



**REMARKS FOR**

**DR. MAMDOUH SHOUKRI  
PRESIDENT AND VICE-CHANCELLOR OF YORK UNIVERSITY**

**PRESENTATION TO THE 12<sup>TH</sup> TRANSATLANTIC DIALOGUE  
VISION OF 2010: FACTORS FACING THE FUTURE**

**JUNE 28, 2010  
NEW YORK**

**CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY**

Good morning everyone.

For those of you who don't know me, my name is Mamdouh Shoukri, and I am the President and Vice-Chancellor of York University in Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

I am here today to talk about what I believe are the key factors that will drive change over the next 15-20 years. While there are many, I will focus on only five – internationalization, e-learning, demographics, challenges to University autonomy and engagement.

These trends are not new to you, in fact, I am sure that we are all dealing with the same issues, but it is how we are dealing with them that makes us different.

In order to understand how these trends affect our university, I would like to tell you a bit about York.

### **History of York University**

Historically, Universities have always played a vital role in society.

From the early days -- as far back as the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries -- their primary role was to educate the intellectual elite and professional classes, and to promote academic freedom.

Over the centuries, Universities have evolved -- just look at some of the milestones ...like secularization and the science revolution -- to what they are today...large institutions, with many disciplines, and students of all ages, races and religions.

I am not here to give you a history lesson, after all I am an engineer, but I felt this was important in order for you to better understand York University.

You see, York is not like the traditional Universities. We haven't had centuries in which to grow, develop, and determine what works and doesn't work.... we are a young university, having only celebrated our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary last year.

In our early days, we started as a small Liberal arts institution with only 76 students. But by the 1970s, we had experienced rapid growth with 16,000 students, 700 faculty, and a budget of \$29 million.

This brings me to today. Over the years, we have transformed into a leading interdisciplinary research and teaching university in Canada. We have a student population of 53,000 and almost 250,000 alumni worldwide – making us the second largest University in Ontario, and the third largest in Canada.

So...where do we go from here?

At 50 years young, we are at the doorstep of becoming a world-class teaching and research institution.

But in order for us to become more comprehensive, while also becoming more competitive – which is what we are striving to achieve – we recognize that we need to expand in two areas: science and applied science.

Currently, we have about 5,000 students in the sciences – which is large for most institutions – but in our case, represents only a small proportion of what our University is actually about.

If we are to become a truly international University, we must address some of the key obstacles that I identified at the onset.

### **Internationalization**

Let me start with internationalization.

The world is changing, and universities need to change with it.

I see universities as being the drivers of that change.

But to do that, I believe that internationalization needs to be a part of every university's mandate.

I am proud of our university's commitment to internationalization. It's also a personal interest and a core value of mine. In fact, I participated in the development of the AUCC Statement on Internationalization and Canadian universities.

After all, internationalization will transform the way we teach and learn. We know that for students to grow and contribute in society, they need opportunities to experience the world firsthand.

Additionally, we need to increase opportunities for faculty to participate in international research projects.

The question becomes, how do you make this change happen?

You need strong leadership from the top, and student involvement from the grassroots level.

Sounds easy enough?

At York, I believe that we have done this right and emerged as a leader.

Canada is a multicultural country, and York definitely reflects this multiculturalism. And so we offer a broad, international curriculum that brings world perspectives into the classroom.

We have excellent student mobility programs, funded international internships, and we offer innovative international degrees that combine regular majors with language study and courses in international content and a study or work term abroad.

We are also home to a bilingual campus, Glendon College, offering programs in both of Canada's official languages – English and French.

But this is only the beginning and we will do more.

### **E-learning**

This brings me to my second point: e-learning.

One of the drivers of internationalization is the ever-changing advancement in information technology.

Let's face it, the so-called millennial generation is all about hi-tech. They expect everything to happen at their fingertips within seconds.

I am still learning how to use twitter to engage our students and to share the most recent soccer scores.

But seriously, our students are demanding more and more services via the web – but there are so many options and ways to do this. The issue becomes, what is the best option?

At York, we offer about 5 per cent of our classes on-line, and more of our courses are becoming hybrid, in that part of the curriculum is available on-line.

For example, our dean of the faculty of fine arts is currently developing a course in Chinese dance that would be delivered synchronously with a class in Toronto and a class in China, via the web.

Through information technology and by delivering the curriculum through e-learning, we are then able to expand access to our institutions.

In terms of our location, we are on the fringe of downtown Toronto, and most of our students commute. We also have students who are looking to balance their

work, home and academic obligations. So it really is crucial that we cater to their needs.

Our own academic plan has identified this as a priority and we are planning to do more.

## **Demographics**

Universally, we are all facing challenges regarding accessibility. There is a growing requirement that one needs a postsecondary degree in order to succeed in today's growing economy.

This is being recognized in many jurisdictions. In Ontario, the provincial government has set a goal of 70 per cent postsecondary attainment.

In the US, the Lumina Foundation has set a goal of 60 per cent postsecondary attainment by 2025.

Is this feasible?

As we know, most developed countries are experiencing low birth rates, and particularly in Canada, we are also seeing increased immigration.

In order to reach the amount of access, as set by the government, it means we are all going to have to reach the non-traditional learners.

What this means is a shift from a system of elites to a system of access.

This challenges our traditional model of how we deliver education – where small classes, taught by faculty members who spent 40 per cent of their time actively engaged in research, were the norm.

But this model is no longer viable. And the struggle becomes how to accommodate this supply while continuing to deliver quality programs.

In Ontario, this has become a hot topic. A recent publication done by postsecondary experts studied this phenomenon – creating quite a buzz. They offered many recommendations to this issue, including creating a new stream of faculty dedicated to teaching with limited research, as well as the creation of a new undergraduate only university.

There is no easy solution.

At this point, York is actively participating with other postsecondary institutions and the provincial government on how to best address this issue.

## **Challenges to University Autonomy**

Which brings me to my next point: the challenges to university autonomy.

University autonomy and academic freedom, as we all know, are core values.

In the United States and Europe, private institutions exist, but in Ontario, we are **all** publicly-assisted and face pressures from various stakeholders.

Being a publicly-assisted university, we do have to be mindful of the government's policies, as well as our own strategic plans, which can, as a result, pose challenges to our autonomy.

This is nothing new. All publicly-supported institutions have experienced this – dating all the way back to medieval times.

In Ontario, the provincial government has been very clear about their plans for postsecondary education. In fact, I have always referred to our premier as the “education premier.”

In the Ontario context, there are synergies between what the Ontario government is hoping to achieve, and York's strategic plan. I am pleased that we are in-line with the government's policies; however, this has not always been the case.

While we are striving to remain autonomous, we have to constantly be mindful of what the provincial government is doing, which can be difficult.

## **Engagement**

This brings me to my final point – and I like to save the best for last – engagement.

As universities, I believe we have a moral and social obligation to engage our community.

There are many models on how best to do that...it could be as simple as doing local outreach, or as complex as the commercialization of research.

But to succeed, there needs to be an institutional commitment at the highest levels. Just like internationalization, we need this commitment to come from our faculty and administration, as well as our students.

To fully realize the potential of engagement, the University needs to develop a mutually-beneficial partnership. This can exist through the full spectrum of activities including teaching, research and service.

At our University, we have what's called the York University - TD Community Engagement Centre – a partnership that works to support the local community in various ways like providing tax clinics, lunch and learns, and homework clubs for kids, to build their self-esteem and help eliminate barriers to postsecondary education.

We also have a Knowledge Mobilization initiative – where we partner social science researchers with government and community groups who could benefit from their research. One of our graduate students studied the user traffic on an NGO website to understand why people were using their online resources, and then made recommendations on how they could more effectively engage their target audience. This NGO has since changed their website based on this research.

### **The Next 50 Years**

In conclusion, these five trends are evolving issues that I would say we, as universities, are all facing. As President of York, I am excited about our opportunities, and I believe that we are well on-track as we move into the next 50 years and beyond.

Thank you.