similar objectives, would be accountable for their activities, and would be included appropriately in the university's ongoing planning."

Members of the task force are not confident that the creation of a Vice-Pridential position would address the core issues facing the colleges. For example, the creation of another Vice-President position would not address the fact that colleges still intersect both the academic and student services realm. It was the opinion of the majority of the task force that the creation of a Vice-President Colleges position would only introduce another level of complexity given that many of the other related services are outside the domain and that the resources that would be required to fund an office would be better applied to the college system as a whole. It was seen as building, not decreasing, the silos that are impairing the college system from achieving its potential to enhance the student experience.



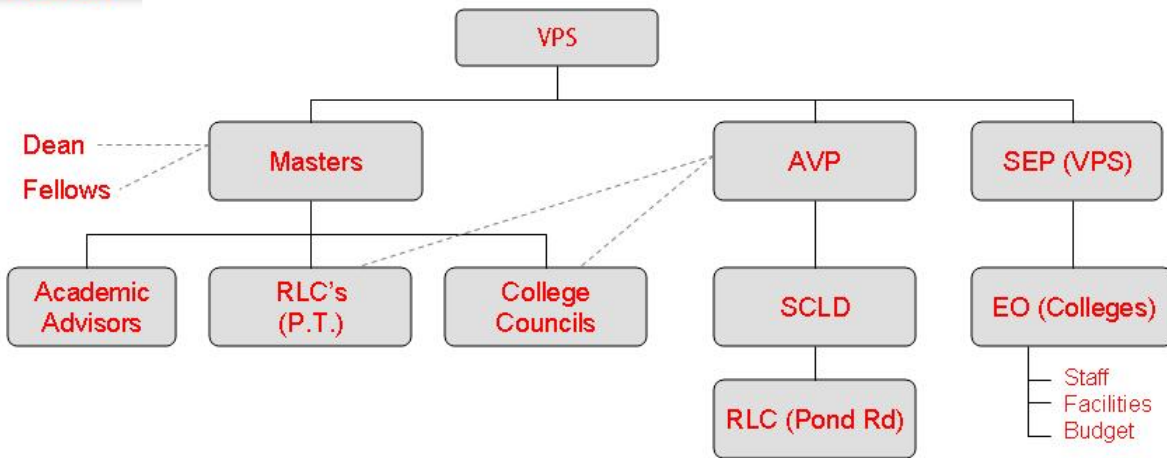
P. Direct affiliation with the Faculties option

This proposal calls for a direct link between a college and a Faculty, as is the case with Glendon and Atkinson. This takes a more holistic approach to the student experience and acknowledges that the in-class student experience should have a direct relationship with the out-of-the-class student experience. Masters would report directly to the Dean.

The main rationale for this linkage is to concretely associate the colleges with a Faculty to entrench an academic relationship which will lead to an enhanced co-curricular role. A dotted line relationship would exist with relevant services. It would further harmonize the structure across York and bring it in line with the Atkinson and Glendon model. Given the size of Arts, it will require at least three colleges which should all be within the same complex.

A concern with this model is whether or not the colleges would have the autonomy and individuality required to develop a cohesive college community. Another concern expressed is whether or not Deans have a desire to be responsible for colleges and what long-term effects this may have on the colleges' existence.

Current




Proposed



Q. Council of College Communities option

The proposal to establish a Council of College Communities resulted from a review of research undertaken by Dr. George Kuh, Director of Indiana University's Center for Postsecondary Research, on Project DEEP (Documenting Effective Educational Practice). The common denominator for all universities studied was that they all had scored better than predicated across some or all the NSSE's five benchmarks of effective educational practice. These include level of academic challenge, active and collaborative learning, student interaction with faculty members, enriching educational experiences, and a supportive campus environment.

A key issue identified by the task force is the inadequate integration of the colleges with other supplemental and core services that possess content expertise. This lack of integration has meant that the colleges are not successfully part of strategic planning which includes components such as space, budgeting, linkages to the academic plan and student experience enhancement. A corollary to this is the lack of cross-communication which in turn leads to confusion and lost opportunities.



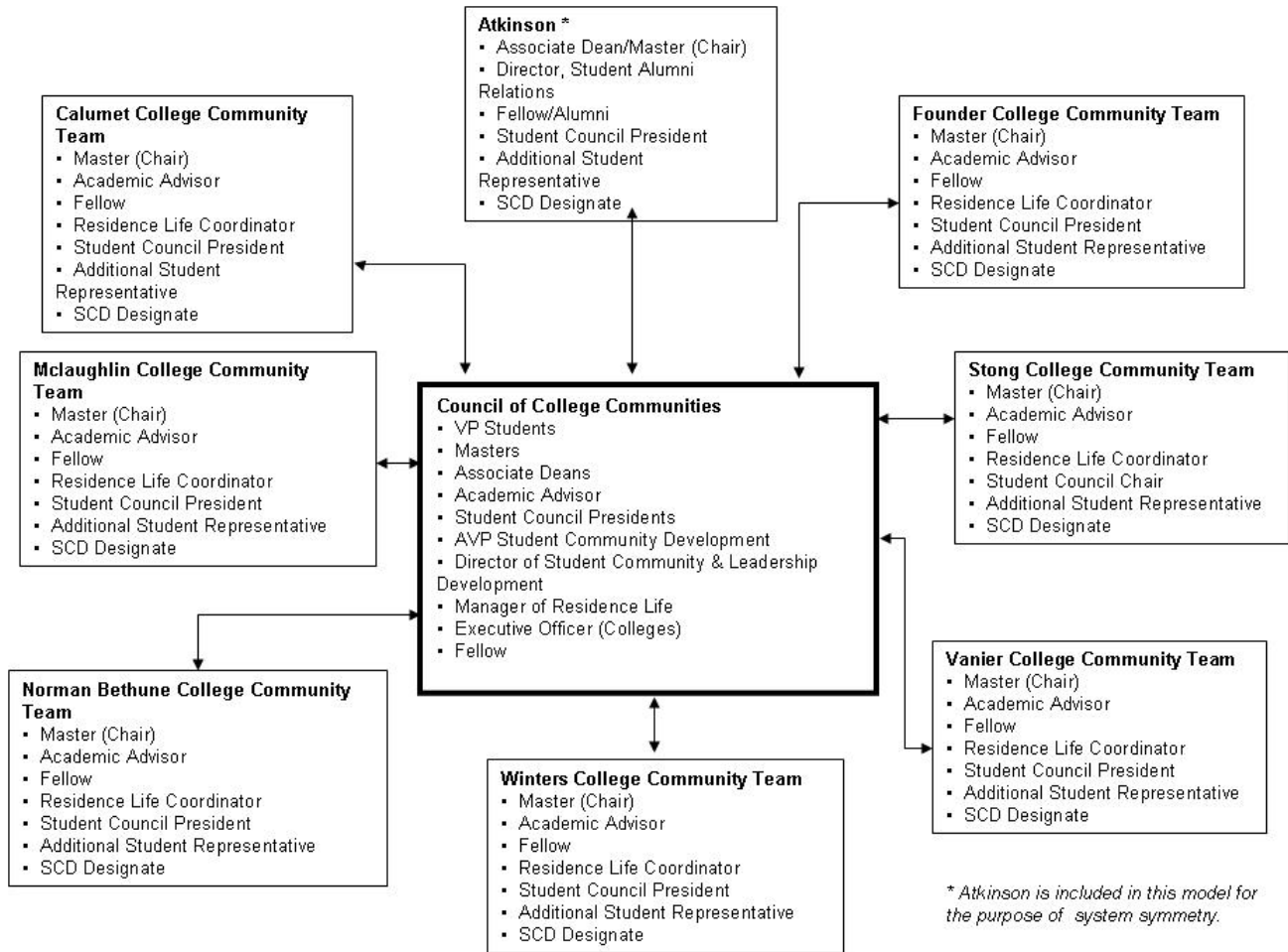
The proposed model has two components. First is the Council of College Communities, which will integrate the academic and student service providers, co-chaired by the Vice-President Students and the Chair of the Council of Masters.

The Council of College Communities would serve as a direction-setting body that links the colleges together as a system incorporating academic and student experience expertise. This matrix would provide a real and constant network that will help ensure that the college system meets its mandate and strategic objectives. To be successful, this body must be integrated fully into the university planning structure and would have strategic and governance responsibilities for the colleges

The second component is local College Community Teams, responsible for managing the affairs of their individual college, providing input to strategic and programmatic planning to the Council of College Communities. Several colleges already have something of this nature with an “executive committee”.

This model will formalize an existing structure and introduce it system-wide with a focus on integration, collaboration and cross-communication.

This model ensures that the college and their Masters have the full support of the student affairs professionals who are subject matter experts in relation to the student experience. Also, it includes key partners to ensure broad representation and student input in the determination of planning and programming.



R. Hybrid option

Although models 2 and 3 were generated as distinct approaches, the task force also considered the blending of both options as together they were seen as each providing significantly positive benefits to generate greater synergy and harmony. It is the opinion of the majority of the task force that this is the preferred option. It should be noted, however, that the two Masters on the task force do not support a change in the reporting relationship from the Vice-President Students to the Deans as they believe that the role of the Master should be seen as equivalent to a Dean and that there is the potential for a dilution of the relationship between the college and students. The hybrid model of college programming governance does provide for the opportunity to clearly identify the Master with the alignment of the college to Faculty affiliation while ensuring that those with content expertise assist in the delivery of programming to students.

IV. Concluding Remarks

In a way, this report is another chapter in the history and evolution of York University's colleges. We do not believe it will be the last chapter written, nor should it be, for our structures need to respond to changes in our university environment and student requirements.

Through our research and consultations, the task force has outlined a renewed sense of the purpose of the college system for students and how it should be structured to fulfill this mandate. Our challenge was to re-vision the Keele Campus colleges. Now, action is required.

Most of our recommendations can be achieved with better coordination of existing resources. Other recommendations will require new resources, but if strategically applied as we believe they should be, the student benefits will be well worth the effort.

The task force also believes that a review process of the impact of these recommendations should be undertaken by the university within two years after the implementation of the recommendations.

V. APPENDIX


S. Supporting documents

Background

York University is one of only three universities in Canada in which all undergraduate students belong to colleges. The colleges were originally intended to be an academic and a social home base at the university for both resident and commuter students during their years of undergraduate study, and a locus of interdisciplinary interaction among faculty.

The seven non-Faculty Keele campus colleges were created in successive years between 1965 and 1971. In addition, Atkinson College integrated a Faculty and a college. Since their creation, the colleges have become home to small interdisciplinary communities of students, alumni, scholars and staff within what has become a very large university community. The colleges enhance the undergraduate experience by offering services for students, opportunities for involvement in the university community beyond academic, as well as extracurricular academic, social, cultural and recreational activities.

Although the mandate has remained essentially the same for the colleges, there have been a number of significant changes that have affected the manner in which students relate to the colleges. For example, the colleges have established distinctive mandates and the basis upon which students are affiliated with a college has been revised to link with specific academic programs (e.g. Winters College is affiliated with the Faculty of Fine Arts and Norman Bethune College with Science and Engineering).



There have also been significant changes in the past decade, such as the transfer of the college course program into the Foundation Course Arts curriculum and the move from a College to a Faculty-based convocation schedule and central convocation receptions. Atkinson College became the Faculty of Liberal and Professional Studies, creating the beginning of a distinction between the college part of Atkinson and the Atkinson Faculty.

In addition, between 1971 and 2004, York has also experienced very significant growth in our undergraduate enrolment – from 17,620 to 44,674. Although the number of spaces available in residence has grown over that period of time as well, the actual percentage of students now commuting to York is substantially higher.

A major challenge for the university over the past several years has been to identify and promote programming and services that reach out to commuter students. It is well accepted that facilitating a feeling of “connectedness” as early as possible in the first year can dramatically enhance the student experience – both academic and social. The benefits of establishing a close relationship between students and the university can be seen in enhanced retention, higher graduation rates, higher participation in university activities, and improved alumni relationships.


The important role that the colleges play in the life of each student will become even more important as a result of the recent report by the Rae Review panel. A specific goal outlined in the report is the establishment of quality standards and measures to ensure improvements are made at the institution and program and student experience levels. The tool of measurement will be the National Survey on Student Engagement (NSSE) to establish baseline data on student engagement and benchmarks against other universities employing the NSSE.

The desired results defined by Rae are as follows:

- Expansion of quality measurement – including the student experience – leading to a comprehensive framework for quality assurance.
- Continuous improvement towards the attainment of broadly understood priority results.
- Public reporting on sector, institutional and program-level quality and performance that provides meaningful information to help students make educational choices, which contributes to greater public confidence in higher education.

In addition to current key performance indicators of graduation and employment rates, it is clear that the graduate and undergraduate assessment tools will become one more measure by which the government distributes funds to universities. These measures may be unique, however, it is highly likely that each university will establish measurement targets or goals for improvements on the level of student engagement.

Much of the emphasis of these new tools will be on measuring the experience in the classroom, e.g. participation levels, contact with faculty in and outside of the classroom. The college system at York could play a unique role in enhancing the relationship between faculty, staff and students in a



collegial interdisciplinary milieu. Indeed, other universities in North America are investigating and developing college systems and are already turning to York for guidance.

Understanding our students' experiences, their needs and their expectations has been identified as a critical component of the university's Academic Plan now under discussion. Given that the majority of our students are commuters, York will need to continue to focus on identifying co-curricular programming which will facilitate the engagement of our students.

It is therefore recommended that a Presidential Task Force be established with the following terms of reference and membership.


Membership

- Vice-President Students (Chair)
- Five students (democratically elected and preferably with residential – commuter status represented)
 - one from York Federation of Students
 - one from the Student Senate Caucus
 - three from College Councils
- Two Masters
- One designate of the Vice-President Academic
- One Dean
- One Faculty member – preferably a Senator
- One representative of the Board of Governors
- One designate from Student Community & Leadership Development
- One designate Institutional Research and Analysis
- One alumni representative

Assigned membership

Robert Tiffin, Chair

Patricia Bradshaw, Faculty, Senate Representative



Melissa Bridgeman, Student, President of Bethune College Council
Carole Carpenter, Master, Vanier College
Reuban Clarke, Student, President of Founders College Council
Ioanna Gantzis, Student, President of Vanier College Council
Susan Gapka, Student, Chair of the Student Senator Caucus
Marilyn Lambert-Drache, Faculty, Associate Dean of Arts
Robert Martellacci, Alumni, Fellow of Stong College
Marie Rickard, Master, Winters College
Corrie Sakaluk, Student, Vice President, York Federation of Students
Sylvia Schippke, Administrator, Assistant Vice-President Student Community Development
Ted Spence, Administrator/Faculty, Director, Institutional Research and Analysis
Ross McMillan, Secretary

Terms of reference

1. To undertake a review of and make recommendations on the mission, mandate and future role of eight Keele campus colleges in light of the recommendations of the Rae Review, the university academic plan, and the desire to enhance the quality of student life at York.
2. To undertake a comprehensive survey of undergraduate students to assess their understanding of the college system, the nature and type of programming which would engage them in university life, and evaluate the perception of quality of student life for residential and commuter students.
3. To identify how best the colleges may be organized to promote an accessible academic environment that provides social support and promotes connections with York that encourage retention and an ongoing relationship with the university after graduation.
4. To recommend how the colleges can continue to assist in the integration of academic and co-curricular facets of the graduate and undergraduate student experience.
5. To solicit broadly the opinions of the York community through written submissions and public meetings. To identify best practices through site visits to other universities.
6. To review the current practices of college affiliation.
7. To submit a preliminary report to the President on February 15, 2006, and a final report no later than April 1, 2006.

T. Consultations

From the outset, the task force agreed that it was important to engage the university community in the questions surrounding the terms of reference. Members of the community were asked to consider:

1. What are your thoughts on the Keele campus college system, the nature and type of programming they provide to engage you in university life and the level of quality they add to student life?
2. What do you think the mission, mandate and future role of York's Keele campus colleges should be?
3. How do you think the colleges should be organized to promote an accessible academic environment that provides social support and promotes connections with York that encourage retention and an ongoing relationship with the university after graduation?
4. How should the colleges assist in the integration of academic and co-curricular facets of the graduate and undergraduate student experience?

The task force established an email for input collegeinput@yorku.ca. In total, 18 formal submissions were sent to the task force. Additionally, over 25 people RSVP'd for the public forums.

The task force held four widely advertised public forums. Two were located in the York University Student Centre and one forum each was held in Complex 1 and 2 (Vanier and Bethune respectively).

Tuesday, January 31, 2006: 2-4pm in Room 313, York University Student Centre (attendance was approximately 25)

Thursday, February 2, 2006: 4:30-6:30pm in the Renaissance, 001 Vanier College (attendance was approximately 150)

Monday, February 6, 2006: 5-7pm in the Paul Delaney Room, 320 Bethune College (attendance was approximately 75)

Wednesday, February 8, 2006: 3-5pm in Room 313, York University Student Centre (attendance was approximately 20)

At the forums, participants were offered the opportunity to write their response to the task force questions. Sixty-eight participants elected to do so, and their insights, as the comments heard at the forum, are reflected in the findings of the task force.

Along with the forums, the task force met with a number of targeted individuals and groups to garner their insight.

1. Deans
2. College Masters
3. College Academic Advisors
4. Presidents and Chairs of College Student Governments
5. Residence Dons and Residence Life Coordinators
6. President Marsden

U. Tables, facts and figures

1. Fellows per college (Fall 2006)

College	Number of Fellows
Bethune	84
Stong	64
Calumet	93
Founders	76
McLaughlin	194
Vanier	125

2. Enrolment per college – by Faculty (Fall 2006)

College	Affiliation	Residents
Complex 1		
Founders	4,223	264
McLaughlin	5,049	271
Vanier	5,095	271
Winters	2,555	267
Complex 2		
Bethune	6,087	274
Calumet	4,799	250
Stong	4,468	272
Total	32,276	1,869

V. Survey

Refer to: "York Students and the Keele Campus Colleges; A report prepared for the Presidential Task Force to Revision the Keele Campus Colleges" prepared by Michael Ornstein and the Institute for Social Research, York University, May 2006. (Colleges_Survey_Final_Report_May06.pdf)

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