



REMARKS FOR

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OF YORK UNIVERSITY**

**26 FEBRUARY 2009
THE SENATE OF YORK UNIVERSITY
TORONTO, ONTARIO**

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Introduction

Good afternoon. My remarks today will not be the usual variety of university news and topics, because the state of our affairs here at York is not usual, nor is it sustainable. I want to speak to you today about the future of our University.

We are all here today because we believe in York. We believe in what it stands for: accessibility to the very best education, equity, social justice. We believe that this place has great strengths and even greater potential. No other university in Ontario — maybe in Canada — has the potential that York has. But before we can realize that potential, before we can build the York University of the future, we must address the shared challenges we face, as well as the threats to this institution that are holding us back.

There's a lot of good work happening here, but it's being overshadowed by recent events. York is at a critical point in its history and we need to change. We need to address the issues that threaten our institution and our academic reputation. As the University's academic governing body, I call on you to rise to this challenge and to help deliver the change York needs.

The Challenges

We have just endured the longest university strike in the history of English-speaking Canada. Our students have returned to class and to examinations, only to be faced with a barrage of disruption, hostility and even intimidation from their fellow students. This state of affairs is unacceptable to me, and it should be unacceptable to you. Intimidation, bullying, and discrimination will not be tolerated here, and we are taking action to protect the rights and the safety of all students and staff.

If these challenges were not enough, the world is entering the greatest economic downturn since the Great Depression. Tens of thousands of our fellow Canadians are losing their jobs. Parents have told me what a struggle it is to send their children to university; students have told me how difficult it is to juggle part-time jobs with their education and how worried they are about their prospects for summer jobs.

The Government of Ontario has put us on notice that it will be looking for savings in university operating grants. Along with most other universities, our endowment payouts — which benefit students and faculty directly — are dwindling. Our budgets — which were already being cut by two per cent per annum — will have to be cut further. Our pensions are facing a shortfall and will have to be topped up to meet our legal obligations. The strike has cost us millions of dollars in direct costs. The costs in lost opportunities cannot be measured. Our applications are down 10 per cent, our first-choice applications are down 15 per cent.

The academic budget is under unprecedented pressure, and that pressure will only increase. We're still working through the details, and we need to do further consultations with the Deans on cuts in the academic units, but it's clear that tough choices will have to be made in every unit and department on both the academic and administrative sides.

At this point, we've identified targeted cuts to the administrative side of the University. Cuts totaling more than \$10 million over two years that will help offset some of the pressure have already been applied on the administrative side. We have deferred important infrastructure projects, and senior university administrators have voluntarily accepted a salary freeze at the 2008/09 level. The point is that we're in this together — every part of this University is feeling the pain.

We hope to provide the community with an update in late spring, once the budget for 2009-10 has been further developed. And we need the community's ideas on how to maintain the quality of faculty and students as we make tough decisions on the budget.

But at a time when our community should be pulling together, we turn on each other instead — academic disruption, intimidation, sit-ins, name-calling, shouting people down, banging on the doors and windows of Senate or the Board of Governors or student clubs. Then we run to the media and tell anyone who will listen how bad York is.

Is it any wonder our own students are disconnected? Or that turnout at our student elections is so low? Or that our students and their families are voting with their feet? Our public face is not demonstrating the core values a university should stand for:

- Freedom of speech – *especially* for those with whom we disagree
- Mutual Respect
- Reason
- Discourse
- Objectivity
- Being able to teach — and learn — without disruption
- Being open to other ideas and other people.
- And yes, social justice.

But we cannot demand social justice only for ourselves and for those who think like us. Social justice is for everyone, or it is for no one. York has a history of social activism, but the events of the past weeks — intimidation and shouting each other down — have nothing to do with social activism.

Call to Action

That is why I am asking you today, as Senators and key representatives of the academy, to make your voices heard and say, “enough is enough.”

I want to give a couple of examples of how the academy can contribute to open dialogue on tough issues. At other universities in this province, faculty members participate as guest speakers at lecture series organized by student clubs.

These events tackle the very same issues we are struggling with:

- Islamophobia
- Anti-Semitism
- Racial profiling
- Overcoming stereotypes

The goal is not agreement or endorsement of each others’ ideas, it is to create safe spaces where people can come together to articulate their views — without fear and without being shouted down.

I’ll give you another example happening right here at York. Next week, the York Centre for International and Security Studies is hosting an event that will examine the idea of academic boycotts. Speakers will explore the topic in a reasoned way in an academic forum. These two examples share one common element: faculty involvement.

Our faculty needs to become more involved in leading these conversations. Students look up to their professors. They look to you for direction. You are in a position to mentor and guide them and to teach them how to talk with passion about things that anger us, but without anger, without hate, without fear. I am asking you to help us fix our community, because this truly is our problem.

We talk a lot about diversity here at York, but somehow we have allowed that diversity to divide us. We need to focus now on unity, on our common values and on what makes us a community. We must identify the challenges and work as a community to address them.

We talk about educating citizens of the world and about developing critical thinkers, but we must do more. We must teach a sense of responsibility so that our graduates can contribute to the life of their times.

The Way Forward

I believe we have two major tasks ahead of us.

Our highest priority is to protect the quality of the academic experience on campus. That means protecting the quality of our teaching and research, the

quality of our faculty, and the quality of our academic resources — libraries, labs, and infrastructure — in a very difficult budgetary situation. Realizing that additional budget cuts will be needed, we are mindful of the need to ensure that these cuts will not compromise the future of our academic enterprise.

While developing the next phase of our Integrated Resource Planning project, we have started an initiative to help our decision making in the short-term aimed at:

- Reviewing the current budget allocation model
- Identifying the percentage of our budget that is allocated to the academic enterprise and bench-marking it against that of other universities, and
- Providing alternative models that ensure linking the budget allocations or cuts to our academic priorities. The results of this project will inform our decision making in the short term.

To move forward on protecting and advancing our academic enterprise in this difficult time we need your ideas.

The other priority is an urgent need to commit ourselves to fixing the way we relate to each other. We must build trust, deal with each other in good faith, and communicate in an open and honest way. We must replace the tension and negativity with reasoned dialogue, so that we can talk to each other and to the wider world.

I have also heard from the community that we need to explore the fundamental issues underlying our labour relations. We will have a task force on relationships on campus once arbitration is resolved in late spring.

These are our two urgent tasks: enhancing and protecting the academic enterprise at a time of extreme financial restraint, and fixing the way we relate to each other. These are difficult at the best of times, but these are not the best of times. I must be very clear when I say that these two tasks are highly interdependent: unless we fix the way we relate to each other, we will not be able to protect the quality of the academy. York needs your leadership, your willingness to embrace change and our combined collegial efforts at this crossroads in our history.

Given York's location at the heart of the GTA, given our potential, I continue to believe that our future development must focus on making York a more comprehensive university by building on our 50 years of success.

Universities in the 21st century must have a culture of planning if they have any hope of maximizing their potential. York can no longer afford new growth without corresponding new funding. The Deans will be instrumental in the decisions affecting their faculties, and in this, they will work closely with their colleagues

and the students enrolled in their programs.

Strengthening research is integral to our University Academic Plan and to our success in achieving our goals. This means defining areas for strategic growth in light of the University's vision. If we get this right we will emerge even stronger in the new economy; if we get this right, we will realize our full potential.

York at 50

I would like to conclude by recalling — lest we forget! — that York is now in its 50th year. In light of our financial circumstances, the events to mark the 50th will be more modest than originally planned. But this is an important opportunity for York.

Our 50th should be the start of York's new beginning. We have a unique opportunity to acknowledge the achievements of the past 50 years as we look to the next 50. This is the time to recognize our academic achievements and the contributions of our students.

The vast majority of the more than 90 U50 initiatives are academic events enhanced by the U50 umbrella. You should also know that the 50th media activity is largely the result of sponsorship provided by donors. I also want to remind Senators that the Foundation has already achieved \$180 million of our \$200 million target. All of this money goes to support endowments for students' scholarships, faculty chairs, and to support infrastructure.

Many of you will be aware of the announcement the University made recently of a special 50th Anniversary Bursaries and Awards program. This program is designed to help our students right now as they deal with the financial hardships of the extended school year. This expendable fund will help our returning students on a needs basis starting immediately and into the fall academic term. The goal for this fund is \$5 million.

While assisting returning students is a top priority, we also know that the economic climate is making the goal of higher education a challenge for students just beginning their academic careers.

With this in mind, I am pleased to announce that a great friend of the University — who prefers to remain anonymous — has come forward with an additional gift of \$2.5 million. This will create 500 awards for incoming students, valued at \$5,000 each. Awards will be made over a two-year period starting in the fall of 2009. Combined, the 50th Anniversary Bursaries and Awards program and these new Entrance Awards will help minimize financial barriers to qualified students.

Conclusion

Finally, I would like to thank Senators and all the members of the York community for their continuing commitment to York and its students. I have spoken at length about our challenges, but let's not forget the good things happening here at York.

Earlier this month, Professor Hamzeh Roumani was awarded a 2009 3M National Teaching Fellowship. This prestigious fellowship recognizes excellence and leadership in Canadian university teaching. Professor Roumani is a senior lecturer in the Department of Computer Science & Engineering.

You probably heard about Bridget Stutchbury's groundbreaking work on the migration of songbirds. This was the first time songbirds have been tracked for their entire migration. It turns out scientists have dramatically underestimated their flight performance.

And last Saturday, the York Lions women's volleyball team defeated McMaster to claim the provincial championship.

These are the types of stories we should be focused on — stories that demonstrate our excellence in teaching, research and student life. These are the types of stories that people should think about when they think of York University.

I began by saying that York has the potential to be great. We have the greatest opportunity of any university in the province. Let's work together to achieve that potential. I ask all of you to do your very best to ensure that we remain true to our historic mission — so that we can build our common future.

Thank you.