

# Moving Forward with the University Academic Plan Report to the Board of Governors: December 2007

## I. Overview and Context

As York evolves into a comprehensive, research-intensive university by implementing the priorities of the University Academic Plan (UAP), it must plan strategically and also remain open to new opportunities. *All new initiatives must adhere to one or more of the eight academic priorities set out in the UAP, meet several overarching principles, reflect the needs of society and address York's aspirations as a progressive university in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.*

An external and internal environmental scan conducted recently identified relevant challenges and opportunities. This discussion paper presents the approach for developing a set of strategic initiatives which (i) represent York's competitive response to these challenges/opportunities, and (ii) adhere to the criteria listed above. The paper ends with a list of strategic initiatives which can be pursued.



## II. The University Academic Plan: Eight Academic Priorities

1. Intensify and Promote Research Culture
2. Enrolment Planning
3. Graduate Education Focus: Higher Proportion of Graduate Enrolments
4. Enhance the Student Experience
5. Focus on Health Research and Education
6. Maintain and Extend York's Distinctiveness in Community Education, Accessibility and Internationalization
7. Raise York's Profile
8. Enhance Organizational Effectiveness

### III. Some Overarching Principles for Moving Forward

1. **Quality:** York must continue to strive for excellence in all of our activities. This means competing for the best researchers, best students and best staff. It also means providing the necessary supports to ensure York can achieve its full potential.
2. **Full Funding:** Full funding of all activities is a fundamental requirement to the successful long-term implementation of any plan. This means York will continue to demand that government recognize the full cost of teaching and research activity through increased operating, capital and start-up funding and indirect costs of research.
3. **Build on York's Heritage as a Socially Responsible, International and Interdisciplinary University:** This principle is fundamental to the UAP. York must continue to balance new and innovative directions with traditional areas of strength.
4. **Strategic Alignment:** Major initiatives must be clearly linked to strategic goals, with administrative processes and resource allocations that reinforce these links.
5. **Flexibility, Agility and Responsiveness:** Strategic initiatives must respond to the needs of our internal and external constituencies and be flexible enough to respond to specific opportunities and threats in the competitive landscape.

### IV. Internal and External Environmental Scan

In the fall of 2007, York entered into a formal Environmental Scan process that involved a series of interviews with the University's senior leadership. This process produced about 1,000 discrete observations regarding the strategic environment within which York University must compete and strive to achieve its strategic goals.

#### *(i) External Environment*

- **GTA Demographics**  
Significant immigration-based population growth in the GTA (mainly York and Peel Regions), and modest population declines elsewhere in the province will drive dramatic geographical shifts in the demand for university education in the GTA generally, and in York Region in particular. Over the next two decades, there will be pressure for York to expand enrolment, which presents both opportunities and challenges. York must capitalize on one of its greatest resources, York Region, and define a winning strategy for competing in York Region.
- **Globalization / Internationalization**  
Competition in teaching and research is occurring on a global scale and is intensifying. York University must use major partnerships and act now to establish itself as globally recognized, high-quality university in both teaching and research and must protect its privileged position in York Region.
- **Government Decisions & Political Will**  
York, like all other universities, requires greater financial resources, yet government funding regimes likely will continue to be inadequate, unstable and increasingly targeted. Building relationships with key individuals inside and outside of government who can shape political will and/or mobilize major partnerships and donations is critical to our success.

- **Information & Communication Technology**

New modes and norms of communication are creating a widening communications divide. York must compete by learning to market effectively across the divide, continuously improving its communication with students and becoming a leader in transforming scholarly communications.

***(ii) Internal Environment (Organizational Culture)***

York takes great pride in its commitment to social justice and its sensitivity to global issues. The University exists in the community at large and not in an “ivory tower.” However, there are also many cultural trait dichotomies that exist at York. These traits are held in tension and striking the appropriate balance will be required to successfully achieve our strategic goals. Examples include the balance between deliberation vs. action; academy vs. administration; and labour relations vs. collegial governance.

## **V. Key Strategic Initiatives**

1. **Efforts to Intensify and Strategically Expand Research Activity** — While York has grown into one of Canada’s largest universities, it is not yet one of Canada’s top research-intensive universities. Recognizing this dichotomy, the UAP sets the intensification and expansion of research as the paramount objective. This will require strategic initiatives that ensure major short-term leaps forward while creating a sustainable, innovative and enhanced research culture in the long-term. Planned initiatives must ensure research intensification across the entire spectrum in the humanities, social sciences, fine arts and professional schools; that we maintain our prominence in areas of historical research strength; that we invest strategically and aggressively into niche areas; and that we diversify our research base and build our reputation through external partnerships with a focus on building clusters in York Region. Investments in research infrastructure and services are needed to create highly competitive recruitment packages to attract world-class scholars in strategic areas to drive forward York’s research performance.
2. **Expansion of Programming with a Focus on the Life Sciences and Applied Sciences** — By any standard, York University is a very large institution. Future growth must be carefully controlled and contribute to York’s evolution towards becoming a more comprehensive institution. It must be growth on our terms. The University is currently investigating directions of future growth in the life sciences and applied sciences that could lead to the development of a Medical School and/or a new Faculty of Engineering.
3. **Restructuring Leading to a New Faculty** — Ongoing efforts to create a more comprehensive university. In its current form, the transition from the Faculty of Arts and the Atkinson Faculty of Liberal and Professional Studies to a new Faculty is an opportunity to create a foundation that will underpin most of the activities for the largest segment of York’s students. The transition efforts will relate to almost all of the priority areas in the UAP.

4. **Student Experience** — Research on the retention and graduation of students shows that students who find support for their learning, receive feedback about their learning and are actively involved in learning are more likely to learn and to remain engaged as students and as alumni. The initiatives at York are designed to provide academic, social and personal support to connect students with their university experience – both inside and outside of the classroom. Examples of initiatives being developed include the revitalization of the college system, which will create smaller communities within the larger York experience and integrate students into campus life through co-curricular programming, and the Research At York (RAY) program that provides students and faculty the opportunity to work together on research projects. A Retention Council jointly chaired by the Associate Vice-President Academic Learning Initiatives and the Manager of Student Success and Retention in Student Community and Leadership Development has been established with Associate Deans, College Masters and Academic Advisers to identify new programming and support to assist in the retention of students.
5. **Community Relations** — York University is involved in the community through many programs and initiatives. Current examples include the HSPC (Human Services Plan Coalition) knowledge mobilization initiatives in York Region, the Westview Partnership, which engages students from local schools in both academic and non-academic pursuits and the new York University satellite centre in the neighbouring Jane-Finch community, which will offer a variety of community-university initiatives that enhance student learning and build stronger neighbourhoods. We are working to bring greater focus and visibility to existing programs and to continue building the valuable relationship with our surrounding community.
6. **Improving Administrative Procedures and Integrated Resource Planning** — Major initiatives to ensure achievement of academic objectives and the successful implementation of the UAP through streamlining current procedures, aligning resources to strategic initiatives, building administrative infrastructure to support planning and creating a culture of accountability and active performance management.