March 18, 2015

Statement by York University President and Vice-Chancellor on the Resumption of Classes

As more of our students and faculty resume classes this week, I would like to welcome them back to campus. Let me assure you that the decision to resume classes was not taken lightly. We know that students are concerned about completing their courses and program requirements in a timely way. If prevented from returning to class, many of our students face serious and urgent consequences, including those related to accreditation, certification, placement and graduation. At the same time, we know that there are difficulties associated with crossing picket lines, and that some students have expressed a reluctance or refusal to do so.

The challenge is that both positions are legitimate, and so we have done everything possible to give our students the choice to return to their studies in order to complete their terms. With CUPE 3903 Unit 2 representing contract faculty ratifying the University’s settlement offer, an overwhelming majority of our courses and services can be available, and in a context where we are so close to the end of the academic year, it would be irresponsible not to consider resuming as much academic activity as possible. We have a responsibility to our students to do so.

Despite these challenging circumstances, our faculty members are committed to ensuring that academic integrity is preserved and academic objectives are met, and we greatly appreciate their commitment. This kind of goodwill has always united us at York, and now more than ever, we deeply value and need to call upon our collegial relations with each other. As President, my responsibility is to ensure the University’s core mission of teaching and research can be carried out, and that our students remain our highest priority. Above all, we need to protect and preserve the academic freedoms they came here to pursue.

As classes resume, the safety and well-being of all members of the York community remains our primary concern. I urge the University community to show calm and civil conduct at all times, and to demonstrate vigilance, cooperation and patience in entering and exiting our campuses.

In closing, let me reiterate our commitment to reaching a fair and competitive settlement that will continue to position our teaching assistants and graduate assistants as among the best compensated in Canada. At York, where research intensification is a strategic priority, we take pride in recruiting the best graduate students in the world. Along with the quality of academic programs and faculty supervision, financial assistance is a major factor in attracting and retaining excellent students, so it is in the University’s interest to create the best possible financial support package for our graduate students.

We remain in contact with the provincially appointed mediator, who will advise us when there is a basis to resume negotiations. We continue to believe a settlement is readily achievable, and we look forward to resuming negotiations and to an end to the labour disruption.