

Dear President Lenton, Dean McMurtry, and Principal Fiola,

We at the Critical Trafficking and Sex Work Studies Research Cluster are writing to express our concern over York University's decision to halt new admissions to 20 degree programs.

This decision is an affront to the University's reputation as a progressive Liberal Arts institution. York University's mission asserts its adherence to the "pursuit, preservation, and dissemination of knowledge," testing the boundaries of knowledge, and the cultivation of crucial intellect. The halting of new admissions to these programs breaches the values and educational commitments outlined in York's mission that inform the University and its reputation. Many areas in York University's own Strategic Research Plan (2023-2028), which include the pursuit of justice and equity, creating healthy communities, and Indigenous futurities, are also directly weakened by this decision.

The Critical Trafficking and Sex Work Studies Research Cluster thrives because of the critical knowledge and skillset developed within these educative programs. The people and ideas emerging from these degrees allow our Cluster, an interdisciplinary research program, to combat misinformation about sex trafficking and to fight whorephobia (a fear and hatred of sex workers).

York's Women's Studies program, established in 1992, was the first of its kind in Canada and the third in North America. That same year, Susan Mann became President of York University (1992-1997), followed by Lorna Marsden (1997-2007). York is renowned for its innovation in sex work studies, feminist studies, and feminist practice at large. However, the decision to halt program admissions without meaningful dialogue and consultation significantly undermines its reputation in these fields.

York's administration has justified this decision to halt program admissions through SHARP (Shared Accountability and Resource Planning). However, SHARP's criteria fail to recognize the invaluable contributions of these programs, including their offerings in gender, sexuality, and women's studies, Indigenous studies, and several humanities programs. These programs not only align with the intellectual and social fabric of the University but also inspire critical work such as leading the task force on Homophobia & Heterosexism (1994), founding the university-wide sexual assault survivors' support line (1995), organizing of the first Transgender Day of Remembrance (1999), and inspiring the globally-recognized SlutWalk (2011). In a time when transphobia, anti-Black racism, anti-Indigenous racism, queerphobia, Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, Sinophobia, Xenophobia, whorephobia, and misogyny are on the rise, these programs are not just relevant—they are essential in combating this hate and its associated violences.

Limiting access to programs focused on social justice, feminism, and combating hate and discrimination is deeply troubling. It not only restricts students' ability to engage with critical issues but also sets a dangerous precedent. By yielding to market pressures, the university allows external forces—rather than core pedagogical values—to dictate its priorities. This undermines the academic integrity of York University, making it not only deleterious to our reputation as a whole but also fiscally reckless. For a respected Canadian institution, such a decision, especially in the absence of transparency and without the expertise of the affected programs, is both irresponsible and disappointing.

We urge you to reconsider this decision and are open to further dialogue and discussion.

Regards,

On behalf of the Critical Trafficking and Sex Work Studies (CTSWS) Research Cluster
Centre for Feminist Research
York University